



# NCDD Project Report for the Kettering Foundation

Views of NCDD 2008 Conference Participants on Democratic Governance  
and Two of our Field's Greatest Challenges

Prepared for: The Kettering Foundation (Project Coordinator: Ileana Marin)

Prepared by: Sandy Heierbacher, Director, National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

October 19, 2009

Project number: 27-40-00

KF-53515

*Links in this document were edited or removed in July 2014.*

*Material from NCDD 2008 can be found here: <http://ncdd.org/rc/item/tag/ncdd2008>.*



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Definitions</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Our Respondents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Views on Democratic Governance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What is citizens' role in democratic governance?</b>	<b>5</b>
Citizens play a critically important role in democratic governance	<b>5</b>
Citizens' role and influence varies widely	<b>6</b>
Citizens play a very limited role in democratic governance today	<b>7</b>
Citizens' role in democratic governance should be much greater	<b>7</b>
The ideal role for citizens...	<b>8</b>
<b>What level(s) of governance does your work influence?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>How do you or your work affect the role citizens play in democratic governance?</b>	<b>11</b>
Creating the space for engagement	<b>11</b>
Engaging a larger number of citizens	<b>11</b>
Ensuring citizens have a voice in politics	<b>12</b>
A ripple effect	<b>12</b>
<b>The Action and Change Challenge</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Types of goals/impacts of dialogue and deliberation</b>	<b>14</b>
First-Order Goals	<b>15</b>
Second-Order Goals	<b>17</b>
Third-Order Goal: Improved Community Problem Solving or Increased Civic Capacity	<b>18</b>
<b>Goals/impacts focused on most</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Themes that emerged in the Action &amp; Change challenge</b>	<b>20</b>
Defining success for ourselves	<b>20</b>
Developing clear theories of change	<b>20</b>

A broader and more systemic view of “Action & Change”	21
Matching process with purpose	23
Transparency about goals and expected outcomes	24
Cautious framing of potential outcomes	25
Building capacity in social change methods	26
Evaluating, and learning from mistakes	27
<b>The Systems Challenge</b>	29
Cultivating and supporting public engagement practitioners	30
Joint ownership of programs and structures	30
Building on existing structures and resources	31
Demonstrating the impact of our processes—together	33
Taking advantage of new opportunities	34
<b>Conclusion</b>	38



# Introduction

For this research project for the Kettering Foundation, the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) explored how attendees at the October 2008 NCDD conference in Austin, Texas see citizens' role in democratic governance and how they see themselves or their work impacting the role citizens play in democratic governance. Furthermore, we examined attendees' views on how best to address each of the five "challenge areas" we focused on at the conference, specifically asking them for ideas for making progress on the "Systems Challenge" (embedding public engagement in government and other systems) and the "Action & Change Challenge" (strengthening the link between public engagement, citizen action, and policy change).

## The "Challenges Process"

At NCDD Austin, conference organizers ran a multi-tiered process aimed at encouraging over 400 conference attendees to focus in on five of the most complex, challenging issues facing the dialogue and deliberation community. The five issues were identified by participants at previous NCDD conferences as vital to address if we, both individually and collectively, are to be our most effective.

The challenges process was primarily a self-organized process and it was a *challenge* in and of itself to generate and record new learning in five nuanced areas at a conference with over 400 attendees with varied levels and types of experience in dialogue and deliberation work. Steven Fearing, facilitator for the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services, coordinated the whole "challenges process" wonderfully. We had great conversations, workshops, and learning in all five challenge areas, though this was a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of work our field needs to do in these areas.

## The Five Challenges

### 1. The Action and Change Challenge: Better connecting D&D to action and policy change

*Challenge Leader:* Phil Mitchell, Director of the Greater Seattle Climate Dialogues

### 2. The Systems Challenge: Making dialogue and deliberation integral to our systems

*Challenge Leaders:* Will Friedman, Chief Operating Officer of Public Agenda and Matt Leighninger, Executive Director of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium

### 3. The Framing Challenge: Presenting dialogue and deliberation in an accessible way

*Challenge Leader:* Jacob Hess, Ph.D. Candidate in Clinical-Community Psychology at the University of Illinois

### 4. The Evaluation Challenge: Demonstrating that dialogue and deliberation works

*Challenge Leaders:* John Gastil, Communications Professor at the University of Washington and Janette Hartz-Karp, Professor at Curtin Univ. Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute

### 5. The Inclusion Challenge: Walking our talk in terms of bias and inclusion

*Challenge Leader:* Leanne Nurse, Program Analyst for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

## Research Methods

Several research methods led to the data presented in this report...

### Online dialogue at CivicEvolution.org

Using the unique group collaboration technology at CivicEvolution.org, we held an online dialogue six months before the conference on the five challenges, involving planning team members and interested members of the greater NCDD community. This online dialogue process allowed us delve into each of the challenges and begin thinking together about conference design.

## Conference sessions and discussions

At the conference itself, workshops were held on each of the challenges, “Challenge Leaders” kept track of insights and developments in each area, and a team of five graphic recorders—Sunni Brown, Julie Gieseke, Mariah Howard, Marilyn Martin and team leader Avril Orloff—created vibrant murals that followed the conversation and learnings in each challenge. Conference attendees contributed insights and ideas that were incorporated into the graphic murals, and the challenge leaders summarized findings at the conference closing session.

## Interviews and surveys conducted at and after the conference

Over a dozen volunteers, mostly graduate students, offered to conduct interviews at the conference. Interview notes were submitted after the conference by Karen Banks, Lisa Bedinger, Nathan Emerson, Allegra Fonda-Bonardi, Karen Snow, Kelsey Visser, Steve Zikman. In addition to asking a few basic questions about the type of work they do, interviewers asked their fellow attendees the following questions:

- How would you describe the role citizens play in democratic governance?
- How do you see yourself or your work affecting the role citizens play in democratic governance?
- How else does your work impact democratic governance? (Interviewers were also asked to take note of what level of governance—local, state, national, etc—attendees feel they influence.)
- What do you think is the most important thing that can be done to help embed dialogue and deliberation in our government systems in particular? (the Systems Challenge)
- What do you think is the most important thing that can be done to ensure that dialogue and deliberation do lead to the outcomes we hope and often claim they will have? (the Action & Change Challenge)
- If sufficient progress was made on these two challenge areas in particular, how would your role in and impact on democratic governance change? How would our role/impact as a field change?

Since we only had record of 17 interviews conducted at the conference, I conducted 13 additional interviews by phone and created an online survey that over 55 conference attendees took the time to complete. Overall, data was collected from 86 conference participants directly.

In the online survey, conference attendees were asked four additional questions. We included a question about the types of goals/impacts they focus on most in their work (first, second, or third order goals as described later in the paper), and we asked what they thought was the most important thing that could be done to address the other three challenge areas.

## Partial literature review

To more accurately represent the current discourse in our field in these areas of research, some literature was consulted and is cited appropriately. Almost every article cited is related to the conference, having been written or presented by conference attendees, featured speakers and workshop presenters.

## A note about photos and images

All of the photos featured in this paper were taken at the 2008 National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation. Most of the photos depicting conference participants were taken by photographer Tim Thomas, who created a gorgeous “photo journal” that we played during the conference closing (courtesy of the Generative Change Community). The images featuring graphic recordings created at the conference are the work of our 5-member graphic facilitation team.

## About the author

The author of this article, Sandy Heierbacher, is the Director of NCDD and its biennial conferences. She serves as the hub of a 1200-member network of organizations, practitioners, and scholars on the leading edge of the fields of intergroup relations, public policy, conflict resolution, community organizing, deliberative democracy, and organizational development. For the 2008 NCDD conference, she managed a volunteer planning team of over 80 people, working with a smaller core group to design the Challenges Process and other conference activities.

# Definitions

The following terms can have different meanings to different people, so I wanted to clarify how I am using these terms in the report. We did not define or explain these terms to interviewees or in the online survey.

## **Democratic Governance:**

A shift from citizens as simply voters, volunteers and consumers to citizens as problem solvers. A shift from public leaders as service providers to public leaders as partners and catalysts for citizen action. A shift from democracy as a series of elections to a society that tackles problems collaboratively that cannot be solved either without government or by government alone.

## **Dialogue:**

A group process characterized by the exchange of personal stories, experiences, and viewpoints. It is a safe and honest facilitated discussion aimed at providing an opportunity to tell one's story, listen deeply to others, build understanding and uncover solutions to complex problems. As Hal Saunders of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue (pictured) says, "Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn."

## **Deliberation:**

The ancient Greeks called deliberation the talk we use to teach ourselves before we act. Deliberation is the kind of reasoning and talking we do when a difficult decision has to be made, a great deal is at stake, and there are competing options or approaches we might take. At the heart of deliberation is weighing possible actions and decisions carefully by examining their costs and consequences in light of what is most valuable to us. Deliberation can take place in any kind of conversation—including dialogue, debate and discussion.

## **Dialogue & Deliberation (or Deliberative Dialogue):**

Together, dialogue and deliberation (sometimes referred to as "D&D") can allow individuals with different backgrounds, interests and values to listen, understand, explore and ultimately come to more reasoned, informed and public-spirited decisions.

## **Civic Capacity:**

The capacity for communities, organizations, and societies to make wise collective decisions and to create and sustain smart collective action.

## **Public Engagement:**

Various forms of highly inclusive public dialogue and deliberation that are critical steps towards policy development, collaborative civic action, and other forms of public problem solving.



# Our Respondents

In short, most of our 86 respondents were community-based and university-based practitioners of dialogue and deliberation programs. All respondents had attended the 2008 National Conference on Dialogue & Deliberation held in Austin, Texas.

People identified themselves as working in a variety of areas in addition to dialogue, deliberation and public engagement: interfaith relations, disaster preparedness, dialogue-stimulating documentary films, local government, federal agencies, communications, diversity training, etc.

When asked what type of dialogue and deliberation work they do, most of the people surveyed identified multiple roles. The largest number of respondents (38) identified themselves as facilitators or moderators of dialogue, deliberation or public engagement. The next largest number (28) identified themselves as convenors or organizers of dialogue and deliberation programs.

14 respondents identified themselves as practitioners in conflict resolution (mediation, reconciliation, dispute resolution, etc.). One such respondent added that “all complex issues can be seen as disputes over ways of relating to issues.” And 13 identified themselves as trainers,

educators or college professors who train people to moderate deliberative forums, run trainings in participatory methods, educate students about public deliberation, etc.

Six people identified themselves as researchers (in deliberation, healthcare, issue analysis, etc.). Five identified as convenors or facilitators of stakeholder engagement processes specifically, distinguishing them from efforts to engage the general public. Four respondents self-identified as public officials, four as working in organizational development (i.e. strategic planning consultants), and four as community organizers or community problem-solvers. Several people listed “writer” as one of their roles related to dialogue and deliberation, and several identified themselves as working in public libraries.

Other roles identified by fewer than four respondents include funders, community planners, youth ministers, arts-based dialogue facilitators, counselors, law enforcement officers, creators of web-based discussion tools, convenors of web-based dialogue, arts-based dialogue facilitators, conversation mappers, community weavers, and environmental consultants.



# Views on Democratic Governance

## What is citizens' role in democratic governance?

When asked how they would describe “the role citizens play in democratic governance,” people responded in five distinct ways. Some took a positive stance, outlining citizens' critically important role in governance. Others took a pragmatic stance, recognizing that the role of citizens varies depending on a variety of factors. Others responded soberly about the very limited role citizens have in government. Many expressed why they felt the role citizens currently play is far from where it should be. And several outlined what citizens' role *should ideally* be in governance.

Below I outline these five types of responses.

### Citizens play a critically important role in democratic governance

When asked how they would describe the role citizens play in democratic governance, about 20 respondents expressed that citizens play an integral role, “like the blood cells in the circulatory system. There is no democratic governance without citizens.” Several pointed out that citizens are the real decision-makers, and the real owners of the government.

These respondents felt that citizen participation is essential for effective democracy. Willie Ratchford, Executive Director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Community Relations Committee, said “citizens, through their agreement and acceptance of government, are the glue that hold democratic governance in place.” Tobin Quereau, Professor at Austin Community College, added that “without informed citizen input, the driving forces for governance would be even more biased toward commercial and financial interests. Knowledgeable and engaged citizens can provide a balancing role to the powerful interests which have extensive access and influence with elected officials and legislators.”

Steve Swanson, a community organizer who responded to the survey as a general citizen, also considers the role of citizens in democratic governance to be “essential.” He pointed out that historically, most of our nation's and communities' challenges are people/citizen and relationship challenges. “The only sustainable solutions to these challenges are those created and implemented by the people themselves, together as a community.”

Like Steve, several others emphasized citizens' role as problem solvers. In her interview with graduate student Kelsey Visser, Marti Roach of the Center for Strategic Facilitation explained that “By virtue of being a citizen you are an activist—it is not a passive status.” Arts-based dialogue facilitator Sandy Agustin said, “Individuals not only create content, but define direction, dynamic and process for policies and law.” Consultant and educator Ken Homer considers “Citizens” to be those “who understand that if they do not actively participate in governance that they will end up being bullied and shafted instead of governed.”



One respondent said citizens “help generate ideas, deliberate on possibilities, ensure accountability for the decisions of public officials, etc.” In a phone interview, writer and professor Phil Neisser noted that for governance to truly be democratic, citizens need to play a formative role in deciding what the issues are with each other, how to frame them, what the choices are after that and what choices to make. Citizens in a democracy are involved at each stage of public action, even deciding what the issues are, with voting one of many things they do.

A number of respondents who felt that citizens play a critically important role in democratic governance also emphasized the responsibilities inherent in that role. Hawaii State Senator Les Ihara, Jr. said “Citizens have the opportunity and responsibility for giving voice to their interests and concerns, particularly on issues with pending public actions.” Similar, Susan Schultz (Program Director with the Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution at the University of Texas School of Law) said that in a representative



democracy, “citizens have a role and a responsibility to make their voices heard at all levels of governance and to hold their representatives accountable for decisions made for the public good.”

Adin Rogovin, Board director of The Co-Intelligence Institute, said “Citizens are responsible for acting together to provide wise choices and policy guidance for the governance institutions.” And Sheril Smith of the University of Texas at Austin, who serves on a state regional water planning board, wrote that citizens are responsible for studying the issues they vote on and for “participating in government at the local, state, and/or national level, depending on their available time.”

