

# Community Democracy Workshop at the Kettering Foundation

May 21 and 22, 2014

## NOTES

### Purpose of the meeting

- Engage participants in a process through which they collectively learn from one another's knowledge, experience and perceptions
- Explore the following questions:
  - What are our assumptions and beliefs about learning and knowledge building?
  - What are various approaches to community engagement? What are the relative value and effectiveness of these approaches to advancing community democracy?
  - How are we to enter, behave in, and exit from communities?
- Among the desired outcomes of the meeting was that by the end, participants would have an understanding of the purpose and approach of the Community Democracy Workshop, the status of work to date, and its plans going forward.

### Participants

*A list with affiliations accompanies these notes.*

Paul Alexander, Terri Bailey, Roque Barros, Jeff Clarke, Nicholas Deychakiwsky, Anne Focke, Jason Garrett, Mary V. Gelinis (*participant and facilitator*), Rahwa Ghirmatzion, Anne Kubisch, May Louie, Tufara Waller Muhammad, Peter Pennekamp, Takema Robinson-Bradberry, Connie Stewart, Terry Supahan, and Garland Yates.

*From the Kettering Foundation:* Derek Barker, Paloma Dallas, John Dedrick, Melinda Gilmore, Valerie Lemmie, and Debi Witte.

## WEDNESDAY, MAY 21

### About the Kettering Foundation

Debi Witte, program officer at Kettering, gave a short summary. Kettering is an operating not a grantmaking foundation. It is a research organization, not a think tank, with a mission to learn what it takes for democracy to work as it should. Its hypothesis is that democracy requires citizens who can make decisions, requires citizens to be in community, and requires that organizations are part of the community. Peter added that in its use of the word "citizen," Kettering is not referring to the legal definition.

Kettering's inquiry is into problems *of* democracy not *in* democracy, the "problems behind the problems." Debi cited a study by Cynthia Gibson, *Citizens at the Center*. Much of their work is done through convenings like this one. Often many are scheduled at once, as they are this week,

which allows participants in different groups to learn from each other. Kettering's work gives the upper hand to experience and practice. Back in the 1990s, Kettering embarked on a civil investing program to look at the question of foundations' role in civic engagement. Recently they picked up the topic again. Through this renewed effort they learned of Peter Pennekamp's work and commissioned the paper everyone received in advance.

### **Why is community democracy important to you?**

Mary Gelinas had everyone pair up and identify one word that captures the essence of why this work is important personally. The resulting words are:

Ownership	Relationship linked to Difference
Real	Essential
Belonging	Connection
Humanity	Future
Mutuality	Agency
Interdependence	Wisdom
Neighbor	Love

### **Question: Who is the audience for this?**

Is the audience for this meeting just us? An external audience? Garland Yates replied that none of CDW's work is just relevant to itself but is meant to be shared freely even though the way this will manifest isn't known yet.

### **Conversation ground rules**

The group developed and agreed to the following guidelines:

- Explain acronyms.
- Be open to hearing different things. "Check your biases at the door." Create a safe space. Be honest about what is happening.
- Share the stories behind your comments and beliefs.
- Recognize the sincerity of intentions; don't hold preconceived notions.
- Recognize that questions or comments don't reflect entrenched beliefs. We can change and grow. Be willing to change.
- Challenge each other; it will let us get to greater wisdom.
- If you don't understand, ask!
- Speak up!
- Speak in the here and now, and in the first person.
- Make room. Everyone has a voice.

### **Community Democracy Workshop: purpose, strategies, status**

Peter Pennekamp briefly described CDW. It was conceived as part of many other efforts, not as a stand alone project or a new organization. It is imagined to have a term of five years. The CDW fellows are at the center, and the work will move out in circles of connection. They work

together democratically and exercise a democratic form of learning, fixing on ideas that seem powerful. They begin with a community lens and then look at how philanthropy and other systems intersect with community.

