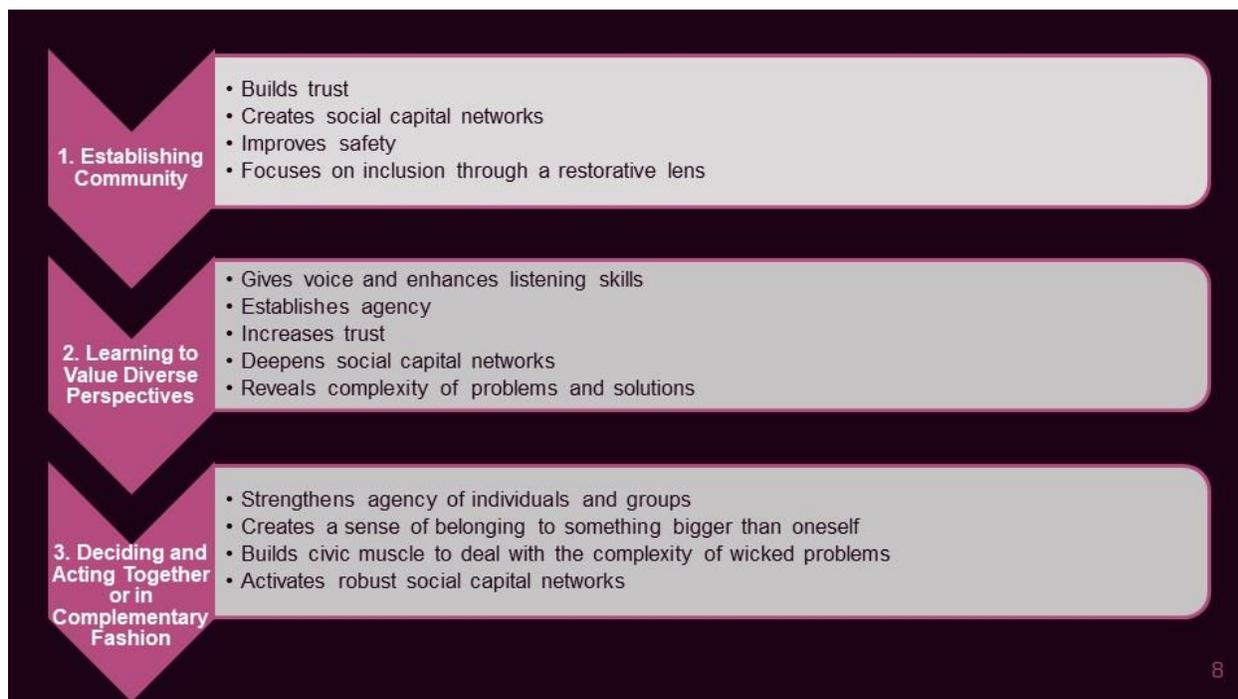


## Building Community and Coalitions for Public Action

The Center for the Study of Citizenship supports the use of democratic practices to solve shared problems. Working with the Kettering Foundation and National Issues Forum Institute, the Center promotes and educates for democratic public life. This primer is intended to support educators involved in the Youth Civic Engagement Project to support students in identifying needs, building coalitions through dialogue and deliberation, deciding and acting together. In short, it is a “with” strategy where citizens become co-producers with institutions and organizations to create the kind of community they want to live in.

The Center recommends an approach grounded in community that we have studied and implemented.



### Establishing Community

Beginning with establishing community, we use a modified restorative approach to begin to build familiarity with one another. By placing students in small groups, teachers allow students to engage in answering each of the following questions, in round robin fashion, one question at a time, allowing 2-3-minute answers:

1. Who are you, where are you from, and why did you join the Civic Literacy Club?
2. What is the biggest problem facing you and your community? What have you been thinking and feeling as this problem continues to unfold?
3. What has been the hardest thing for you during this time?
4. What is one thing you in your control that you can do in the coming days and weeks to make things a little bit better?