Several respondents emphasized citizens' responsibility to self-govern and self-organize. Cheryl Honey, founder of the Family Support Network and creator of Community Weaving, expressed that “Citizens are capable and need to be empowered to take responsibility for what they care about and initiate the changes necessary to improve their quality of life.... Government must stop doing *for* or *to* the people and start innovating *with* the people to address issues impacting lives and communities.”

Michael Ostrolenk, Founder of the Liberty Coalition and participant in our “Conservatives Panel” at the 2008 NCDD conference, first clarified to Steve Zikman in his interview that “we are not a democracy but a constitutional republic.” Michael felt that citizens should seek to enhance the decision-making power within their own communities, families, business life and other social institutions—limiting the power of state intervention whenever possible.

### Citizens' role and influence varies widely

About a dozen people responded by saying that citizens' role varies depending on a number of factors. Paul Alexander, director of Regis University's Institute on the Common Good and Cherry Muse, director of the Public Conversations Project, both pointed out that the role of citizens varies considerably from community to community and between levels and types of government. Several people stated that citizens can and do play the most active role at the local level.

In my interview with Bill Keith, professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and author of *Democracy as Discussion*, Bill described democracy as a gigantically complex ecosystem, with citizens participating in politics directly and indirectly in myriad ways—including just chatting in line about a public issue at the grocery store. Bill contends that we need to recognize a larger number of activities as being part of democracy. John Dewey, Bill pointed out, said there's a politics in every single human interaction.



Similarly, Ecuadorian researcher Rosa Donoso noted there is more than one type of citizen.

Some citizens are interested in being involved in decision-making throughout the whole process, while others are satisfied with quality information about issues and decisions. Still others are satisfied with their role as voters. “Citizens' role in democratic governance is to use the power to participate or not; citizens have the choice to engage or not.” Our role is to open that choice to all citizens and, as another respondent added, to ensure citizens know their involvement is valued.

One person characterized citizens' roles as voting, organizing and influencing (political mobilizing), information gathering and dissemination, and governance (local, national, regional office holding). Kai Degner, Mayor of Harrisonburg, Virginia, summarized citizens' various roles and attitudes as follows:

Ideally, citizens play the role of an informed advocate for their own interests, with the understanding that governing bodies in a democratic republic have many interests to balance. In practice, I see a wide range of roles citizens play, including but not limited to ignorant of any government processes, cynical of all government action, disenchanted and/or apathetic about government, healthily skeptical and questioning of government, supportive of current procedures and processes, curiously engaged in pursuing a certain change, etc. There are all kinds of roles citizens play, some more constructive than others. I find with more information about why things work the way they do and what change processes are in place, citizens can quickly take on a more constructive role.

One respondent stated that citizens have as much voice as they choose to wield. In contrast, Delia Horwitz, owner of Business Relationship Consultants, said that when citizens' voices are *heard*, they play a key role. "When there is not an effective way to receive their ideas and opinions, they have little influence except at the voting poles."

### Citizens play a very limited role in democratic governance today

About ten people indicated that they felt citizens' role in democratic governance today is "woefully meager" (Susan Sachs, environmental consultant). These respondents felt that citizens primarily play a narrow role in governance as voters, sometimes involving themselves more actively in institutions that directly impact their lives like schools and homeowners' associations. Several respondents mentioned that citizens either do not know how to play a greater role in governance, or see the potential impact as too small compared to the effort that would be required.

Professor, author and seasoned dialogue practitioner Barnett Pearce describes citizens' role in democratic governance soberly as "the 'audience' before whom politicians perform in order to win elections so that they can get into office. Once there," he continued, "they are primarily influenced by their party (from whom power derives) and lobbyists (from whom money comes)." Although he conceded that things can be different at the local level, and acknowledged that his comment may seem cynical, Barnett bases his views on relationships he has developed with current and former elected officials over the years.

A couple of respondents pointed out that citizens' role in democratic governance is minimal for good reason: "Since we have representative democracy in the U.S.," one practitioner wrote, "that leaves citizens consultative roles except in states where referenda are possible." Betsy McBride, director of the Hampton Roads Center for Civic Engagement of Virginia Beach added that although citizens do lend authority to elected officials, they "never relinquish their responsibilities for informed participation in self-governance."

In his interview at the 2008 NCDD conference conducted by by Allegra Fonda-Bonardi, Brian Manwaring, Program Manager at the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, noted that although the electorate gives public officials the power to speak for them, democracy is a two-way street:

It's a balancing act: the more the public's values play a role in the decisions being made, the stronger democratic governance can be. I believe that citizens should be consulted on controversial issues in which the public's values play a role in the issue at hand. However, consultation and deliberative democracy are not as necessary for the making of decisions that are more technical than moral in nature.

Freelance writer and consultant Marla Crockett pointed out that although citizens' traditional role in politics is limited, we should make the connection between governance and the problem-solving people do in their daily lives. "We neglect the politics that people practice with others—at home, school, and the office—in their everyday lives. We problem-solve all the time at a micro level, and I'd like to see us start making the connection between that and government in general."

Marla also suggested we "factor in the Internet, which has had a huge impact on access and people's expectations about government. There's more of a connection than there used to be, and that's good, if it can be harnessed in the direction of more openness and interactivity." She added, "I'm hopeful that the work done in the D&D field will complement this trend and help citizens interact more face to face—and with government officials at every level."

### Citizens' role in democratic governance should be much greater

A dozen respondents took their responses one step further than the previous group, sharing a conviction that citizens should play a greater, more integral role in democratic governance. This group agreed that although most citizens do not participate except when an issue affects them directly, ideally the majority of citizens would participate far beyond voting. Tim Bonnemann, founder of Intellitics and creator of online discussion tools commented that "a lot could be gained by engaging citizens more in governance, outside of elections. There is a lot of potential that has yet to be harnessed."



Several people emphasized the importance of citizens taking more responsibility for making sure they have voice and influence in governance. In a phone interview, Marieanne Shovlin of the Global Facilitators Service Corps and the Center for Strategic Facilitation suggested that “citizens need to help create an environment where all voices and opinions can be heard.” Scholar and facilitator Sara Ross, President of ARINA, Inc., noted that “when governance is well understood as much more than government, in my view citizens have the primary role because the tasks they need to attend to are all of the social, economic, and political issues that result in creating conflict, unfair distribution of various kinds, etc. The polis *should* be playing ongoing roles—and learn they have those roles and become educated about the roles and issues—rather than believing that it is enough to tell elected officials their preferences.”

Others focused on shifting the role citizens are currently assigned (consumers, clients, spectators) and lessening the role of special interests. Ariana McBride of the Orton Family Foundation noted in a phone interview that although citizens can provide valuable information for public problem-solving efforts, they are not necessarily given the opportunity to do so. Public Agenda's Alison Kadlec added that “Citizens should be viewed as indispensable resources for identifying, naming, and solving difficult shared problems. Unfortunately, our current system views citizens as spectators and clients for whom voting is the only expression of citizenship.”



Michael Baldwin, Director of Benbrook Public Library (Benbrook, Texas) feels “citizen participation should be the essence of democratic governance. However, as elected officials become ever more beholden to special interests, and as citizens are ever more misled by media also beholden to special interests, grassroots democracy becomes less and less feasible.”

Diane Miller, Assistant Director of Envision Central Texas and leader of the Central Texas Team for NCDD's 2008 conference, contributed this astute comment:

Ideally, citizens priorities and values should set the agenda and shape the policies and practice of government. In reality, subject matter experts, special interests and professionals in the various issue arenas have much greater influence over the content and context of the discussions on policy and influence over policy makers. Citizens are asked to 'weigh in' and gathering public input is an element of many governance and community decision making processes but, more often than not, a pre-determined agenda and course has [already] been set and the public is not fundamentally shaping the nature of the discourse.

Tyrone Reitman, Co-Director of Healthy Democracy Oregon, noted that “sadly, citizens are generally treated as consumers of targeted information.” He suggested that to shift citizens' role to that of ownership and responsibility, “we need to model good process to affect change, and ultimately empower citizens to have a meaningful voice in our democracy.” He added that dialogue and deliberation are great avenues for doing this.

### The ideal role for citizens...

Several respondents outlined what they believed to be citizens' ideal role in democratic governance, rather than focusing on citizens' current role. In an interview with Allegra Fonda-Bonardi at the conference, Pflugerville mover-and-shaker and youth minister Rod Reyna said that ideally, there should be many ways for citizens to become involved in the democratic process; many points of entry.

Another conference participant suggested that, in the future, we will have structures in place for quality dialogue and deliberation to occur across the country and across the globe, “where deep, complex, thoughtful and heartfelt conversations can be held, leading to breakthrough solutions and healthy actions.”

Lucas Cioffi of OnlineTownHalls.com said “citizens will eventually be seen as collaborators on complex issues.” And Cherry Muse, Executive Director of the Public Conversations Project, stated that ideally, citizens listen, read, reflect and talk with others to make a decision about the best candidate, policy, or course of action.

Similarly, Peter Shively of the Interactivity Foundation, added this comment:

Ideally, they should determine the agenda, control the discussion and the process for both deciding the available choices and making that choice and working to insure that our elected representatives and appointed public officials respond to and enact their choices. Their role would be robust at all levels and involve much more than simply voting or responding to polling. Citizens concerns, discussions, and choices would be given paramount consideration in forming our longer term public policy. Corporate interests and influence would be concomitantly much more limited than now.

And some in our field are taking the initiative to help shift citizens' role toward this ideal, at least at the local level. On The Move—a youth leadership program that worked with the Rockrose Institute to run the Youth Dialogue Program we held at the 2008 conference—is running a groundbreaking program in the Napa Valley that is worth mentioning here. In the McPherson Neighborhood, a residential neighborhood of 6,000 people in Napa, California, hundreds of white and Latino residents have come together in World Cafe dialogues to create the nation's first "**Democracy Zone.**" Here's how On The Move's Nick Challed (pictured on this page, speaking) described this effort in a post on the World Cafe Online Community site:



Within this Zone the concept of "citizen" will be redefined through intentional dialogue and democratic processes, focusing on a commitment to common values. Citizens will be those who support, foster and engage in inclusion, integrity, cultural appreciation, curiosity and action on behalf of their neighborhood.

At the heart of this Democracy Zone will be a Community Plaza - an open space for all ages, cultures and languages. At the World Café [held in May 2009], a community-wide effort began to design and develop this Plaza. Participants engaged in this inspiring event – representing youth to senior citizens, English and Spanish speakers, and a wide mix of students, neighbors, public officials, educators, funders and staff from community-based organizations....

Towards the end of the Café, guests were invited to nominate someone at their table to become a "Community Collaborator" – a person who had shown a commitment during the Café to their neighborhood and the vision of a Community Plaza. A total of 51 nominations were received, and On the Move will convene this group on July 29, 2009. The intention is for this group to become an initial Leadership-Design Committee of the Community Plaza, which will be the "pilot" area of the Democracy Zone.<sup>1</sup>

---

In addition to these five categories of responses to the question *How would you describe the role citizens play in democratic governance?*, a number of people pointed out that **ensuring citizens play a significant role in democratic governance is what our work in dialogue, deliberation and public engagement is all about.** Much of the work of those who attended the 2008 NCDD conference focuses on broadening citizens' role by inviting greater participation in public discussions about critical issues.

We need to hear the voices of those most effected by public policies... democratic processes are meant to do that," one conference attendee said. Youth minister Rod Reyna said, "In order for citizens to be fully engaged in democratic governance (and not all want to be), they need to deliberate, become informed, and engage in dialogue. They need to be able to have a forum to discuss various options, issues, and directions for their communities."

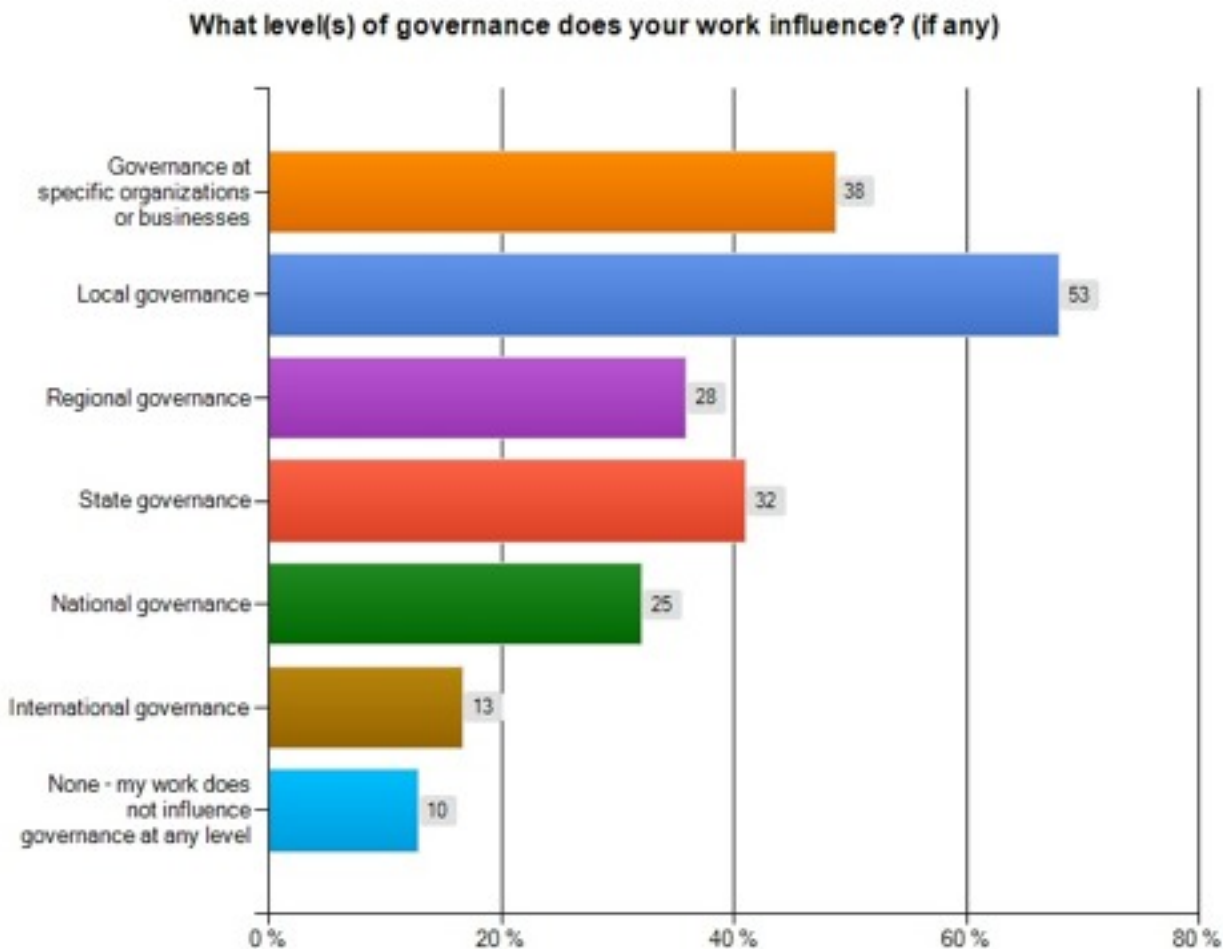
In a phone interview, DeAnna Martin of the Center for Wise Democracy added that there is a need for public officials to embrace more generative or emergent models for public involvement (approaches that allow new ideas or solutions to emerge). Decision-makers think that their processes would work if only citizens showed up, DeAnna noted, but typical engagement processes are designed to keep governing systems as they are. Just involving more citizens in business-as-usual methods is not enough.