CDW works in three ways; it's a three-legged stool:

- working in communities through community field work,
- creating a learning agenda and building knowledge, and
- building a constituency through communications and outreach.

Although there's a push for theory and research, everything is accountable to communities. The focus is the intersection between communities and theory. Especially early in his career, Peter was angry at assumptions about where knowledge is and where power is. The problem is bad systems, he said, not bad people. One thing CDW will do is work on systems that are taken for granted. For instance, a widely-held assumption has been that solutions will be found either through government regulation or privatization. In research on governing the commons, which included thousands of studies, Elinor Ostrom (Nobel-prize winning economist) has proven the effectiveness of a third option: communities working together.

There is no unified CDW point of view. What will be presented here are things that CDW cares about now. Working from a beginning provided by the Kettering paper, *Philanthropy and the Regeneration of Community Democracy*, Peter spent a year reaching out, testing ideas with many people and groups. Among other things, he found that most of us have had all the theory we can use. What people want is ideas for what to *do*, how to start. He sees great hope in how many people are asking.

### **Initial assumptions about learning and knowledge building**

Terri Bailey introduced CDW's initial assumptions about learning and knowledge building, and stressed that CDW is just getting started. The assumptions document the way CDW will "live into" the work and come from a desire to say publically what CDW wants to be accountable to. They're offered as a way to open the door with the aim of creating a space for the practices and knowledge of everyone in the room.

Peter added that the work now includes much ambiguity, and it always will. At the same time, a central CDW question is: Are there underlying principles for successful work in communities that are consistent across the world? Ostrom's work suggests there are.

### **Small groups discuss the assumptions**

Small groups were formed, and each was assigned to discuss one or two assumptions and why participants agreed or disagreed with them. Report-outs followed the hour-long discussions. Part-way through this section of the agenda, the importance of beginning with assumptions was noted. It's a lesson that could be applied in many circumstances and is reflective of the deep listening that's needed in this work.

### **Assumptions 1 and 2**

1. *Knowledge is power; widely held knowledge is the first step toward widely held power.*
2. *Knowledge and hunger for knowledge exists everywhere and in everyone. Advancing an elite expert meritocracy does not advance the cause of democracy.*

The group restated the assumptions:

1. Something can be learned from everyone and everyone can learn.
2. The ability to learn and to apply what is learned with others is power.

The group discussed what *is* knowledge? and does everyone really *have* knowledge? They decided everyone does, though often they don't know they do. There are many differences in the knowledge that people have. It can be gifts of the heart, hand, or head. Differences in knowledge set up the possibility for exchange and learning that is relational, two-way, or multiple.

Knowledge in itself is not power. It has to be used, that is, shared with others. It has to gain the ability to influence. Critical thinking is required. The ability to question, challenge, analyze, and be curious is needed. By "knowledge" the group doesn't just mean information but the ability to question and challenge it. They also noted that, while being sympathetic to the idea, "elite expert meritocracy," is loaded language.

### **Assumption 3**

3. *The process of identifying existing and building new knowledge is itself an opportunity to build community power and capacity to access the political, economic and social mainstream.*

This group began by saying that from their perspective there are only three basic assumptions:

- *Principles*, assumptions about the value of knowledge
- *Production*, the act of producing the knowledge through a democratic process is key
- *Expansion*, assumptions about how to get the knowledge out to a larger audience

The order of these is important. Principles don't stand by themselves; the constant producing of collective knowledge gets you to the principles. The act of doing is key!

Learning needs to be continuous. Community democracy is not the goal, it's the path, the process. A new construct of power is the goal, a more just distribution and use of power. You can go through the process of community democracy with civility or with conflict as long as you come out on the other side.

**Power and knowledge.** The larger group's discussion at this point revolved around both power and knowledge. Craig McGarvey was quoted as saying that power is the ability not to have to learn, which uses a more traditional view of power *over*. Dr. Martin Luther King was quoted as saying knowledge is the ability to achieve power and power is the ability to achieve your purpose.