Another aspect of establishing community is checking in on how each other are doing. Let's face it, sometimes we react to others not because of what they did, but the baggage we bring to the group. This practice alerts the group to how each other are doing and feeling, allowing us to build understanding of each other. This can be a fun routine that takes a few minutes to help ground the work for the day. Pose the question: If you had to describe yourself today as a \_\_\_\_\_, what would you be? Why? Below are some ways to fill in the blanks.

- Brief weather report
- Cartoon character
- Plant
- Vegetable
- Superhero

Be sure to ask students to propose other ways of describing themselves and add it to the mix.

Another activity that we recommend to build community is "At Your Very Best." In this activity, ask each student to think of themselves when they are at their very best. What adjective describes them? Using Jamboard/Google Docs, or a paper plate and markers if in person, have each person share their asset to the group, creating a group description. (Paper plates are placed in the center of the group, one at a time as each student shares their asset). Have students reflect on why we are stronger together.

Remember, the goal is to establish a community.

### **Learning to Value Diverse Perspectives**

Using our *Citizen Dialogue*<sup>TM</sup> structure allows students to delve into an issue of concern to them to understand the questions, assumptions, and experiences that underlie how people may respond to their demands. The Center's *Citizen Dialogue*<sup>TM</sup> program is designed to support community members in developing healthy and productive habits of civic engagement. The *Dialogues* provide a safe space for citizens to have a voice on issues they care deeply about in an effort to build understanding of one another's perspective.

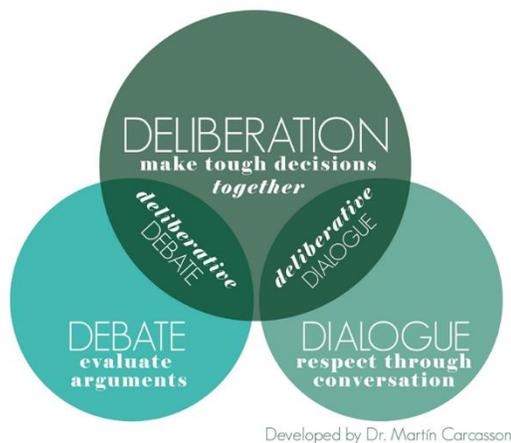
The Dialogue process works best if students choose a topic they care about. They do not need to know much about it. The idea of a Citizen Dialogue is to mine the expertise of the broader community to help them understand the issue. A sample of the Citizen Dialogue Materials can be found in Appendix A.

Below are links to websites that students can use to consider which issue they would like to take up:

- <https://www.procon.org/>
- <https://www.isidewith.com/polls>
- <https://www.nifi.org/en/nifi-materials>

### Deciding and Acting Together or in Complementary Fashion

Deliberation is where citizens work with other citizens to solve common problems and produce things that benefit everyone. The things that citizens produce also help institutions and representative government work effectively. Deliberation has some overlaps with dialogue and debate, but is a different approach as seen in the image below.



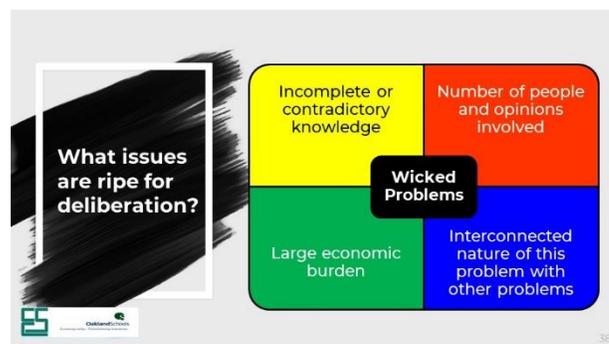
In short, deliberation is:

- A careful consideration and discussion;
- Includes a weighing of options fairly;
- Requires moral reasoning; and
- Focuses on what we value or hold dear.

Most public issues we face are wicked problems. This means that they are difficult to solve for a variety of reasons. They also are connected to other issues. For example, poverty is linked with education, nutrition with poverty, the economy with nutrition, and so on.