---

<sup>1</sup> May 27, 2009. Full article is viewable at <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/forum/topics/the-democracy-zone-a-world>.

## What level(s) of governance does your work influence?

In the interviews and in the online survey, we asked respondents to identify the level or levels of governance their work has an influence on. They could choose more than one of the six types of governance we listed, and most did.



We included the option “governance at specific organizations or businesses” because many NCDD conference attendees are doing dialogue and deliberation work in the organizational development (OD) context, or leading private dialogues to help people solve long-standing problems like whether their church will begin to allow female or homosexual clergy. Besides “local government,” this was the most common response.

Nearly 70% of our respondents consider their work to have an influence on local government. 41% feel their work influences state governance, which is slightly more than the 36% whose work influences regional governance. 32% feel their work influences national governance, while only 17% influence international governance in some way. And 13% of respondents indicated that their work does not influence governance at any level.

In her interview, Kate Fly contended that “Work at local level impacts elements on other levels. Work at one level translates across all levels.” Since the question was phrased as what level one’s work *influences*, we can assume that other respondents agree that work at the local level has influence at the state level and so forth, and responded accordingly.

## How do you or your work affect the role citizens play in democratic governance?

In the interviews and survey, conference participants largely agreed that their work broadens and strengthens the role of citizens in democratic governance, though they emphasized a number of different specific impacts. Most responses clearly fall under the categories pictured in the Goals of Dialogue and Deliberation graphic on page 14, and I have summarized those responses in the goals/impacts section that begins on page 15. The graphic is based on Martin Carcasson's research for the Kettering Foundation, which was recently published by Public Agenda in the article "*Beginning with the End in Mind: A Call for Goal-Driven Deliberative Practice.*"

### Creating the space for engagement

A minority of the responses did not cleanly fall under the seven goals pictured in the Goals graphic. Eleven respondents emphasized how their work helps create the necessary *space, systems or structures* for citizens to play a more meaningful role in democratic governance. Vanessa Sarria, Executive Director of Austin's Community Action Network, described this function succinctly as *setting the table* for dialogue on important issues and efforts.

Paul Alexander, director of Regis University's Institute on the Common Good, admitted that the shift in citizens' role happens slowly. But by creating "effective spaces for democratic governance, we expand the possible use of deliberative tools." Similarly, Peter Shively, Outreach and Projects Administrator at the Interactivity Foundation, explained:

We see ourselves as working to strengthen the very 'front-end' kind of discussion that is necessary for citizens to fully develop and consider the full range of possible policy options on longer term issues. We want to help open up the discussion and strengthen the discursive practices necessary for healthy discussion....and later deliberation.

Diane Miller of Envision Central Texas described it this way: "We provide a forum through which people can engage directly with the issues on both a policy level as well as a practical, day-to-day level of how they live their lives" so they'll understand what's at stake, and have a direct conduit to do something about issues.

Several respondents specified that the spaces they create are online ("*so those who can't attend public meetings can participate*") or at public libraries ("*to promote civic engagement in communities*"). One person indicated that the spaces they create include "conditions under which people's voices and perspectives matter and are taken into consideration."

Kai Degner, Mayor of Harrisonburg, Virginia (pictured on this page), said that he sees creating spaces for dialogue and listening "as a way to create a paradigm shift about what's possible in community conversations. Introducing new processes *outside* the political arena may allow a community to consider new and different processes *inside* the political arena."



In May 2009, Kai held a successful community-wide Open Space event called the "Mayor's Sustainability Summit," involving about 160 people and 120 organizations in an innovative day-long event held in public and commercial spaces throughout downtown Harrisonburg. The cost to the city? \$30 for a few supplies (everything else was donated).

In an email to the NCDD network after the event, Kai wrote:

I'm struck how innovative people find the event to be, which is a wonderful reminder to me that no matter how obvious or useful I see these processes, there are still many folks who have no experience with these other paradigms to have community dialogues and deliberations - and this high profile seat is a way to showcase their utility while also realizing their value for our city.

### Engaging a larger number of citizens

Several respondents suggested that their work strengthens citizens' role in democratic governance by increasing the *number* of people who engage in politics and decision-making, or otherwise broadening the base of participants. Chris Heuer, founder of Social Media Club, specified that his work encourages broader participation through use of the internet and social networks.

Another web-based civic entrepreneur noted that in addition to reaching more people on the web, you can also drive down costs of participation and convening considerably.

### Ensuring citizens have a voice in politics

A few people asserted that their work helps give citizens more of a *voice* in politics. Polly Riddims of Fusion Partnerships noted that Fusion's work helps create a "voice for the grassroots and marginalized." Another respondent noted that "we're starting to see at the local and regional levels citizens beginning to have a real voice."

### A ripple effect

Several respondents talked about their work having an impact via a ripple effect. An organizational development (OD) practitioner said, "any organization takes responsibility for enhancing its organizational systems including decision making, it creates a positive ripple effect." Lauren Parker Kucera, director of coAction, feels similarly about her work building awareness of white privilege and improving race relations:

"In helping white people understand ourselves as key players in maintaining our sociological systems of institutional racism, this leads to building of better community coalitions and more sustainable ways to affect change in the arenas of education, employment, housing, health care, law enforcement, etc."



Arts-based dialogue practitioner Sandy Agustin, focuses on engagement in general, arguing that people who feel more engaged are more likely to stay engaged in processes that impact their communities. Processes that use art as a tool for engagement, Sandy feels, "can be transferred to other groups, and topics, which is my hope."

### How else does your work impact democratic governance?

We asked this question in case people wanted to share ways that their work impacts democratic governance in general, without relating specifically to the role of citizens. Here are a few interesting responses:

- writing articles and letters to the editor
- advocating for change
- fostering communities of practice among process experts
- building awareness of deliberative democracy by framing it in clear, compelling ways
- connecting elected officials to the results of deliberations
- working with faculty to improve discussion practices in college classrooms
- helping teachers model democracy and citizenship
- bridging gaps between researchers/scientists and elected officials
- promoting dialogue within my government agency

# The Action and Change Challenge

Few people get into dialogue and deliberation work because they love “talk.” Practitioners in this work are passionate about helping people think more critically about issues, building bridges between conflicting groups, making sure people have a voice in their democracy, or helping people work together to solve problems.

More and more people are coming to realize that addressing the major challenges of our time is dependent on our ability to collectively move to a new level of thinking about those challenges, and that dialogic and deliberative processes help people make this leap. Yet we continually struggle with how best to link dialogue and deliberation with action and change, and with the misperception that dialogue and deliberation are “just talk.”

For the “Action and Change” challenge, we explored this question: “How can we strengthen the links between dialogue, deliberation, community action, and policy change?” Our aptly-chosen leader for the Action and Change Challenge was Phil Mitchell, Director of the Greater Seattle Climate Dialogues. Mitchell strongly believes that “only citizen participation on a large scale is going to make bold climate action politically possible.” The purpose of Seattle’s climate dialogues is to help people become informed and connected, to explore solutions and choices, and to influence local and national policy.

In the online dialogue at CivicEvolution.org, members of the conference planning team agreed they wanted to examine and learn from promising dialogue and deliberation efforts that did not result in the action or policy change desired. There was a shared concern about the potential negative impact of large, well-funded, even well-run, deliberative efforts that fail to have any documentable impact on policy. Similarly, there was concern about what happens when dialogue efforts that promise to make an impact on certain issues, like youth violence or racism, are unable to demonstrate that any changes have been made. Would funders, decision-makers, community leaders and others who invested so much in the process with high hopes for concrete outcomes invest again? Would citizens be discouraged from participating again?

As is evident from these questions, this challenge area is very closely related to the Evaluation Challenge, which we often framed as the question “How can we prove to power-holders that dialogue and deliberation really do work?”

Participants at the 2008 NCDD conference were encouraged to attend the following sessions if they were interested in this challenge:

- Choosing Deliberation and Dialogue Techniques that Work (pre-conference workshop)
- How can we Combat Climate Change with Dialogue and Participation?
- Exploring How our Work in D&D Contributes to Social Change
- Virtuous and Vicious Cycles: Beyond a Linear View of Outcome and Impact
- The Role of the Facilitator in International Development: Collective Reflection for Sustainable Change
- Connecting the Dots: How Does Dialogue and Deliberation Work Lead to Change?
- Findings About Public Participation from the New National Academy of Sciences Report

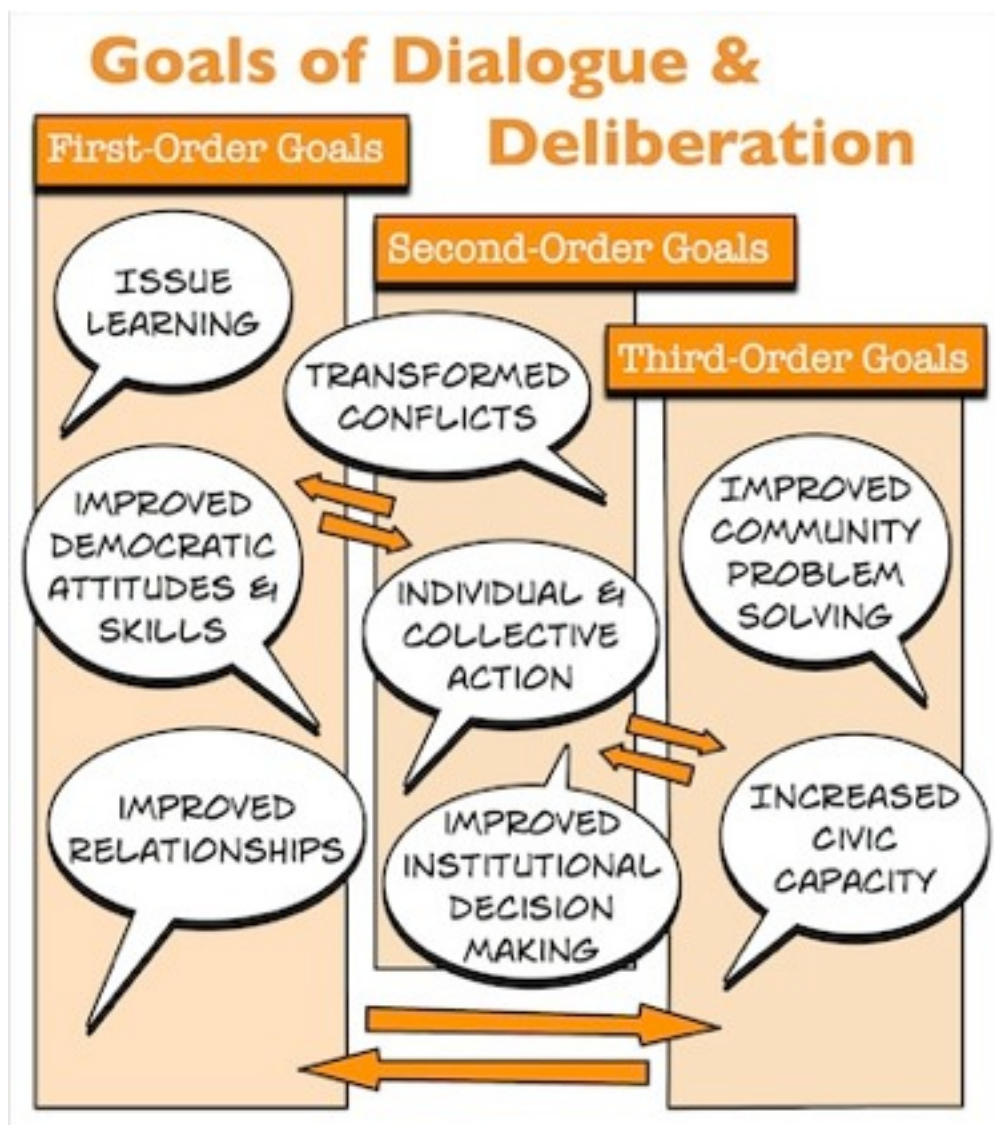
Before I outline some of the themes that emerged at the Austin conference related to this challenge area, it is useful to explore what conference attendees mean when they refer to “action and change” that results from dialogue and deliberation efforts.





## Types of goals/impacts of dialogue and deliberation

As stated previously, when asked how their work impacts citizens' role in democratic governance, most respondents mentioned impacts that fall clearly into at least one of the categories in the Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation graphic pictured here. I created the graphic to expand slightly on the Goals of Deliberation figure in an occasional paper published this summer by Public Agenda. The paper, written by Martin Carcasson, Director of Colorado State University's Center for Public Deliberation (and a workshop presenter at NCDD 2008), outlines three broad categories of goals for deliberation.<sup>2</sup>



With the blessing and involvement of Carcasson as well as Public Agenda's Will Friedman and Alison Kadlec, I built on the essay's "Goals of Deliberation" figure to ensure the framework is inclusive of public dialogue for purposes of conflict resolution. Carcasson wrote about these concepts in his paper, but did not include them in his Goals of Deliberation figure.

<sup>2</sup> Carcasson, Martin. *Beginning with the End in Mind: A Call for Goal-Driven Deliberative Practice* (Summer 2009, Public Agenda's Center for Advances in Public Engagement). The graphic pictured (created by Sandy Heierbacher) is a slightly adapted version of the paper's "Goals of Deliberation" figure.

## First-Order Goals

### 1. Issue learning (and beyond)

Respondents asserted that participants in dialogue and deliberation programs not only learn more about contentious **issues** like healthcare reform, energy security or race relations, they learn about **how the world works**; “how things operate in public life” (Rosa Donoso, researcher). They learn how government works and what government's responsibilities are.