**Language.** There was also a discussion about language. Some believe it's at the heart of our work saying, it's important to avoid big generalities, but the way English is used makes finding

commonality very difficult. Another view was that we spend a lot of time with words, that on the ground can become mysterious, and we need to get to work in the community.

### **Assumption 4 and 5**

4. *Change of the magnitude communities desire and deserve cannot be achieved without producing strong evidence of the role community can and must play.*
5. *The field is too small and insular. Convincing an audience of like-minded allies is insufficient. The learning agenda we establish and the knowledge we share must have the potential to mobilize those with whom the evidence resonates but who have not yet taken action, and importantly to convince the unconvinced.*

The group reported that this work is about relationships and people, people who use accessible language and find commonalities. In order to realize the “magnitude” of change that a community aspires to requires that it determine its own needs and wants; this is empowerment. Also, communities are not fixed or static, and they need infrastructure to build and sustain resilience and endurance.

*Evidence.* To make room for this work in their organizational agendas, philanthropy and government usually require “evidence” of the relationship between community democracy and concrete change or “outcomes.” Often in this, what counts is what can be measured rather than what a community feels makes a difference, which can be hard to measure. To provide the evidence needed, communities have to learn specialized language, which raises the question of whether a community is willing to change its language to get what it wants. Garland suggested, perhaps CDW should redefine what “evidence” is, and in a way that recognizes that communities are not monolithic and are actually messy.

### **Assumption 6**

6. *People learn democracy by being members of a group or community that acts democratically – a community in which everyone, not just a few, have access to knowledge, to co-own it, and use it to hold themselves and each other accountable.*

This group began by asking, “What does democracy mean?” It must be specific; generalization is a problem. Assumption 6 is OK as an aspiration but not as an assumption. Everyone belongs to many different communities; within some communities, “democracy” means the CIA. Residents never use the word democracy. They wish for a community that makes them feel safe and helps them know they’re part of something bigger – safety and a sense of belonging.

Democracy needs a frame that doesn’t exclude but is still specific enough. What frame works? To have an inclusive process an exclusive process is necessary. It requires preparation, and it never results in a single table. People need to be in settings where they feel safe, and a truly inclusive process won’t get them there. It’s like sitting around a quilting frame: there’s work to do that’s interwoven and collective. We need multiple quilts, multiple frames, multiple entry points.

Many in the larger group took up the question of what democracy is: John Dedrick said, democracy is a broad group of people taking responsibility, acting on a common problem, and being accountable to each other. Derek Barker added, democracy is more than knowledge; it requires action and the capacities for it. Knowledge is one of these, along with habits, skills, and power.

Peter asked, how can we have processes of democracy that don't get deflated by inclusion? The California Endowment's 10-year initiative (Building Healthy Communities), for instance, began with a model of inclusion that put many people together, from heads of agencies to community residents. But now, several years into it, only agencies are involved.

True democracy means leveling the playing field, giving the community control. "We know what we need where we live," was chanted at the end of every community meeting, Rahwa Ghirmatzion told us. In a diverse, community-led group, the people who need to be brought up to speed are the ones who are not community based.

### **Overall observations**

- The relationship between language and action came up a lot.
- Paul Alexander observed that we so often refer to "community" in the singular: the African American community, the Chicano community, the immigrant community. What about building community among many communities? Is it possible to have *communities* with shared goals?
- The idea of "reaching inclusion through exclusive processes" caught many people's attention. Connie Stewart said we need to create safe spaces where power is shared, and sometimes we focus on inclusion when we shouldn't. Garland is concerned about who decides who's included and who's not. His approach is to be absolutely clear about what's going on in the room.
- Tufara Waller Muhammad ("Tuffy") asked, are folks sincerely willing to sacrifice privileged positions to come to a more inclusive process?
- Garland reminded everyone that there are three legs to CDW's stool. Each one has built in assumptions, and there are also assumptions about how the three legs work together. This conversation has focused on the learning and knowledge-building leg.
- Terri was struck by May Louie's discussion in their small group about the importance of community infrastructure, and she wondered whether it's included in CDW's three legs. It shouldn't be a fleeting idea.
- So much of this work is about trust and reciprocity, Peter said, and we're not talking about it.