For more information about deliberation, why educators and schools should embrace deliberation, and views from civic education leaders see Appendix B.

For an issue deconstruction worksheet to use with students, see Appendix C.



Using its trained staff, the Center for the Study of Citizenship is willing to help educators involved in the Youth Civic Engagement Project use deliberation with students and the broader community. To schedule a moderated online deliberation on an issue, select an issue guide from <https://www.nifi.org/en/nifi-materials> and contact Amy Bloom at [AmyBBloom@wayne.edu](mailto:AmyBBloom@wayne.edu) to create and moderate the forum on the Common Ground for Action (CGA) portal. For an introductory video to CGA, click [here](#).

## Appendix A: Citizen Dialogue Materials

**Purpose and Process:** This structured conversation is designed to peel away the layers in order to address the deeper issues that underlie a problem. There will be several rounds during which each participant has up to one minute to talk. The final part of this process is both for the individual and the good of the group.

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### ***Directions for Facilitators to Begin the Table Conversations:***

- Step I: Each table has a facilitator. The facilitator's job is to read the questions, monitor time, and enforce the protocol. The facilitator does not participate in the structured dialogue.
- Step II: Facilitator reminds participants of the focused topic for the table.
- Step III: Facilitator reads the purpose and the process statement above.
- Step IV: Facilitator reads the norms for the process and asks for consent to the norms. Members then give consent to the rules of engagement.
- Step V: Facilitator suggests that if any member thinks of something as other members talk during this process, it should be noted for later, after everyone at the table has participated in the round. Pens and sticky notes are available for this at the table.
- Step VI: Facilitator asks the small group if they have any clarifying questions about the process. Facilitator responds to question as needed.
- Step VII: Facilitator reads the question for each round. Each participant will have up to one minute to answer. The conversation should move around the table for each participant to speak. Participants are free to pass if they choose.

.....

### ***Question Rounds (feel free to select from below or create your own):***

**Round 1:** What is your perspective on our topic? How does your experience inform your perspective?

**Round 2:** What is one concern you have about this topic?

**Round 3:** Please finish the following statement:

One assumption that seems to be part of the topic is... Or,

One thing I assume to be true about this topic is...

**Round 4:** Please finish the following statement: A question this topic raises for me is...

**Round 5:** What do you think we should do to make things better?

**Round 6:** What might be some unintended consequences on individuals and their communities of some of the ideas you heard?

**Round 7:** What is one thing you learned about an opposing viewpoint on this topic?

**Round 8:** Where do you think we can find common ground?

**Round 9:** What do we want others to know about our conversation? How can we summarize it with a newspaper headline?



### **Reflection Rounds**

These are designed to be used immediately after the Citizen Dialogue conversation. It is recommended that participants write their answers in the chat (if online) or on sticky notes (if in person).

- What are you taking away from tonight's Citizen Dialogue™?
- How has this dialogue changed, challenged, or extended your thinking about the topic?
- How has this dialogue changed, challenged or extended your thinking about others?



## **Discussion Norms**

**Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.**

**One Mic (Speaker) at a Time.**

**Everyone should participate in the conversation.**

**Speak from Your Own Experience Instead of Generalizing.**

**Challenge the Idea, Not the Person.**

**Stay on Task and on Topic.**

**Be Thoughtful, Courteous, and Kind.**

## Appendix B: Why Us? Why Now?

Divisiveness is prevalent in today's political system. It has spilled over into our Main Streets. Is public engagement the remedy? The loss of public confidence has increased even as engagement efforts have grown. Many Americans have difficulty seeing a place for "people like me" in a highly professionalized, bureaucratized government. So, what can be done to keep the government from being seen as the people's enemy?

### Insights from Leaders in Civic Education

**David Mathews**, President and CEO of the Kettering Foundation, shares some insights featured below. According to Mathews in *With the People: Making Democracy Work as It Should*:

"We need a different form of collaboration that would have institutions working *with* citizens, not just *for* them. A *with* strategy encourages collaboration through mutually beneficial or reinforcing efforts between the citizenry and the government. And it fosters collective work, not only among people who are *alike* or who *like* one another, but among those who recognize they *need* one another to survive or to live the lives they want to live.