Participants learn about **problems and problem solving**. Antioch University-McGregor professor Sara Ross explained how participants in her TIP process (The Integral Process for Working on Complex Issues) analyze complex issues, so they see how “many individuals, groups, organizations and institutions have integral roles in *constructing* and therefore also in *solving* problems.” Dialogue and deliberation can help citizens identify root causes of problems, so they are able to tackle complex problems more effectively.

Participants learn about a **different way of making decisions**. As Michele Holt-Shannon of the University of New Hampshire and The Democracy Imperative wrote, this work gives people “a chance to see productive and engaged decision making rather than politics as usual.”



Participants in deliberation and [especially] dialogue learn about **other groups of people**. Daniel Tutt from 10,000 Dialogues provided an example of films about Islam airing at the State Department and other government agencies to provide fodder for dialogue. Participants develop a better understanding of where “the Other” is coming from, and about how issues are seen from different perspectives. Diversity trainer Catherine Orland mentioned that her work helps citizens learn about power dynamics, and about their own privilege.

Noam Shore (Founder of Idealogue, Inc.) said “before policy can be written, it is vital for people to understand the differences between each other, and then utilize that information to respond more effectively to policy options (or develop new ones)... Once there is greater understanding, and potentially common ground discovered, then it is possible to better author policy initiatives.”

These responses are consistent with the “Issue Learning” category in Carcasson's *Beginning with the End in Mind* article (p. 5). As Carcasson says in his article, these types of impacts are “particularly important in comparison to the dominant forms of political communication which often aim at narrowing conceptions and misrepresenting opposing views.”

### 2. Improved democratic attitudes and skills

About 17 respondents felt their work either motivates or empowers/equips citizens (or both!) to “step up” their participation in democratic governance.

Those who felt their work **helps build citizens' democratic skills** mentioned a number of different skill sets. During her interview with Steve Zikman at the conference, attorney/mediator Carol Hess said “As people learn skills in communication and feel that they have a voice, they will be more inclined to become involved in governance issues.”

Professor and writer Bill Keith, who considers himself to be “putting the *public* back in public speaking,” teaches citizens how to use public reasoning in their arguments, how to speak effectively to people they don't agree with, and how to muster evidence and argument in the face of audiences that disagree with them. Phil Neisser, professor at SUNY Potsdam, similarly talked about “improving the way we disagree with each other”; the way citizens talk to each other across differences of opinion about politics.

Another wrote about providing people with the necessary tools for engaging “the other” in dialogue about contentious political issues.

Many conference participants believe their work in dialogue and deliberation **motivates citizens to become more active in civic life**. Professor Sara Ross, for example, feels The Integral Process she uses “seems to consistently motivate people to play myriad additional roles they had not previously considered.” Hawaii State Senator Les Ihara says his work “empowers citizens to increase their impact and role in democratic governance.” And Tobin Quereau, professor at Austin Community College, feels that while his work does not directly advocate action, “it can provide information and incentive for individuals to become more engaged and active in political and governance matters as they see fit.”



In a phone interview, Larry Dressler of Blue Wing Consulting asserted that because of dialogue and deliberation and related efforts, he is starting to see a positive change in how people see the political process. “At Colorado town meetings,” Larry noted, “people are actually believing that showing up matters, and that the methods they bring and experiences they share have an impact.”

Many specifically feel their work **empowers citizens to “find their voice and express their opinion”** (consultant Susan Sachs). As Delia Horwitz, owner of Business Relationship Consultants, explained, “In any environment, if people feel their opinions are heard and valued, they are more likely to venture them in a variety of circumstances.” Because of her and others’ work at Arizona State University, Patricia Boone-Edgerton Longoni says that students are empowered to use their voice and to consider the voices of those with different perspectives.

### 3. Improved Relationships

The final First-Order Goal in my graphic is “improved relationships.” In *Beginning with the End in Mind* (p. 7), Carcasson included this outcome under Improving Democratic Attitudes, describing it as the “creation and improvement of community relationships, particularly between individuals with opposing perspectives.”

Respondents emphasized the importance of both **interpersonal relationships and general community connections**. As Betty Knighton, director of the West Virginia Center for Civic life explained, “Since deliberative dialogue almost always develops or enhances relationships among participants, the general public, officeholders, and the media,” we begin to see each other in new ways—“ways that open the door for other types of citizen participation in local or statewide governance.”

One respondent said, “We help create the space of civil society, which is often distinct from just the decision making space of ‘governance’ as most understand it and includes the relationships and spontaneous possibilities of neighbor helping neighbor, citizens taking action on behalf of their community, etc.” Similarly, Cheryl Honey wrote about how Community Weaving helps people connect with others in their community to exchange services and solve problems.

In an interview at the conference conducted by Nathan Emerson, graduate student Sthea Mason mentioned that forming new connections between people equips them to take more effective action together, due to a greater diversity of input and skills.

## Second-Order Goals

### 1. Transformed Conflicts

Six respondents specifically mentioned that their work affects citizens' role in democratic governance by helping them consider and handle conflicts differently. One practitioner described this succinctly as “helping people overcome their barriers and work together.”

Mike Aaron, a practitioner who is fairly new to dialogue and deliberation work, noted that this work is about “helping citizens begin to think about a conflict differently, looking for the other side’s interests.” They begin looking “for common ground instead of immediately seeking to oppose.”

Willie Ratchford, director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee described his work in dialogue and deliberation as advocating “for an inclusive community where trust, acceptance, fairness and equity are the building blocks for a community where people’s differences are acknowledged, understood and accepted.”



Several respondents emphasized their work’s focus on bridging divides and getting past partisan gridlock. Tyrone Reitman, Co-Director of Healthy Democracy Oregon wrote that “an underlying goal of this work is to connect the dots for legislators, decision-makers, and the public that D&D can play a meaningful role in moving past partisan gridlock, conflicts of interest, etc., if done with integrity and transparency. As cynical as politics is, I think there is keen interest on both sides of the aisle to find innovative ways to move past old debates.”

Though the question focused on respondents' impact on citizens in general, a couple of people mentioned their work training, informing or working with public officials and civil society leaders to help them “reach across the aisle.” Michael Ostrolenk of the Liberty Coalition, for example, mentioned in his interview that “we bring conservative and liberal leaders together for dialogues in order to humanize the political process and discover common ground. We seek alliances across the political spectrum to promote and protect our constitution and republic.”

### 2. Individual and Collective Action

Several respondents emphasized how their work empowers and inspires citizens to self-organize and self-govern. Austin minister Landon Shultz describes this impact as “helping to define significant issues and to generate helpful, workable, and sustainable solutions to social challenges.” And Sheril Smith of the University of Texas at Austin contends that although individually, citizens have little power “together, citizens can be a very powerful force when they are motivated and work cooperatively.”

Betty Knighton, director of the West Virginia Center for Civic Life, described her work as providing “an opportunity for citizens to see possibilities for their own contributions to democratic governance more fully. During and after deliberative discussions, citizens often become aware of individual or group responses they can support and engage in.”

DeAnna Martin (President of the Center for Wise Democracy) noted in a phone interview that participants in Wisdom Councils and Creative Insight Councils develop tangible ideas they then want to organize around. Diane Miller described their work at Envision Central Texas, in part, as helping people “organize and become more skilled at affecting real systemic change on policies and power structures that are driving our communities down unsustainable and unhealthy paths.”

Michael Ostrolenk and other politically conservative civic entrepreneurs see this outcome of dialogue and deliberation work as having the potential to limit the size of government. In his interview with Steve Zikman, Michael commented that this work helps citizens see themselves “as self-governing agents within a community context instead of subjects of the corporate state.”

In addition to catalyzing citizen action, dialogue and deliberation work can of course also lead to collaboration among institutions. For example, Public Agenda’s Alison Kadlec mentioned how their work helps civil society organizations work across silos to improve public problem-solving.

### 3. Improved Institutional Decision Making

Some respondents emphasized the impact or potential impact of their work to influence public policy decisions. One of the aims of dialogue and deliberation work, explained Diane Miller (Envision Central Texas), is to shape the nature of policy discussions and directly affect decisions that are made so they “serve the interest of many rather than the self-interests of a powerful few.”

Hawaii State Senator Les Ihara (pictured on this page) noted that the role of citizens expands when his “partnership with citizen activists is successful in bringing about political reform legislation.” In his interview with Allegra Fonda-Bonardi at the NCDD conference, Brian Manwaring (Program Manager at U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution) explained that his work “helps bring public values into environmental policies.” And Sheril Smith of the University of Texas at Austin, who serves on a state regional water planning board sees herself “as a link between local citizens and the decision-makers.”



DeAnna Martin of the Center for Wise Democracy made an interesting comment in her phone interview, distinguishing between soft power (or indirect power) and hard power (the traditional paradigm). In Ashland, Oregon, public engagement efforts using methods like randomly-selected Wisdom Councils, open dialogues at the public libraries, and World Cafe’s at the Elk’s Club have impacted the values, principles and priorities of government in indirect, non-traditional ways. According to DeAnna, public officials have begun to “reorient their decisions to reflect the emerging community conversation.” In Ashland, self-organized citizen dialogue driven by powerful, challenging questions rather than stakeholder agendas, has begun to affect change through moral authority, not coercion.

### Third-Order Goal: Improved Community Problem Solving or Increased Civic Capacity

Although there are two “bubbles” under Third-Order Goals in my Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation graphic, I consider “increased civic capacity” to be another way of saying “improved community problem solving.” Martin Carcasson contends in his article that improved community problem solving should be the ultimate goal of deliberative practice. Rather than overly identifying with specific issues or processes (and the squabbles between them) or focusing solely on individual events and projects, Carcasson argues that dialogue and deliberation practitioners should become “known for their passionate focus on democratic problem solving and all that entails” (p. 2-3).

Here is how Carcasson describes community problem solving:

At its best and most effective, community problem solving is a democratic activity that involves the community on multiple levels, ranging from individual action to institutional action at the extremes, but also includes all points in between that involve groups, organizations, non-profits, businesses, etc. It is also deeply linked to the work of John Dewey and his focus on democracy as 'a way of life' that requires particularly well-developed skills and habits connected to problem solving and communicating across differences.

Many of our 88 respondents, in one way or another, mentioned civic capacity building when asked how their work impacts citizens' role in democratic governance. One specified their work builds civic capacity "for more inclusive and effective forms of governance," and another "for effective and authentic civic engagement."

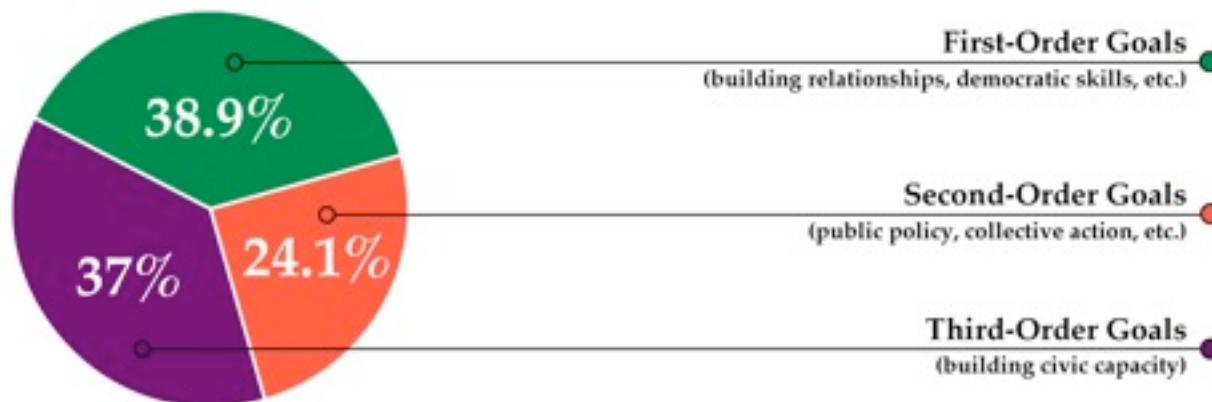
Respondents build civic capacity by training trainers, facilitators and convenors, "demonstrating good and useful process" to decision-makers, strengthening the "vital signs of civic health" that enable higher levels of collaboration, changing federal agencies' "capacity to listen to various publics," and creating systems that give citizens access to government... to name just a few things.

They also build civic capacity by equipping public officials with skills and knowledge. Ariana McBride talked about the important role the Orton Family Foundation and other community foundations can play in helping local decision makers better understand how to engage citizens and stakeholders in meaningful, productive ways.

Lucas Cioffi of OnlineTownHalls.com explained, "Our goal is to demonstrate that there is tremendous latent intelligence in the citizenry and that if elected officials tap into it, they will make their jobs much easier. Deliberation is smart political and financial risk management." Similarly, Susan Stuart Clark of Common Knowledge wrote about "helping policymakers gain increased respect for the capacity and contributions of an informed public." And Minister Landon Shultz wrote about helping public officials "understand real issues of real people."

### Goals/impacts focused on most

In the online survey, we asked conference participants who identify as practitioners in dialogue and deliberation to indicate which of the three orders of goals/impacts they focus on most in their work. Respondents were asked to skip the question if they do not consider themselves to be a practitioner. The graphic pictured here shows their responses. (This question was not asked during interviews conducted at the Austin conference.)



Of the 53 respondents who answered this multiple-choice question, there was an almost-even split between first-order goals (building relationships, democratic skills, etc.) and third-order goals (building civic capacity), each of which were selected by close to 40% of respondents. The second-order goals of resolving conflicts, influencing public policy and inspiring collective action were selected by 24% of respondents. In many ways this was a false choice, as dialogue and deliberation programs tend to set goals in more than just one of these categories and the outcomes and impacts in the three orders of goals are interrelated. But I wanted to get a sense of where practitioners are currently in their thinking about the different types of goals and impacts of this work.

## Themes that emerged in the Action & Change challenge

Below are eight themes that emerged in the Action & Change challenge area at the 2008 NCDD conference and in dialogues, interviews and surveys with conference attendees.

