



A PUBLIC VOICE 2021

September 20, 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Kettering
Foundation



About A Public Voice 2021

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

A Public Voice 2021 continues this conversation by bringing bipartisan, former members of the US House of Representatives to discuss how people can work in complementary ways with elected officials on shared public problems. Kettering president and CEO David Mathews will share his reflections at the end of the event.

All participants will speak to how they've worked with fellow citizens and public officials to address persistent problems facing communities today. This conversation examines the outcomes of deliberative public forums on a variety of issues plaguing communities. In these forums, citizens consider the options for dealing with the problem, share their views, and weigh the costs and benefits of possible actions. Forums are held both online and face-to-face, typically last two hours, and attract participants of all ages from all walks of life.

A Public Voice engages policymakers and the networks of deliberative democracy practitioners in a conversation about public deliberation—what it is, how it differs from polls and focus groups, and why it has value for them—and what people can do together in various alliances, including those with public officials, to solve shared public problems.

What is A Public Voice?

A Public Voice is the voice that explains what people are willing to do when they recognize that there will be costs and often unpleasant consequences for moving ahead on issues of policy and on problems requiring collective action. It clarifies which trade-offs are and are not acceptable. Officeholders, policymakers, and officials of all kinds and all levels need to know what people can and can't live with. This is particularly true for policy questions. The decisions citizens make, however, are seldom as definite as those institutions make. They are more likely to be decisions that identify how much political latitude is available.

Public deliberations can identify these tensions and whether they have or haven't been resolved. And they can show where there is enough common ground for action to move ahead. Deliberative forums yield insights about public thinking that are different from polling data. Polling provides snapshots about public thinking that, when looked at together, produce a picture that can seem incoherent. Public opinion surveys show a public that often appears uninformed, contradictory, unwilling to make choices, easily manipulated, and quickly polarized. But in deliberative forums, citizens come together, exchange views authentically but civilly, weigh the nuances and trade-offs of particular potential solutions, and move toward a truly sound judgment on the issue.

From these forums, policymakers can get a considered, seasoned judgment that reflects a knowledge based on the interaction of citizens, not off-the-cuff answers to a quickly posed question. In some cases, officials may think that the best course of action is outside the boundaries of what is politically permissible. In these situations, public deliberations can tell officeholders how people went about making up their minds so officials can engage their thinking.

National Issues Forums In Communities. In Your District. Across the Country.

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Center Point
Columbiana
Fairfield
Hayneville
Helena
Montevallo
Selma
Tuscaloosa

Alaska

Anchorage

Arizona

Flagstaff
Oracle
Phoenix
Scottsdale
Sedona

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Northridge
Oakland
San Diego
San Jose
Santa Barbara
Vacaville
Valencia

Colorado

Carbondale
Denver
Fort Collins

Connecticut

Bloomfield
Groton

New London

Storrs
Waterford
West Hartford

District of Columbia

Washington

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Ft. Lauderdale
Jacksonville
Jacksonville Beach
Miami
Orange Park
Panama City
Penney Farms
Tallahassee
West Palm Beach
Winter Park

Georgia

Albany
Athens
Atlanta
Savannah
Watkinsville
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Newton
North Newton
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Crestview Hills
Highland Heights
Williamsburg

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Dundalk
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Leonardtown
Prince Frederick

Massachusetts

Boston
Framingham
Greenfield
Randolph
Salem

Michigan

Big Rapids
Delton
Detroit
Grand Rapids
Kalamazoo
Rochester
Southfield

Minnesota

Inver Grove Heights
Saint Paul
Winona

Mississippi

Cleveland
Mound Bayou
Starkville

Missouri

Columbia
Jefferson City
Kansas City

Nevada

Reno

New Hampshire

Rindge

New Jersey

Galloway
Newark
Paramus
Rockaway

New Mexico

Sante Fe

New York

Binghamton
Brockport
Chautauqua
Cheektowaga
Harpursville
Hempstead
Hyde Park
Jamaica
Ithaca
Pittsford
Saratoga Springs
Sound Beach
Stony Brook
Troy
White Plains
Windsor

North Carolina

Charlotte
Fayetteville
Greensboro
Salisbury
Swannanoa
Winston-Salem

Ohio

Ashland
Beavercreek
Bowling Green
Cedarville
Centerville
Chesterland
Cincinnati
Cleveland
Dayton
Elyria
Fairborn
Hamilton
Kent
Mentor on the Lake
Montgomery
Oakwood
Springfield
Wilberforce

Oklahoma

Okeene
Oklahoma City

Oregon

Eugene
Forest Grove
Portland

Pennsylvania

Lancaster
Wallingford
Tyrone

South Carolina

Aiken
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Newberry
Ridgeville
Sumter

Tennessee

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Milwaukee
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Cheyenne

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Agenda

11:00 AM Introductions and Opening Remarks

Valerie Lemmie, Director of Exploratory Research, Kettering Foundation

11:15 AM A Different Kind of Talk

Leslie Garvin, Executive Director, North Carolina Campus Compact

The Honorable Loretta Sanchez, Former Member of the US Congress (CA-46)

The Honorable Charlie Dent, Former Member of the US Congress (PA-15)

- Former members of the US House of Representatives discuss how people can work in complementary ways with elected officials on shared public problems.
- National Issues Forums moderators, analysts of forum outcomes, and members of the policy community share their own stories about how they've worked with their fellow citizens and public officials to address the practical problems facing communities today.
- Group discusses public deliberation: how public thinking differs from the "public opinion" usually available to policymakers, what public thinking has emerged from National Issues Forums on a range of prevalent issues, and what people have done together about these problems.

12:15 PM Closing Remarks

David Mathews, President and CEO, Kettering Foundation and Chair, National Issues Forums Institute

12:30 PM Adjourn

About the Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is: what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation.

The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. Guiding Kettering's research are three hypotheses. Kettering's research suggests that democracy requires:

- responsible citizens who can make sound choices about their future;
- communities of citizens acting together to address common problems; and
- institutions with public legitimacy that contribute to strengthening society.

The foundation's small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Those working on related problems share what they are learning through ongoing research exchanges. As the foundation's learning progresses, Kettering shares its research findings through publications. In addition, Kettering produces materials, including issue guides and starter videos, for the National Issues Forums (NIF). The foundation collaborates with NIF as part of its research efforts.

Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. It is an operating foundation headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, with offices in Washington, DC. For more information, call 800-221-3657 or visit the foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

About the National Issues Forums

The National Issues Forums (NIF) is a network of organizations that bring together citizens in communities and online around the nation to talk about pressing social and political issues of the day. Hundreds of local organizations, including schools, libraries, colleges and universities, churches, civic groups, and others, have sponsored forums designed to give people a public voice in the affairs of their communities and their nation. NIF's Common Ground for Action allows people from across the country to participate in moderated forums online.

Forum participants engage in deliberation, which is simply weighing options for action against things held commonly valuable. This calls upon them to listen respectfully to others, sort out their views in terms of what they most value, consider courses of action and their disadvantages, and seek to identify common ground for action.

Issue guides are designed to frame and support their deliberations. They present alternative perspectives on the issues at hand, suggest actions to address identified problems, and note the trade-offs of taking those actions to remind participants that all solutions have costs as well as benefits.

In this way, forums can jumpstart the movement from individual opinions to collective judgements as members of a community—the kinds of choices from which public policy may be forged or public action may be taken on community as well as national levels.

For more information, visit the National Issues Forums Institute's website at www.nifi.org.