A better alignment between citizens and government actors doesn't necessarily require government officials to do more but rather to do what they are already doing a bit differently. Ideally, government institutions and associations of citizens will collaborate for the benefit of each. As officials deliberate among themselves, they have to weigh various policy options against their costs and consequences. They have to consider tensions among the things they consider valuable as they weigh the pros and cons. This is their "choice work." Citizens do the same thing, albeit in their own terms, when they deliberate. When government officials sit down with deliberative citizens to compare the outcomes of their respective efforts at choice work, they are collaborating *with* one another. A deliberative voice can tell [office-holders] how citizens go about making up their minds when there are costs and other trade-offs to consider. When citizens have deliberated in forums on an issue that is also before the government, the outcomes of the public deliberations have been helpful to elected representatives by showing them routes they can take that are less likely to lead to polarization."

## What does it take to make democracy work as it should? Some Core Insights from the Kettering Foundation

### Citizens

Democracy requires responsible citizens who can make sound decisions about their future and can act on these decisions. The ability to make sound decisions is required of all citizens, as is the ability to act on these decisions. But people aren't always sure they have the power or resources they need to make decisions or to act. They may doubt that they can trust others to work with them. In addition, people often disagree about what should be done. And many people feel completely shut out of the political system.

One problem Kettering pursues in its research is how the collective action of citizens can be informed by sound judgment, which requires collective decision making through public deliberation. Kettering's research also suggests that citizens lack the spaces and opportunities for this work and are often sidelined from democratic practices. Kettering calls this a problem of **democracy**. Over time, public spaces have become few and far between. One public space that every community has is our public schools. If collective decision-making is at the heart of democracy, schools need to take a more active role in providing a place for citizens to engage in collective decision-making.

Another problem of democracy is that citizens do not pursue an active role. Kettering's research suggests that this may be due in part to a misunderstanding of the role and work of citizens in a democracy. Again, schools can help. Schools are where the next generation learns what it means to be a responsible, informed, active citizen.



**"The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by its private citizens."**

**- ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE**

### Communities

One of the three hypotheses underlying Kettering's research is that democracy requires a community, or a society of citizens, that can work together to address common problems. Kettering researches the way citizens face persistent problems in their communities. These problems, such as poverty, violence, and gaps in educational achievement, require citizens, communities, and institutions to work together to address them. In discussing whether these problems require communities to act and what would cause them to act wisely, deliberative politics comes up in its proper context.



Without strong communities, democracy may be reduced to a set of impersonal institutions and artificial techniques. While some scholars lament the decline of community, Kettering has found that citizens yearn to shape the future of their communities.

The Kettering Foundation has identified democratic practices that communities of citizens apply when working to solve pervasive problems. When citizens in communities come together to solve their most difficult problems, they

- name the problems in terms of what is most valuable to them;
- frame the issues to identify options for action;
- deliberate publicly to make sound decisions;
- identify and commit resources;
- organize to act; and
- learn together.

In their research on community, Kettering recognizes that citizens in communities often do not see that collectively they have the power to act on problems that threaten the community and require public action and work to resolve. One way in which this can change is through democratic practices that become embedded in the ways a community conducts its business.

Communities are living arenas of civic interactions where people develop insights together about the nature of the challenges they face, the available assets in their community, and things that could be done to put their assets to effective use. Integrating democracy and community are essential if we are going to build the communities we want to live in.



**"We have an instinct for democracy because we have an instinct for wholeness; we get wholeness only through reciprocal relations, through infinitely expanding reciprocal relations."**

**- MARY PARKER FOLLETT**

### Institutions

One of the three hypotheses underlying Kettering's research is that democracy requires institutions with public legitimacy that contribute to strengthening society. Kettering's research aims to deepen learning about a disconnect separating citizens from government and from other institutions as well as the professionals who staff them.