### Defining success for ourselves

In the online dialogue we held at CivicEvolution.org before the conference, planning team member Joseph McIntyre wrote about his experiences with the Ag Futures Alliance project, which focuses heavily on dialogue to drive change in food systems. He emphasized the importance of practitioners identifying their own definitions of success. He explained that the Alliance can demonstrate numerous kinds of success:

- *Citizen white papers issued.* These documents represent the best thinking in the community on the tough issues the Alliances tackle.
- *Citizen action released.* The Alliances have spawned significant follow-on action, for example in the creation of farm worker housing.
- *Influence of the Alliance.* In most places where we have Alliances running, they are called on by government as a key voice in policy making.
- *Resources garnered.* The Alliances are largely funded from local sources. People putting up money to back what they believe in.
- *Transformation of the local dialogue and local attitudes.* The Alliance method, which is based on dialogue/respect, has been carried out from the central circle and applied in the organizations where members work and in other forums.
- *Legislative change.* The Alliances have successfully gotten one law passed in California and are at work on two more.



McIntyre pointed out that although this seems like success, if someone asked him if we were closer to a sustainable food system, "I'd have to say no." He continues, "D&D is simply plowing the field and planting the seeds that will result in the changes needed. In my case, D&D is part of an evolutionary change."

McIntyre was not alone in emphasizing the need for practitioners to (1) own the definition of success and then (2) demonstrate and document their success. At a breakfast John Esterle and Chris Gates hosted for a cross-section of NCDD leaders to discuss funding challenges and opportunities for this work, Esterle—Executive Director of The Whitman Institute and board chair of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE)—implored those present to empower themselves regarding impact. "Let funders know, 'this is how we measure our success.'" Be proactive and able to articulate your impact in a compelling way.

### Developing clear theories of change

Of course, being able to define "success" for themselves hinges on practitioners' ability to articulate their theory of change. What good is it for a civic entrepreneur to claim they have tripled the number of citizens in their community who are deliberating about local problems, if they cannot explain how that increased level of engagement has improved their community and the lives of its citizens?

Two workshops at the 2008 NCDD conference used different approaches to looking at the change theories in this field of practice. Philip Thomas of the Generative Change Community led a workshop titled “*Exploring How our Work in D&D Contributes to Social Change*” and Public Agenda’s Will Friedman and Alison Kadlec led a session called “*Connecting the Dots: How Does Dialogue and Deliberation Work Lead to Change?*”

Friedman and Kadlec’s session explored the relationship between dialogue and deliberation work and the impacts they can have at various levels (e.g., attitudinal, institutional, community, culture and policy), to help participants gain clarity on their theories of change and become better able to articulate their change theories to funders, officials and communities. They also explored the ways in which particular dialogue and deliberation methods related to different kinds of change.

Recognizing that our work in dialogue and deliberation is necessary but often not sufficient to reach participants’ and organizers’ larger goals for change, Philip Thomas’ session explored the assumptions we hold about how change happens and how dialogue and deliberation can contribute. Participants mapped strategies for change and drew distinctions among various approaches.

As was pointed out in a document on the Generative Change Community handed out during Thomas’ workshop, there is a strong sense of urgency among many practitioners to learn how to make participatory processes “more effective and to understand the role they can play in different strategies for societal change.”

### A broader and more systemic view of “Action & Change”

In his workshop, Philip Thomas (pictured here) also discussed some insights from his draft white paper, which outlines the beginnings of an “**integral theory**” of dialogue.<sup>3</sup> In his work on the book-length Handbook on Dialogue published by the United Nations Program on Development and its partners,<sup>4</sup> Thomas was struck by some practitioners’ seemingly incompatible views of dialogue. Some felt, for example, that personal transformation among dialogue participants was a critical outcome to emphasize in the Handbook, while others wanted to de-emphasize and even eliminate such concepts from the book and focus primarily on political processes and outcomes.



An “Integral Theory” or approach is a frame that is broad enough to include all perspectives in a way that respects important differences while highlighting their connections, and shows how together they form a more robust and comprehensive image of the whole. Philip Thomas’ integral theory of dialogue is based the recognition that change occurs at three levels (or from three perspectives): 1st person (I), 2nd person (you/we) and 3rd person (it). These three perspectives reflect many other scholars’ thinking, including Habermas’ “particular inner world” (I/ subjective), “social world” (we/intersubjective) and “external world” (it/objective) realities.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas’ integral approach to dialogue acknowledges and incorporates the realities and influences from each of these perspectives. Most importantly for our field, an integral approach recognizes as valid the distinct knowledge claims of each of these frames, disallowing the kind of reductionism that occurs when any one of the frames is held up as absolute or superior. As Thomas wrote in an email to me, “Too often D&D practitioners advocate for one of these at the expense or neglect of the other,” some claiming the work is all about changing external structures and systems, or laws and policies, while others claim it’s ultimately all about personal transformation or about shifting relationships.

Similarly, workshop presenter Sara Ross has taken an integral approach to understanding and addressing complex problems with her “**Integral Process For Working On Complex Issues**.” The Integral Process (TIP) goes beyond quick-fix problem solving to help participants tackle complex issues systemically. TIP exposes the layers of complexity in public issues which, if left unseen, make efforts to deliberate, decide, and act less likely to be effective.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, P. (2006). *Towards an Integral Theory & Practice of Dialogue* (First Draft).

<sup>4</sup> Pruitt, B. and P. Thomas. *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*. CIDA, International IDEA, OAS and UNDP, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, J. (1979). *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Boston, Beacon Press.



In another workshop, Maggie Herzig (Senior Associate of the Public Conversations Project) and Lucy Moore (public policy mediator) outlined Herzig's new theoretical model that reflects the systemic and cyclical nature of dialogue and deliberation. As our community of practice matures, there is a growing realization that the view of this work as involving a linear set of steps (i.e. share stories, generate ideas, weigh options, decide, then act) is inadequate. Quality dialogue and deliberation often do not have distinct beginnings and end points, and cannot be fairly judged by looking only at the decision, action, or policy outcome that result (or don't result) from the initial process.

**Herzig's "Virtuous and Vicious Cycles" model** addresses the limitations of this linear view. Her model recognizes that in complex systems, endings are also beginnings and a single initiative may, in fact, go through several cycles of engagement and impact and may generate ripple effects that extend far beyond its formal endpoint.

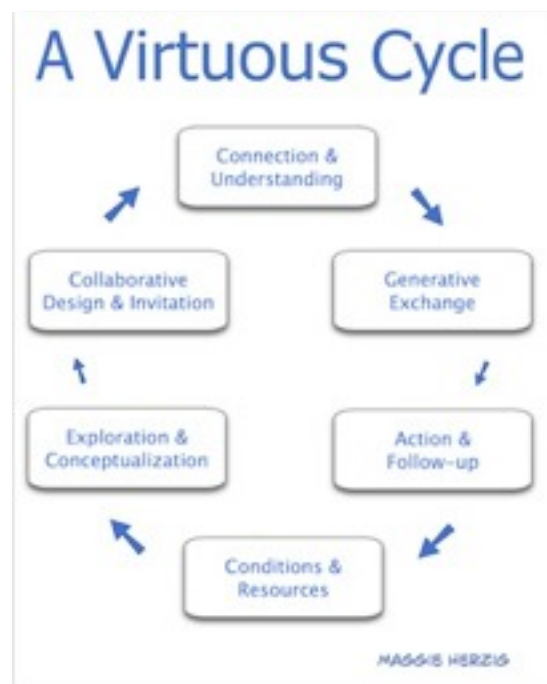
As Herzig explained in an exchange with me about her model, in living systems there are both a) conditions and resources that represent and *support* aspirational community goals (e.g., an involved and informed citizenry) and b) conditions and resources that represent a lack of such qualities and that *undermine* those goals. Effective practice not only supports specific outcomes, but also alters the conditions and resources left behind.

Effective practice can be described as a **virtuous cycle** (pictured) often including reflection, collaborative planning, connection, increased understanding, new ideas, action and follow up. Good work *at each phase* as well as the effectiveness of the full cycle improves conditions and resources, e.g. leaving behind more hope, skilled leaders, empowered citizens, etc.

A typical **vicious cycle**, on the other hand, brings together the usual suspects in an atmosphere of fear, distrust and marginalization. Those who come together generate ideas destined to fail over the long run and breed further mistrust and polarization (i.e., the conditions and resources deteriorate).

Herzig's model encourages practitioners to distinguish between project-specific *impacts* as well as *outcomes*. For example, a project may be a success in reaching agreement but people are left feeling injured. Or a project can fail to achieve an agreement but leave people feeling confident that resources are now in place to solve important problems.

The model also underscores the organic nature of working in complex systems and attempts to normalize unpredictability. Although contracts and grant funding tend to require prediction, Herzig pointed out, this work—especially if it is powerful and involves multiple "cycles"—changes the conditions and resources along the way. Her model highlights dilemmas related to "getting ahead of reality" and encourages practitioners and supporters of dialogue and deliberation work to embrace unpredictability.



As mentioned at the beginning of the Action & Change Challenge section, Martin Carcasson's new paper "**Beginning with the End in Mind**" provides a broad, accessible frame for understanding the various types of goals/impacts of dialogue and deliberation efforts—and how they reinforce each other. The essay outlines three broad categories of goals for deliberation, and explores how a clearer understanding of the goals and purposes we are trying to achieve through public engagement can improve our process decisions and increase our impacts. It offers a practical framework to help practitioners systematically consider both their short- and long-term goals and the strategies that will set them up for success.

The **Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation graphic** on page 14—and the figure in Carcasson's article it is based on—emphasizes improved community problem solving and increased civic capacity as longer-term goals of public engagement work. In his newest book, Xavier de Souza Briggs shows how civic capacity—the capacity to create and sustain smart collective action—is crucial for strengthening governance and changing the state of the world in the process.<sup>6</sup> As practitioners move from project to project, they

<sup>6</sup> de Souza Briggs, Xavier. *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe* (2008: MIT Press).

sometimes lose sight of the fact that their work is contributing to the larger goal of more democratic, effective communities and cultures.

Both figures illustrate that “first-order goals” like issue learning and improved democratic attitudes—which are often discounted as convenors and sponsors focus on goals related to concrete action and impact on policy—contribute to the big-picture goal of increasing a community’s civic capacity and ability to solve problems. This is a critical insight because oftentimes, dialogue is just the beginning of a larger effort to solve a multi-faceted problem, and deliberation is just one of many factors contributing to public policy decisions. In other words, “second order goals” like collective action and policy change can be challenging to achieve short-term, and can be very difficult to measure.

Valuing shorter-term first-order goals and the overall development of civic capacity may be more practical—and satisfying for practitioners—than solely emphasizing second-order goals like collaborative action and policy change, since such goals usually depend on many decisions and factors outside the scope of any one project. Practitioners should consider *all three* types of goals when determining project design and when measuring their success.

Carcasson’s essay and the Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation framework have the potential to create much-needed clarity about the link between public engagement, civic capacity building, and shorter-term goals. We need to find ways to encourage practitioners, community and political leaders, and funders to utilize more systemic frameworks like these and Maggie Herzig’s Virtuous and Vicious Cycles model, which provide more realistic and useful ways of looking at impact and outcomes. As Sara Ross said in the survey, “We need to educate policy makers/decision makers about the nature of complexity, that policy alone—almost always a bandaid approach—cannot suffice to address complex issues.”

### Matching process with purpose

Every public engagement program has a unique set of goals, and different processes are better suited for reaching different goals. Carcasson’s essay and the *Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation* graphic are new contributions to an ongoing effort to help practitioners think more strategically about the goals they are reaching for, and what design choices will help them reach those goals. They complement existing tools like NCDD’s Engagement Streams Framework, which NCDD members and community leaders have used since 2005 to help them decide which engagement methods best fit their goals and resources.

Although today’s practitioners largely agree that no method works in all situations, community leaders and others who are new to public engagement often become overly attached to the first process they learn about—and end up with less-than-satisfying results. NCDD developed the Engagement Streams Framework in 2004 to introduce people to the range of possibilities available to them and to send them in a better direction than they may have otherwise gone. The framework has been referenced and depicted in numerous books and articles, taught in dozens of undergraduate and graduate college classrooms, and most importantly has been used countless times to help public officials, school boards, community groups and others understand where to begin when they’re thinking about initiating a dialogue or deliberation program. Here are a few ways people are using the framework:

- I’ve used the Framework for several years with the Leadership Austin classes, to help them understand where dialogue fits into the continuum. Because so few of them have any experience with dialogue, this approachable, easy to understand visual helps them “get it” and differentiates dialogue from other processes. It also quickly gives them several models of dialogue, so they understand that there are many ways to approach it. (*Juli Fellows*)
- We built the Streams of Engagement framework into our online Issue Guide Exchange. When someone uploads a guide to the tool we give them the option of identifying which streams of practice the guide addresses. Then, when someone is searching for guides, the streams of practice provide them with another way to figure out which guides will best meet their needs. (*Carrie Boron, Everyday Democracy*)



- I just discovered the framework and am using it in a group facilitation workshop I'm teaching to AmeriCorps interns. My intent is to get them to think about what type of facilitation they are attempting and what outcomes they are looking for and then looking at what methods make the most sense, given the desired outcomes. (*Marty Jacobs, Systems In Sync*)
- I've used the engagement streams cartoon mostly, since it's a great tool for introducing people to the ideas of different uses for the methods. I've used it and prepared it for Carolyn [Lukensmeyer] to use at presentations for United Way leadership, state elected officials, and college classrooms. (*Susanna Haas Lyons, AmericaSpeaks*)

It is interesting to note that when we formed NCDD in 2002, many practitioners seemed to be focused on developing expertise in a specific method, whether it be Study Circles, Open Space, National Issues Forums, World Cafe, or any number of other approaches. Many practitioners were forging new pathways in their communities on their own, and felt completely disconnected to others who were doing this work. In the past seven years we have seen a distinct shift as people connect more and more beyond specific methods, and more practitioners take the time to gain training and experience in multiple methods. Practitioners are increasingly conscious of the importance of matching methods to context, and we think this framework has played a part in this shift.

As practitioners gain experience in this work, they also become more adept at creating unique designs based on principles, qualities and elements of a variety of different methods—what faculty in Fielding Graduate University's certificate program on dialogue, deliberation and public engagement call “virtuosity.” As researcher Sara Ross said in the survey, once we strengthen practitioners' powers of analysis, “they will be better equipped to make all the logical connections necessary to live up to hopes and claims about action and change resulting from their efforts. Citizens deserve no less from us!”

As the field continues to grow and more people, communities and institutions experiment with these processes, the need to help people effectively match method to purpose becomes greater—as does the need to help practitioners go beyond *selecting* processes to *designing* unique processes to fit their contexts.

### Transparency about goals and expected outcomes

Dialogue and deliberation efforts can lead to many types of outcomes: behavioral change, knowledge building about issues, increased understanding among groups, conflict resolution, impact on decision-makers and policy, collaborative action efforts, and more. Engagement programs and projects tend to focus specifically on one or two of these types of outcomes.