While institutions can affect the public's ability to govern itself, they can also unintentionally weaken self-rule by substituting expert knowledge for public knowledge. Aligning institutional routines with citizens' work is the central challenge.



In our context, the question is how does the work done in institutions like schools affect the work that citizens must do? The corollary of this question is, what does the work of a deliberative public contribute to the work of institutions like schools? In a global, expert-driven world, how do citizens make a significant difference in shaping and supporting these institutions? How communities understand their ties to education and the schools remains a critical question.

Public schools aren't the only institutions affected by troubled relationships with an alienated citizenry. Governments, at all levels, and the political system surrounding them have suffered from a

significant loss of public confidence. Furthermore, this distrust can be mutual: officials in government and the political system don't always have confidence in the ability of citizens to carry out their responsibilities in a democracy.



**“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”**

**- DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

### Democratic Practices

Kettering research has identified democratic practices that have everyday applications in the life of a community. Democratic practices are ways citizens can work together—even when they disagree—to address shared problems.



Democratic practices are variations on the things that happen every day in communities. In order for these routine activities to become public, citizens have to be involved. Yet this doesn't mean that communities have to do anything out of the ordinary—they just have to do the ordinary in different ways. These practices are reflected in the ordinary questions people ask one another when something threatens their collective well-being. Their conversations revolve around such questions as:

- What's bothering you?
- How does this problem affect you and your family?
- What should we do? What would be the consequences?
- If there are negative consequences to what you propose, do you think we should still do it?
- What is the right thing to do?
- Who else do we need to solve the problem?
- What resources do we need? What do we have that we can use?
- What are we learning?

Kettering has selected a set of terms that it uses to describe what is going on politically when people ask these everyday questions. Each term identifies one of the democratic practices just mentioned. All six of these practices are part of the larger politics of self-rule, not stand-alone techniques.



### The Problems Behind the Problems

Besides the problems we face collectively, Kettering has identified some of the deeper causes, or "problems behind the problems," that prevent democracy from working as it should.

- Citizens are sidelined—they aren't always engaged in politics. Maybe the political system has sidelined them by gerrymandering their voting precincts. Or maybe they've sidelined themselves because they don't think they can make a difference.
- A second problem comes on the heels of the first: the political system is polarized. Issues are framed in ways that promote divisiveness. Not all options for solving a problem are considered.
- The result is a dearth of deliberative reasoning and decision making. Citizens may be involved but tend to make poor decisions: people often react hastily without reaching shared or reflective judgment.

- Communities face daunting problems that can only be solved if citizens work together to produce things that counter them. People disagree about what to do, which prevents them from joining forces. Traditional routines for solving problems may also limit the role citizens play.
- Another problem is that citizens think they don't have the necessary resources to act. Yet institutions can't do their jobs as well as they should without the benefit of citizen action, which can complement the work of institutions.
- When citizens do act, they often don't have a shared sense of purpose. Citizen efforts can go in so many different directions that they aren't effective. Institutional attempts to organize them can backfire by draining away the vital energy that people bring.
- The mutual distrust between citizens and most major institutions has been quite acute for decades. Citizens see institutions as unresponsive as well as ineffective, and institutions doubt that citizens are responsible and capable.

Mathews encourages us to look beyond the notion that democracy is a series of contested elections. "I think what we now call democracy began long before the word was coined. It grew out of lessons taken from the collective actions needed for human survival when our ancestors were hunter-gatherers living in tribal enclaves, and later, villages.... A principal lesson of survival was that cooperation is key because we need collective efforts to stay alive." Democratic practices such as dialogue and deliberation are methods of developing collective civic engagement that counter many of the "problems behind the problems" of democracy.

**Peter Levine**, Associate Dean for research at the Tisch College at Tufts University also shares Mathews views on the importance of deliberation as a way of being. In Levine's book, *We Are The Ones We've Been Waiting For*, he makes the case for deliberation:

"Deliberation means trying to decide what is right to do. Self-interest is one legitimate factor, but it is not the only factor. When people deliberate, they consider the implications for other people as well as abstract considerations of ethics and justice.

Levine, clarifies that deliberation is different than negotiation. In deliberation, "participants goals, values, judgments and preferences are open to change. It revolves around finding a good in common that we cannot know alone. It is, as Hamilton saw it, human beings governing from reflection and choice."

Levine stresses importance of inclusion in deliberation. "In practice, a deliberation means convening a diverse group of citizens and asking them to talk, without any expectation or plan that they will reach one conclusion rather than another. Informational materials are neutral and balanced. Deference is given to the views that may emerge from the democratic discussion. This differs from activism or advocacy which implies an effort to enlist or mobilize citizens toward some end."

“In my view, the main contribution of deliberation is not to allow people to speak (for they may rightly prefer other modes of expression that are more confrontational). Rather its value is in helping people listen.... [Most of the time] we cannot know that we are right. Other people’s information, values, strategic suggestions, and expressions of interest, identity, and desire may improve our view.”

For Levine, deliberation is a chance to learn and learning is a social endeavor. “Deliberation is most fruitful for learning: Talk is embedded in relationships among citizens and connected to their common work. . . . Deliberation without collaboration is empty, but collaboration without deliberation is blind. Citizens should listen to people different from themselves on topics of mutual concern.”

According to Levine, there are advantages of deliberation. “When the ideas come from the people through their collective discussion and effort, several things happen:

- Because they designed it, it will meet their needs and reflect their talents
- Because they made it, they will feel a sense of ownership and will be motivated to protect it
- Because they are formally equal as neighbors - not ranked in a hierarchy - each will feel a sense of dignity and status;
- By combining discussion with collaborative action, they will develop skills, relationships, and political power that can transfer to other settings;
- In shaping their public world together, they will gain a feeling of satisfaction and agency.

Full civic satisfaction or public happiness comes from when you have been part of initiating change in the world, combining talk with some kind of action.”

Deliberation is a social activity. We learn what is right through interactions with other people. Moral reasoning is a deeply social activity. Friendships are developed with a shared life, not a common one.

Levine, an expert in civics education explains, “Much of our civic learning is and must be experiential. From Jefferson’s idea of ward republics that would manage “the small and yet numerous and interesting concerns of the neighborhood” and give “to every citizen, personally, a part in the administration of the public affairs” to Tocqueville’s observation that juries and voluntary associations were schools of government, to John Dewey’s notion of democracy as a set of learning opportunities, our wisest thinkers have always understood that the American system depends on knowledge and virtue that must be learned through experience. Our problem today is that such experience is sorely lacking.

Civic relationships generate power, they build communities, they reflect values and principles, and they are intrinsically rewarding. Social capital - the connection among individuals - social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Organizers of deliberations tend to believe that their own role is to strengthen relationship among citizens. For a relationship to be civic, it must involve talking, listening, and working on public issues or problems.”

**So What? Now What?**

Civic engagement has huge implications for schools. As Levine's work demonstrates, "when people get frustrated with institutions they can exit (leave) or find their voice. Loyalty is what causes people to exercise their voice when exit is an option. In our communities, people have voted with their feet, and we find more homogeneous neighborhoods than in previous generations. Deliberative democracy underlies the belief that we should develop relationships with other people who inhabit our communities, treating them as fellow citizens, not as threats or problems. We should use voice to engage them, which means both talking and listening."

**References**

Levine, Peter. We Are The Ones We've Been Waiting For - The Promise of Civic Renewal in America. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Mathews, David. With the People - Making Democracy Work as It Should. A Cousins Research Group Paper. 2019.

### Appendix C

<b>Issue Deconstruction Worksheet</b>				
<b>Issue/Title:</b>				
Approach/Option Name (based on what people value)	According to this approach, the real problem is:	To address the issue/problem, we should:	Possible positive consequences of these actions	Possible drawbacks and trade-offs
1.				
2.				
3.				

Source: *Deliberation in the Classroom: Fostering Critical Thinking, Community, and Citizenship in Schools*. Kettering Foundation Press: 2017. Appendix D, pg. 113.