Many practitioners consider *dialogue* to be a powerful action in and of itself, citing outcomes like broadened perspectives, trust-building, and increased understanding among divergent social, political and ethnic groups. Both dialogue *and* deliberation can help people learn to integrate alternative views—or at least an awareness that for every complex problem there generally are alternative views with some validity—into the way they think about problems and issues. These kinds of outcomes, though difficult to measure, can prevent future conflicts from becoming too polarized and even leading to violence. As the Goals graphic on page 14 shows, for this and other reasons, quality dialogue and deliberation have value regardless of whether participants decide to take action individually or collectively, or whether the process influences public policy.



Oftentimes, though, the public feels a sense of urgency about the issue at hand. When the topic is youth violence, energy security, or disaster preparedness (or any similarly pressing issue), dialogue for dialogue's sake can do more harm than good. Participants can leave frustrated by a process they perceived to be “all talk and no action,” and associate public engagement processes in general with inaction and ineffectiveness.

When I first entered this field in the late 1990's, I administered a phone survey for the Center for Living Democracy, interviewing 75 leaders of race dialogue efforts across the U.S. One thing I heard over and over again was that African Americans were dropping out of dialogue groups early, frustrated that their groups were not moving to action on a topic that had so much urgency for them.

In the late '90s, during President Clinton's Initiative on Race, dialogue organizers and facilitators often felt like they were the only ones doing this kind of work, and they had few ways to learn from peers. Few had much of a background in community organizing, collective action and policy advocacy, and they weren't sure where to turn for help.

Part of the problem seemed to be that dialogue organizers promised greater outcomes than they were equipped to deliver. "Improve race relations in our town!" and "End racism!", some their posters proclaimed. The programs they were prepared to lead could not live up to participants' inflated expectations.

For these reasons, it is crucial to be open and honest from the start with participants, funders, convening organizations, public officials and others involved about the *types* of outcomes they can expect from the process being used and the resources and other inputs at hand. (Ideally, all of these groups played a role in helping develop the program's goals already!) As Marieanne Shovlin of the Global Facilitators Service Corps suggested in a phone interview, we should put our goals, agendas, and results we're seeking out there. Dialogue and deliberation organizers must design the program with their broad goals in mind, advertise accordingly, and then remind participants and other parties why they are there.

As mediator Carol Hess said in an interview at the conference with Steve Zikman, "We need to make sure that when asking people to engage in dialogue and deliberation that there is a purpose to it. The purpose could be simply to foster greater respect and understanding for each other's positions," but we need to be clear about that purpose.

### Cautious framing of potential outcomes

That said, to get people interested, it is often helpful to underscore the potential for concrete outcomes in **big, bold letters**. If a public engagement program is being designed to influence policy on a contentious issue, to inspire collective action among participants, or to resolve a long-standing conflict (second-order goals), practitioners should emphasize that to attract participants. In the online dialogue at CivicEvolution.org, Judith Mowry described learning that an especially effective "way to bring people to the table" is to make clear for them "what's in it for me?" This often means identifying language that explicitly connects the public engagement program to solving a particular problem people are grappling with.



Citizens, community leaders and elected officials tend to talk in terms of solving problems and addressing issues, and think in terms of outcomes and content rather than process. Several conference attendees reported more success in drawing people to the table when they framed public engagement work in those terms. Theo Brown mentioned much greater drawing power for AmericaSpeaks events when they are able to highlight the potential for concrete action and policy outcomes. Facilitator Lucy Moore described "lofty policy goals" as key in bringing a large number of stakeholders together for her dialogue about Grand Canyon issues.

Of course, it can be tricky to promise even general outcomes like "citizen action" or "impact on policy" for programs designed, by their very nature, to provide the space for participants themselves to identify specific action or recommendations. In their workshop, *Virtuous and Vicious Cycles: Beyond a Linear View of Outcome and Impact*, Maggie Herzig and Lucy Moore noted that overly defining outcomes from the start can undermine participants' ownership of their efforts and limit the possibilities that were unimaginable before the initiative began.

Herzig and Moore pointed out that for some groups, an overly-defined outcome is enough to keep them from participating. People with more conservative political views, for example, can be quickly turned off by talk of "social change" or "community organizing" that seems inherently progressive. Talk of influencing government policy can also be a red flag for conservatives like panelist Pete Peterson, Executive Director of Common Sense California, a self-identified "communitarian conservative" who would like to see public engagement efforts focus more explicitly on empowering citizens to take responsibility for community problems rather than turning to government for help or demanding government action.

Peterson emphasized the importance of not allowing a more deliberative democracy to replace self-reliance. After all, our most complex problems cannot be solved by government alone. Similarly, panelist Grover Norquist, President of Americans for Tax Reform, stated frankly, “I don’t like it when 12 people or 12,000 people get together and tell someone what to do.” Peterson, Norquist, and others on our sub-plenary “Panel of Conservatives who Support Public Engagement” suggested framing public engagement around more traditional values like “voluntary, civic solutions to problems” (rather than only political solutions) and “individual responsibility in addition to collective responsibility” in order to attract more conservative participants.

While there may not be a single framing of public engagement that works for all audiences, practitioners are increasingly finding success in focusing on the purpose or potential outcomes (in general) of engagement. Specifically, framing in terms of *problem solving* and identifying and working towards a desirable *future* seems to resonate with broad audiences. In the online dialogue, Joseph McIntyre described his efforts to frame public engagement work in a broadly accessible way:



We frame our work leading wisdom circles in sustainable agriculture as reinvigorating local democracy and specifically we create “citizen think-do” tanks that attempt to bring perspective and the common good back into the center of our communities. For us, the call to represent ‘our best hopes and aspirations for a future worth having’ resonates strongly with both the rural conservative and urban environmental members of our alliance.

It is also helpful to consider the way organizations like Everyday Democracy (which reinvented itself recently by changing its name from the Study Circles Resource Center) talk about the work they do in communities. Everyday Democracy’s website states simply that “we help your community find ways for all kinds of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems.”

### Building capacity in social change methods

As mentioned earlier, my graduate research in the late 1990s had shown that one of race dialogue organizers’ greatest challenges was “moving from talk to action,” and that part of the problem was that they tended not to have the knowledge or skills needed to help their dialogue groups take action effectively in their communities. The practitioners I interviewed professed that dialogue naturally leads to collaborative action and community change, yet their groups’ action efforts often fell flat. At the time, I concluded that dialogue participants *and* organizers needed to be trained and educated in social change methods like policy advocacy and community organizing.

Dialogue and deliberation are designed to help divergent groups to find common ground on complex issues or (as Public Agenda’s Alison Kadlec put it in an email to me about this issue) to develop “a shared understanding of where there’s room to work together moving forward.” Do we abandon participants once they have discovered where and how they should work together? Or do we make sure they have the resources they need to follow through? After all, as one conference participant said, “D&D is only the beginning.”

I believe this continues to be an overlooked gap in dialogue and deliberation work, though some organizations and programs are innovating in this area. The Greater Seattle Climate Dialogues, for example, provides dialogue participants with a 7-page Citizen’s Toolkit which outlines detailed, pragmatic advice on writing letters to the editor, connecting with congressmembers, speaking at public meetings, acquiring public funds for planning efforts, and other forms of citizen advocacy.<sup>7</sup>

King County’s (Seattle Area) innovative Countywide Community Forums, a project of the King County Auditor, deliberately exposes citizens to the ins-and-outs of county government. During one of the rounds of forums, participants (hundreds of volunteer Citizen

<sup>7</sup> Citizen’s Toolkit. Climate Action Labs of the Greater Seattle Climate Dialogues, Northwest Environmental Education Council, WSU King County Extension, and TGreen Consulting. Available at [www.climatedialogues.org/static/docs/CAL\\_Toolkit.doc](http://www.climatedialogues.org/static/docs/CAL_Toolkit.doc).

Councilors) studied the budget-making process and provided feedback on the county’s fiscal priorities. Each round helps participants better understand policy advocacy and how local government functions.<sup>8</sup>

As DeAnna Martin of the Center for Wise Democracy pointed out, we can look outside our field for resources and training in these skills as well, suggesting the League of Women Voters and the Alliance for Justice as particularly good sources.

One of the strategies for strengthening the link between public engagement and action and policy change that a number of respondents shared, was to plan for action from the very beginning. Making sure dialogue and deliberation *convenors* have basic knowledge of social change methods is one way to prepare for action. Equipping *participants* with the training and resources they need to continue working together to improve their communities is another.

## Evaluating, and learning from mistakes

Many survey respondents emphasized the importance of effectively evaluating dialogue and deliberation work. This is interesting given our leaders of the “Evaluation Challenge”—Janette Hartz-Karp of Curtin University and John Gastil of the University of Washington—noted in their challenge report that this challenge is so daunting that few chose to face it head-on at the conference. In her workshop, *Evaluating Dialogue and Deliberation: What are we Learning?* (co-led by Jacquie Dale and Natasha Manji), Miriam Wyman of Practicum Unlimited quoted the cautionary words of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) from a 2006 report:

There is a striking imbalance between time, money and energy that governments in OECD countries invest in engaging citizens and civil society in public decision-making and the amount of attention they pay to evaluating the effectiveness and impact of such efforts.

Respondents seemed to recognize that as practitioners, public and elected officials and researchers, we all grapple with this issue with regular monotony, knowing that it is pivotal to our practice. But at the conference itself, few seemed to want to dwell on the details of measuring success and tracking results.

Arts-based facilitator Sandy Agustin noted in the survey that we need to streamline evaluative processes and tools. Although our methods and goals differ so much that a single one-size-fits-all assessment tool is not realistic, practitioners seem interested in having a clear menu of assessment options so they can match measures with goals (much like they match process with purpose).

One respondent wrote about the need to find ways to measure different types of change, giving the examples of “attendance at city council meetings” and “increased knowledge of government processes.” Another suggested we be clear about what *is* and *is not* measurable, but value both and measure what we can. She urges practitioners not to discard “those things too subtle to measure” but that “matter dearly” like good will and warm feelings.

In a phone interview, Tim Bonnemann of Intellitics said “it’s about closing that loop.” Post-project evaluation must be integrated and not be an afterthought. “You’re not done until you have good, solid understanding of outcomes.” Tim also suggested we share our evaluation results with one another to learn from each other’s successes and struggles.



<sup>8</sup> Workshop presenter at NCDD 2008, John Spady is the Deputy Volunteer Coordinator of the Countywide Community Forums. John is also Executive Vice President of the Forum Foundation (a conference sponsor).

Similarly, many respondents emphasized the need for people in our field to share stories and case studies more than we currently do—and to disseminate them widely. Independent consultant Marla Crockett noted that we need to communicate our challenges and learnings as well as our successes to others in our field of practice, so we can learn from each other's efforts as well as our own.

---

Survey respondents, interviewees and conference attendees had many other suggestions for this challenge area. Strengthening the link between public engagement and action and policy change is a challenge that every practitioner struggles with. Here are some of the other things respondents felt would help address this challenge:

### **Get out of the way**

Several respondents suggested that rather than planning for action, helping prepare participants to take action, etc., convenors and facilitators should “get out of the way.” People can be moved too quickly to action or decisions, and miss out on better solutions that emerge later.

### **Educate and train...everyone**

Respondents suggested educating public officials about the need for dialogue and deliberation, and the importance of incorporating meaningful citizen input as early as possible in the decision-making process. Training in engagement processes in high schools, middle schools, and colleges was also mentioned as a need by several respondents. Building skills and providing training for practitioners was also suggested, as was educating the public about participatory processes “in a massive way” via the media.



### **Provide incentives and recognition**

Several respondents recommended we find ways to recognize “champions” of public engagement—organizations and government entities truly committed to these processes. One suggested an award for the “most deliberative city in America.” Another suggested we come up with new incentives that entice citizens and public officials to engage more.

### **Do this work well**

When asked what one thing would help the field move forward in addressing the “Action & Change” challenge, many respondents made suggestions that I would consider to be part of simply doing this work effectively. “Set up structures where people feel heard, included, respected and valued,” one respondent said. Conduct outreach that is balanced on all sides. Use skilled facilitators. Incorporate dialogue and deliberation early in the decision-making process. Achieve “mass participation.” Connect with problem solvers in the community. Develop an understanding of the time, funding, and resources required to do the work well. Convey results effectively to officials.

# The Systems Challenge

Most recent experiments in dialogue and deliberation have been temporary programs that lead to few long-term changes in the way people and institutions interact. For the “Systems Challenge,” we explored ways we can make public engagement values and practices integral to government, schools, and other systems, so that our methods of involving people, solving problems, and making decisions are used more naturally and efficiently.

At the conference, we focused most on institutionalizing public engagement in *governance*—an area often referred to by scholars (perhaps a bit awkwardly) as “embeddedness.” According to Elena Fagotto, who presented on this topic at the 2006 NCDD conference, and Archon Fung,

When the habit of deliberation is embedded in a community’s political institutions and social practices, [citizens] frequently make public decisions and take collective actions through processes that involve discussion, reasoning, and citizen participation rather than through the exercise of authority, expertise, status, political weight, or other such forms of power.<sup>9</sup>

Participants at the 2008 NCDD conference were invited to attend the following sessions if they were interested in exploring the Systems Challenge:



- Deliberative Democracy and Higher Education (pre-conference workshop)
- Including Our Voices: Young Adult Leadership in the D&D Community
- Creating Room at the Head of Our Tables: Exploring New Mentoring Roles As Young Leaders Emerge
- University and College Centers as Platforms for Deliberative Democracy
- Embedding D&D Into Government Systems
- Fireside Chat on Embedding Citizen’s Voices in Our Governing Systems
- If There’s Something Strange in Your Neighborhood, Who Ya Gonna Call? Ex-ten-sion! Li-brar-ies!
- Direct Democracy in the Mountains: Lessons from the Past, Prospects for the Future

Most of the themes identified as being part of the Action & Change Challenge also relate to the Systems Challenge in important ways. Five additional themes emerged in discussions about this challenge area at the conference.

<sup>9</sup> Fung, Archon and Elena Fagotto. *Sustaining Public Engagement: Embedded Deliberation in Local Communities* (draft dated April 14, 2008), p 3.



## Cultivating and supporting public engagement practitioners

Fung and Fagotto credit much of the success of embedded public engagement to date to what they call *deliberative entrepreneurs*—highly skilled and capable individuals who understand there is a market for public engagement. Deliberative entrepreneurs know that “the general public favors more opportunities to participate in public discussion and provide input in policy-making,” and that public engagement is a much-needed tool for problem-solving. Fung and Fagotto acknowledge that, “like other voluntary and private sector initiatives, the uptake of these novel practices inevitably depends upon the tenacity, expertise, and persuasiveness of the individuals who introduce them.”<sup>10</sup>

As Diane Miller (pictured here) of Envision Central Texas put it in the survey, “you need talent in local communities that know how to skillfully integrate D&D into efforts and you need a public and public champions that are aware of the value of D&D advocating for these approaches throughout the process.” Pamela Hubbard, an environmental/urban planner and public engagement specialist, similarly wrote “There need to be skilled practitioners who can show its effectiveness in practice.”



In their case study on a decade of public engagement work in Bridgeport, Connecticut, our challenge co-leader Will Friedman and his co-authors describe how “the evolution of key actors from the role of deliberative *entrepreneur* to that of deliberative *maven*” can also be a vital factor in embedding deliberation in communities. Not only do such “deliberative mavens” bring deliberation to a community, but they also inspire and cultivate the emergence of *other* practitioners and entrepreneurs. Plus they serve as information banks and deliberative resources for the community. They begin, the authors say, “as importers of deliberation and become, over time, catalysts and resources for further deliberative practices across the community.”<sup>11</sup>

Organizations that focus on building civic capacity in the region rather than importing talent temporarily from outside the community are more likely to create *local* deliberative mavens, and thus to facilitate the embedding of public engagement. The authors suggest the more user-friendly and affordable the approach or method of public engagement used, the easier it is for local deliberative or civic entrepreneurs to “master it quickly, adapt it to their needs, and make it their own.”

Dialogue and deliberation simply cannot be embedded in our systems at the local level if the capacity to organize and convene public engagement efforts cannot be maintained. Building local civic capacity involves such things as training moderators and facilitators, cultivating “champions” of this work within government, developing the capacity to recruit and mobilize participants representing a cross-section of the community, and establishing the know-how and initiative required to organize programs and events.

## Joint ownership of programs and structures

One principle that is echoed throughout the community building, conflict resolution, and social change fields is the need for organizers to share *ownership* of their projects. As Betty Knighton, Director of the West Virginia Center for Civic Life, said in the survey, we need to “involve policymakers, state and local agencies, public schools, and other government-based institutions as partners and collaborators in the full spectrum of deliberative work.”

<sup>10</sup> Fagotto, Elena and Archon Fung, *Embedded Deliberation: Entrepreneurs, Organizations, and Public Action*, final report for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (unpublished), 2006. p 18.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, Will, Alison Kadlec, and Lara Birnback. *Transforming Public Life: A Decade of Citizen Engagement in Bridgeport, Connecticut* (2007). No. 1 of Case Studies in Public Engagement produced by Public Agenda’s Center for Advances in Public Engagement (CAPE).

Public problems cannot be solved by government alone, and community assets like volunteers, businesses, churches, schools and nonprofit organizations must be tapped into to address most complex problems. Sharing the responsibility, accountability, recognition and passion for a public engagement program helps ensure its success and longevity.

According to challenge co-leader Matt Leighninger, one problem with some of the existing systems for public involvement is that they were established purely as government entities, like the neighborhood council systems created during the “War on Poverty” in the 1960s and 70s. “Starting in the early 1970s, local governments in places like Portland, Oregon, Dayton, Ohio, and Saint Paul, Minnesota created neighborhood council systems as a way of engaging residents in public decisionmaking and problem-solving,” Leighninger notes.<sup>12</sup> Because they were designed as miniature versions of city councils, they have had to deal with many of the same dysfunctions and problems as government—only with fewer resources and less authority.

Leighninger asserts that our focus should not be on establishing new government programs, but on creating structures and processes that are jointly owned by whole communities. In his draft report on a *Democratic Governance at the Neighborhood Level* meeting held in November 2008, one of four main conclusions drawn from the meeting is that “this work has to be jointly ‘owned’ and directed.” Meeting participants seemed to agree that in communities where public engagement is successfully embedded in governance, “a broad array of neighborhood and community organizations and leaders, along with public officials and employees” all have some significant degree of ownership and authority within the system.

That said, the importance of involvement and buy-in of political leaders cannot be overemphasized. In their paper *Sustaining Public Engagement*, Fung and Fagotto identify “political authority” as one of three conditions necessary for public engagement principles and processes to become embedded in government systems (pp 47-48).<sup>13</sup> Although public engagement efforts are often initiated by nonprofits and civic entrepreneurs, they are more likely to impact policy and endure over time if they are also supported by local politicians and decision-makers. Hawaii State Senator Les Ihara (an NCDD 2008 attendee) is an example of a public official who has tirelessly promoted National Issues Forums and other deliberative initiatives with legislators for years.

**Innovations from the Greater Seattle Climate Change Dialogues...**

**1** Dialogue projects are sponsored by diverse, local host groups so participants have a ready-made home for their efforts—no matter where the primary organizer is from.

**2** Local non-profit partners and elected officials play a visible role in the program, helping ground participants in the political and social landscape so they can determine what kinds of actions will be most

**Phil Mitchell, our Action and Change Challenge leader, runs the Climate Dialogues.**

## Building on existing structures and resources

In order to build the “joint ownership” described above, a necessary step in many communities is to convene and connect the various groups and leaders who are already mobilizing people around issues and problems locally. Alison Kadlec shared Public Agenda’s conviction that “meaningful and impactful engagement is most likely to result from, and become embedded in, the context of home-grown initiatives that build on existing efforts in new ways (rather than from initiatives imposed from outside or above).”

Our challenge leaders suggest that community foundations and others who tend to play convening roles should bring these local leaders together to discuss what’s currently being done and by whom, and to start thinking and talking about a) how they can work together better and b) what barriers to collaboration need to be overcome. Conference attendee Ariana McBride described during a phone interview how the Orton Family Foundation plays this kind of convening role in the New England communities it supports.

<sup>12</sup> Leighninger, Matt. *The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy: Lessons from the intersection of government and community* (March 2009 draft), a report on the “Democratic Governance at the Neighborhood Level” meeting, organized by Grassroots Grantmakers and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, with assistance from the National League of Cities and NeighborWorks America, on November 11, 2008, in Orlando, FL.

<sup>13</sup> The other two conditions identified by the authors are deliberative capacity and demand for democracy.

During our “Reflective Panel” plenary session, a conversation among four leaders in the dialogue and deliberation community, panelist Carolyn Lukensmeyer (President of AmericaSpeaks) emphasized the need for practitioners to understand and work within existing political structures in their communities.<sup>14</sup> She advised conference attendees to:

- Develop relationships with the people in the agencies and government sectors you want to see doing this work on a regular basis, such as city managers, key leaders in agencies that have some resources, and elected officials.
- Coordinate your efforts with the predictable cycles of decision making, such as budget cycles.
- Know where the leverage points are—where there is a felt need to link public will to political will, and seek to understand the issues related to this felt need.

Similarly, Tyrone Reitman of Healthy Democracy Oregon suggested in the survey that we should focus on “high leverage change opportunities, connecting deliberative processes as directly as possible with public decision making or the legislative process.” One of Healthy Democracy Oregon’s project is doing just that. As Tyrone explains:

Our project in Oregon is using the Citizens Jury process to evaluate measures (propositions) that citizens have qualified for the general election ballot. By passing legislation that allows the resulting “Citizens Statement” from this process to be sent out to every voter across the state we are making a direct connection between a deliberative process and the public’s decision making process. Our hope is that through doing so we will see a change in the debate at election time (away from soundbytes and more towards substance) and that this process has an impact on the public’s decision making process.



Some workshop presenters focused on the importance of learning from and building on long-standing institutions that have been embedded in government for decades or even centuries. Woodbury College faculty member Susan Clark’s workshop, *Direct Democracy in the Mountains*, explored what can be learned from New England and Switzerland’s long-running town meetings. “For centuries,” Clark says, “town meetings have involved citizens from all income and education levels and political perspectives in the ‘public talk’ at the heart of this decision-making institution.”

Another example of long-standing embedded institutions worth learning from are neighborhood assemblies and neighborhood council systems. According to Matt Leighninger, “the history of these neighborhood governance structures offers a rich legacy of successes, mistakes, strengths, and weaknesses that can inspire and inform democracy reform at every level of government.”<sup>15</sup>

Several workshops focused on creating or capitalizing on what Martin Carcasson calls “hubs of democracy”<sup>16</sup> and what Archon Fung and Elana Fagotto call *deliberative catalysts*<sup>17</sup>—“centers that promote deliberation and assist organizations that seek public input or want to increase civic engagement.” One workshop focused on establishing university and college centers as platforms for deliberative democracy, pointing out that there is a growing network of university-based public deliberation programs focused on practical scholarship and hands-on deliberative activities.

<sup>14</sup> Along with Lukensmeyer, the other participants in our Reflective Panel were David Camp, race relations and diversity consultant and author of *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects*; Bill Isaacs, founder and president of Dialogos and author of *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*; and Najeeba Syeed-Miller, former Executive Director of the Western Justice Center Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Leighninger, M. *The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy*, p 2.

<sup>16</sup> Carcasson, M. “*Democracy’s Hubs: College and University Centers as Platforms for Deliberative Practice*.” Contact the author at [mcarcas@colostate.edu](mailto:mcarcas@colostate.edu) for the article, which is based on research sponsored by the Kettering Foundation.

<sup>17</sup> Fung and Fagotto. *Sustaining Public Engagement*, p 57.

Another workshop, led by Taylor Willingham (LBJ Presidential Library) and four of her colleagues from other libraries across the country, urged public engagement practitioners not to overlook libraries and university extensions programs, since they are “the people’s university; the public’s forum for dealing with contentious public issues.” Extensions educators provide problem-solving expertise in every county in the U.S., and libraries provide ideal venues for public forums. As the co-presenters pointed out, there are more libraries in the U.S. than McDonald’s restaurants.

Other workshops recognized some of the public officials and government agencies that are championing the systematic use of public engagement processes in our institutions. One, for example, highlighted the innovative Citizen Councilor Network of King County (Seattle area), which has gotten local government to actively promote and support the formation of numerous small dialogue groups that meet to discuss important regional and societal issues on an ongoing basis. Instead of gathering at a big meeting at one place and time, where only a few people can talk and most have to listen, “Citizen Councilors” meet in small groups at times and places convenient to them. Authorized by King County Ordinance 15896, the network and its Countywide Community Forums provide much-needed citizen input to county government.

Other new efforts that build on existing structures were highlighted at the conference as well, e.g., Vets4Vets, a program which trains Iraq-era veterans to facilitate dialogue among new veterans. Working closely with the Veterans Administration (VA), Vets4Vets’ goal is to build an international peer support community using local groups, phone and internet connections among the growing number of vets who have served in the global “War On Terror.”

### Demonstrating the impact of our processes—together

Numerous respondents expressed that to make dialogue and deliberation integral to our government and other systems, we must continue to pilot and demonstrate good process that leads to concrete outcomes. Laurie McCann, the campus ombudsperson at the University of California-Santa Cruz, said we must “create meaningful opportunities for people to experience true dialogue and deliberation and see the impacts in real time.” Lucas Cioffi of OnlineTownHalls.com put it this way: We need to “demonstrate a return on investment (ROI). How does dialogue help get me reelected? How does dialogue solve this problem?”

Conference attendee Judith Mowry, who works for the City of Portland’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement, uses dialogue, storytelling and restorative justice to help Portland make progress in areas of chronic conflict. Judith’s Restorative Listening Project has been helping Portland residents talk across racial divides about the impacts of gentrification to individuals, families, and communities throughout the city. Lately, Judith has been receiving more and more calls from people who want help starting dialogue groups to address community and civic issues. Her restorative justice dialogues have been demonstrating to Portland citizens and policy-makers that there is a different way to engage citizens around contentious issues, and Judith is seeing this start to sink in.

Adin Rogovin of the Co-Intelligence Institute suggested in the survey that although practitioners and organizations in our field will continue to demonstrate this work separately, we should “collaborate to support, fund, advocate for and convene whole system D&D initiatives that involve government officials and demonstrate their legitimacy and value to our society.” Indeed, this was the main idea that emerged from a two-part workshop at the Austin conference (pictured here) called “*How can WE revitalize democracy with D&D?*” co-led by Adin and DeAnna Martin of the Center for Wise Democracy.



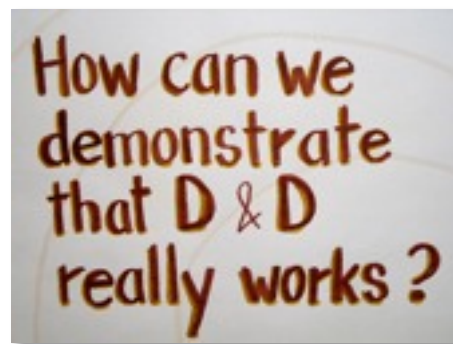
The workshop brought together method leaders and practitioners in a dynamically facilitated fishbowl conversation to explore how we can weave together our work to enhance democracy. Workshop attendees were invited to observe the process and a couple of chairs in the fishbowl were left available so audience members could join in. At different times the fishbowl conversation included: Tom Atlee, Theo Brown, Lucas Cioffi, Peggy Holman, Sen. Les Ihara, Julianna Padgett, Pete Peterson, Jim Rough, Elliot Shuford, John Spady, Patricia Wilson, Landon Shultz, Alexander Moll and others.

Participants in this workshop discussed how an collaborative, multi-process “demonstration project” could...

1. Give us the opportunity to collaborate on a tangible project that helps us learn and move forward together.
2. Generate momentum and resources for ongoing, sustainable, integrated method use.
3. Help us learn how to better meet the interests of decision makers.
4. Introduce a variety of D&D methods into governance, and integrate these methods into a system that is a citizen platform for having citizens make wise decisions in an inclusive way.
5. Build capacity at the local level and build capacity for our field – through capturing case studies, stories, and bringing leaders together to learn from one another (among other things).
6. Funnel into national processes (and vice versa).

Workshop participants explored how NCDD could serve as a hub for the effort. Here are a few of the standout ideas/thoughts shared during the workshop...

- NCDD could provide a national framework for local demonstrations. Framework would include funding or grantmaking, principles of quality public engagement, strategic partnerships and research.
- Create a system of conversation (utilizing multiple D&D methods) that is outcome-oriented. Experiment with new processes and see which ones work under which circumstances.
- Find a city that’s ready (perhaps one with a concentration of D&D professionals) that NCDD could put resources into to create a model for a demonstration project.
- A national advisory group representing various D&D technologies and streams of practice would lead the effort. The advisory group would work with NCDD’s local D&D contacts to begin forming a diverse local design team of process experts, community leaders, elected officials, local funders and representatives from the business community. The NCDD advisory group would work with the local design team to draw up a preliminary project plan and secure funding from local and/or national foundations.
- The local team would be tasked with utilizing and integrating a variety of D&D approaches/technologies to address a specific community issue, utilizing whenever appropriate the advisory group members and the expertise in the larger NCDD community. The local team would be informed and empowered, but not over-powered or controlled, by the national group. Working with the national advisory group, the local team would be guided by nationally-determined principles for quality engagement, and would focus their efforts and assessment on the 5 challenges from the conference.
- The demonstration projects would focus on building capacity at the local level, while building capacity for the greater field by capturing capturing case studies and stories, generating useful data about outcomes and challenges, and bringing together leaders to learn from one another. Locally, we would be working toward the ambitious goal of creating a system of practitioners, tools and supporters that collectively create a “citizen platform” for local issues.



Some people in the workshop were drawn to the idea of NCDD providing grants to cities/communities for local demonstration projects, similar to the small grants Common Sense California awards to communities in California. Pete Peterson explained in the workshop that CSC has a lean structure—an advisory committee, board, small staff—and they were able to put their program grantmaking together in three months. According to Pete, a grant program puts a lot of the work in the hands of the applicants, not the organization. This may be a reasonable way for NCDD—or another network or coalition of organizations—to run collaborative, multi-process demonstration projects.

### Taking advantage of new opportunities

We saw an incredible surge in citizen involvement and voter turnout during the 2008 presidential election. Carolyn Lukensmeyer’s conference session, a *Fireside Chat on Embedding Citizens’ Voices in Our Governing Systems*, explored numerous ways we can capitalize on this unique moment in time to institutionalize new government mechanisms designed to sustain public engagement long-term. Lukensmeyer, who is the President of AmericaSpeaks, asserts that *now* is the time to connect “public will to political will” through public deliberation.

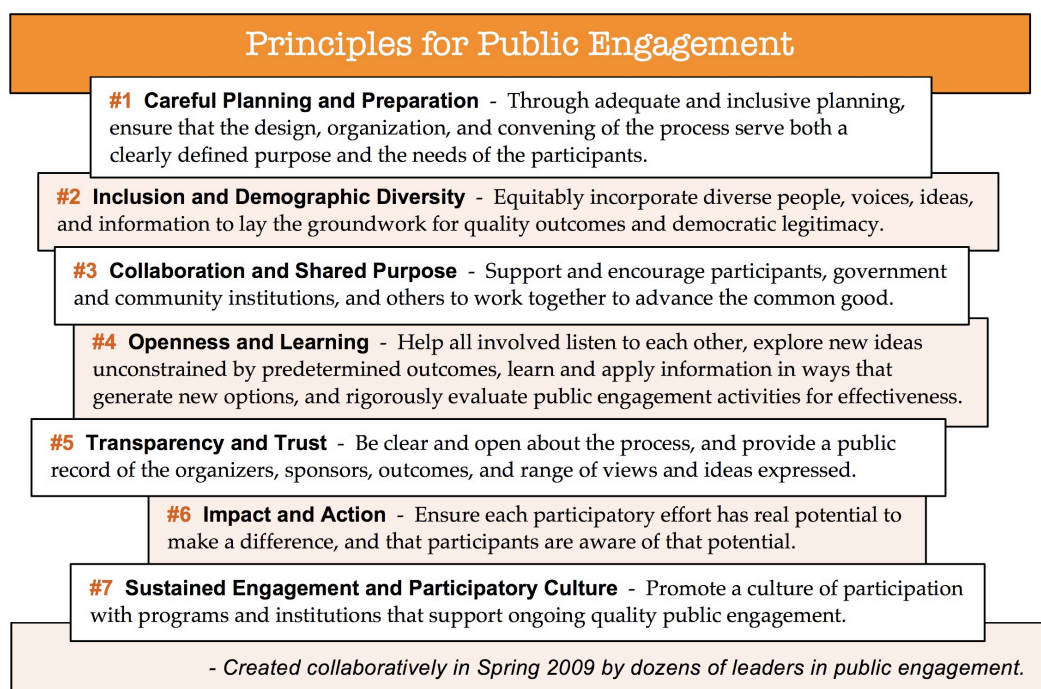
One of the ways Lukensmeyer suggests we should embed new procedures, processes and practices in governance is through legislation calling for regular national dialogue on the issues of highest public concern—such as the economy, immigration, energy

and climate change.<sup>18</sup> According to *America's 2008 Civic Health Index*, Americans strongly support laws and policies that would foster increased civic engagement. When asked the question directly, 80% of Americans “favor holding a national deliberation on a major issue and requiring Congress to respond to what citizens say.”<sup>19</sup>

Much has happened since the October 2008 NCDD conference, with the transition to a new U.S. presidential administration that seems to understand the importance and power of citizen input and community action. On his first day in office, President Obama issued a memorandum calling for the creation of an Open Government Directive “that instructs executive departments and agencies to take specific actions implementing the principles set forth in this memorandum” on transparency, public participation, and collaboration.<sup>20</sup>

The memorandum caused numerous things to be set into motion that have excited, mobilized, and sometimes troubled the entire public engagement community to an unprecedented degree. Many in NCDD and related networks shared a concern that since our field had not yet collectively embraced a standard set of principles or criteria for quality public engagement, people in the White House and at government agencies would end up pasting the label of “public engagement” on manipulative efforts that were more about public relations than about truly learning from or empowering the public.

NCDD, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), and the Co-Intelligence Institute responded to this excitement and concern by leading a collaborative online process that enabled members of our networks to develop a set of Core Principles for Public Engagement (pictured below). Numerous leaders and thinkers in public engagement were involved in the commenting, drafting, and editing process, and the Core Principles have since been enthusiastically endorsed by over 80 leading organizations in this work, including the National League of Cities, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, the League of Women Voters, AmericaSpeaks, Everyday Democracy, Public Agenda, the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), and many others.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>18</sup> See *An Agenda for Strengthening our Nation's Democracy*, a collaborative publication presented by AmericaSpeaks, Everyday Democracy and Demos based on a July 2008 gathering of 49 advocates, scholars, and thinkers who worked together to develop a broad agenda for democracy reform ([www.americaspeaks.org/StrengtheningDemocracyAgenda](http://www.americaspeaks.org/StrengtheningDemocracyAgenda)). The authors explain that national dialogues would “provide policy makers with an independent, non-partisan means of assessing the informed opinions and collective priorities of the American people and forge a stronger link between Americans and their government.”

<sup>19</sup> *2008 Civic Health Index: Beyond the Vote*. National Conference on Citizenship, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> The Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies with the subject “Transparency and Open Government” is viewable on the White House website at [www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/).

<sup>21</sup> The *Core Principles for Public Engagement* document can be downloaded at [www.ncdd.org/pep](http://www.ncdd.org/pep), where you can also see a full list of organizational and individual endorsers, learn more about the process used to draft the principles, and view the expanded text about each of the principles.

An outline and timeline of notable developments in public engagement related to the U.S. federal government is posted on the NCDD website, including the renaming of the White House Office of Public Engagement, the Champions of Participation meetings with federal agency representatives, and the Agenda for Strengthening Our Nation's Democracy. It also outlines the dialogue and deliberation community's involvement in the Open Government Dialogue (the online consultation process feeding into the Open Government Directive called for in Obama's memorandum). In the 13-page report on the first of the three Open Government Dialogue phases, the Core Principles for Public Engagement were listed in full, and the public engagement community was reported to be "the largest and most well-prepared group in the Brainstorm: they were early to the table and augmented their ranks as the dialogue proceeded."<sup>22</sup>

The "democracy reform movement"—which includes those doing electoral reform work and community organizing as well as deliberative democracy—has come together at a second Strengthening Our Nation's Democracy meeting, and is moving forward on a shared agenda many feel can gain traction in the current political climate as never before. The dialogue and deliberation community is involved in this, and is watching such efforts with great interest.

For decades, public engagement practitioners in the U.S. have been working outside government, having limited success embedding dialogic and deliberative practices in local government and other institutions. As professional facilitator Eryn Kalish said at the conference, this work "has been largely about working *around* government." Since the 2008 conference, the political climate has changed in significant ways in the U.S.

We need to continue adjusting our thinking, our strategies and our expectations in response to the new reality of a federal government that now seems to support—and possibly even "get"—real citizen involvement and public engagement. At the same time, we need to be wary that the term, concept, and practices of "public engagement" do not become overly owned by and associated with the Left, and that they do not become synonymous with savvy public events that only *look* like they are connecting citizens to public policy decisions. Our field is still figuring out how to balance this new hope with these not-so-new (but now multiplied) dangers.

The new developments in U.S. governance are providing Americans and even non-Americans in our field with an unprecedented amount of hope and possibility, along with a healthy dose of doubt and cynicism. One thing is clear: this is an exciting time to be involved in dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement.

Whether these kinds of efforts can or will successfully embed public engagement processes and principles in government from the top down is yet to be seen. Some NCDD conference attendees, like researcher Caroline Lee from Lafayette College (pictured here), caution their colleagues against overly formalizing or institutionalizing their practices. As an institutional sociologist, Caroline warns that "more formalization can be really dangerous because it ends up having unintended consequences," as with the limitations placed on federal agencies by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Although it has its benefits, formalization can also "eliminate a lot of the spontaneity that is really important for these processes to galvanize people."



Caroline contends that we should be less concerned with how to embed these processes in governance, and focus instead on embedding "informality and spontaneity" into how decisions are made. She suggest we ask ourselves how we can make quality

---

<sup>22</sup> Trudeau, L. June 1, 2008. Summary Analysis of the Open Government Brainstorm from NAPA (National Academy of Public Administration) to Beth Noveck, Deputy Chief Technology Officer for Open Government Office of Science and Technology Policy, The White House.

public engagement a *habit* in governance, without the binding and inflexible nature of *ingrained* habits. How can we encourage government to be more responsive to the exciting developments in dialogue and deliberation (and vice versa), without lobbying to embed this work through systems, standards and formal rule—all of which could inspire some interest groups to oppose dialogue and deliberation?

Susan Schultz, Program Manager of the Center for Public Policy Dispute Resolution at the University of Texas, summed up the Systems Challenge area well with this comment in the survey:

It is indeed a challenge to bridge the gap between the concept of having the public involved in public policy decision-making (what is already on paper) and the actuality of having the public influence public decision-making (what realistically happens). I believe that a crucial component in having a meaningful public participation system in place is to make the commitment to that participation part of the organization's and governmental entity's culture. Easier said than done, but it starts with clear written policies, commitment to implementing those policies from high level "champions" to field staff (through consistent education and training), and persistent expectations from the public.

As with the Action & Change Challenge, survey respondents offered many other suggestions and ideas. Some were similar to ideas suggested for addressing the Action & Change challenge, like training decision-makers, improving our evaluation techniques, and sharing case studies and stories.

Several emphasized the importance of building a constituency for public engagement work. SUNY Potsdam professor Phil Neisser, for instance, said we need to get ordinary citizens who are politically engaged and concerned about an issue to pressure politicians to use these processes. Polly Riddims from Fusion Partnerships suggested we "rally and organize citizens to demand it." And Steve Swanson said we need "citizens demonstrating they want to and are working together concurrently with the elected officials and other people of influence stating their commitment to community-based leadership and action."





# Conclusion

At NCDD 2008, we attempted to focus in on five key challenges facing our community of practice. While this paper's focus is specifically on two of the five challenge areas in addition to the questions on citizens' role in democratic governance, many learnings in the Action & Change Challenge and the Systems Challenge are relevant to the other three challenges (and vice versa):

- The Framing Challenge: Talking about and presenting this work in ways that reach a broader audience
- The Evaluation Challenge: Demonstrating that dialogue and deliberation works
- The Inclusion Challenge: Walking our talk in terms of bias and inclusion

Our field has a lot of work to do in all five of these areas—though I would argue that, collectively, we know a lot more than we *think* we know, and that a first step for all of the challenge areas is to synthesize the knowledge, tools, research and strategies already available to us, in a format accessible to practitioners.



Certain things were mentioned cursorily in the paper that deserve much more attention than I gave them. Three such issues that call for collaborative, concerted effort from our field are a) finding effective, replicable ways to train government staff and public officials in participatory processes; b) creating a menu of assessment tools and strategies practitioners can use, and tracking the results; and c) collecting and distributing case studies and stories describing dialogue and deliberation efforts and their outcomes and impacts.

Since the first National Conference on Dialogue & Deliberation in 2002, which launched a new network and community of practice around dialogue, deliberation, conflict resolution and public engagement work, we have seen a marked expansion and maturation of this work. NCDD represents a “big tent” under which many approaches and streams of practice have found much-needed support, ideas, connections and motivation. It's also a place where differences in approaches and philosophies of engagement have been hashed out openly—and not always politely—allowing hundreds of practitioners to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the nuances of this work.

This paper represents a snapshot of a specific time in this rapidly growing, maturing field of practice. An exciting time, when process leaders and networks in our field are being brought into discussions about federal policy, and when our field is exploring how and whether it fits into a broader “democracy reform” movement. It's also a time in which we're seeing clear shifts in approach in the field. Practitioners, organizations and institutions are starting to think in terms of capacity building and find ways to demonstrate perceptible shifts in civic capacity. Practitioners are focusing more on developing ongoing relationships with institutions, decision-makers and other power-holders in the communities they serve. And people are becoming more and more adept at using multiple models, combining elements of different models, and designing unique processes to fit different contexts.

Dialogue and deliberation are most useful when people see a discrepancy between what *is* happening and what they think *should* be happening, yet there is no widespread agreement or shared understanding about what specifically should change. In her book *Getting a Grip*, Frances Moore Lappe asks a powerful question:

*Why are we as societies creating a world that we as individuals abhor?”<sup>23</sup>*

Many attendees at NCDD conference feel an urgent need to help their communities, regions, nations and planet bridge this gap on the issues people care about most. I consider our conference attendees to be a very special and important set of people, and I hope this report on their opinions, concerns, ideas and perspectives is useful to the Kettering Foundation.

---

<sup>23</sup> Moore Lappe, F. *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity and Courage in a World Gone Mad*. Cambridge, MA: Small Planet Media, 2007, 3.