[Mary and Terri put together a revised format for the afternoon's agenda and, with agreement from the group, proceeded with it.]

## A Continuum of Community Engagement

Terri introduced “a continuum of community engagement” that moves in steps from minimum engagement at the lower left to maximum engagement and influence at the upper right in these steps:

- accesses information
- outreach audience
- gives input
- repeat or ongoing participation
- plays active role
- leads
- governs

Many use this or a similar continuum, Terri said. Other examples were mentioned: Sherry Arnstein’s “Ladder of Citizen Participation,” “The Spectrum of Public Participation” used by consultants to governments, and Tamarack’s “Community Engagement Continuum.” (See references.)

Terri then discussed some of the challenges or questions that could be raised about the continuum and asked participants what questions the continuum raises for them. The following list includes both her and the group’s questions.

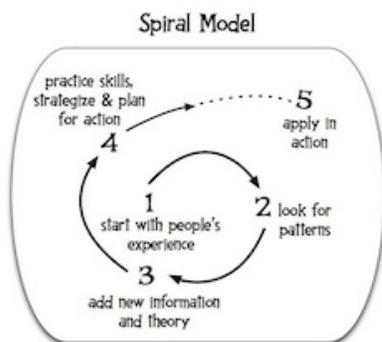
- When does the continuum refer to a community and when to individuals?
- When is the process democratic and when imposed?
- When is the aim to increase community power and when is it to sustain an existing power structure?
- What is the myth vs. the reality of engagement? What’s the difference between what we say we do and what we do? “Engagement” is not usually a partnership. The reality is characterized by a lack of truth-telling.
- When does the community get involved in implementation?
- Where do the community’s own resources come into play?
- What if community insiders hold inordinate power?
- Who is inside and who is outside?
- Community ownership is a step beyond “governs.”
- Is governing actually higher than community leadership?
- The continuum is still presented from the perspective of someone outside the community. What if we flip it and show it from a community ownership perspective? What would it look like from the community’s perspective?
- Who’s engaging whom and to what end?
- Who is the power broker at each level, and what is the exchange at each level?
- How do we know if the community members we’re working with *are* the community? And how can we be sure they continue to be part of the community?
- Who can represent the community and when? Proxies are slippery.
- Where does co-production fit into the continuum?
- What’s the difference between community engagement and community betterment?

- How does a discussion of this continuum further the work of CDW? Can it help us understand what people are actually doing? Can it produce a diagnostic tool for people who want to be involved?

Participants were divided into three groups, given a third of the questions, and invited to develop a single provocative question that should continue to be discussed.

### Small group reports on discussions of the continuum

**Group 1** discussed the evolution of community democracy and what the continuum would look like from the community's perspective. They considered whether it might *begin* with community members' owning their place in the community. In any case, it would have to start where people *are*, with support like child care. The steps in the continuum would be different and might start with individuals developing a sense of belonging while being their whole selves at the same time. Identification with a place, with the community, would be a next step. The group didn't get through all the phases, but acknowledged that democracy from a community perspective would face external forces as well as internal obstacles. In trying to imagine what the continuum would look like from a community point of view, they came up with a spiral rather than stair steps, a never-ending spiral. This spiral from Paulo Freire and popular education was a reference. [Thanks to Connie, who sent this afterward.]



The group also discussed other aspects of engagement from a community perspective: being place-based is important; hierarchies are a problem; systems can be obstacles; especially as they bump up against policy, a community can need experts; and an infrastructure can be loose, but it's needed. And they questioned whether philanthropy can ever really be a partner.

**Group 2** took a close look at the role of foundations. For the most part, foundations don't know about these issues. Even those who are trying don't know what to do, don't know how. Roque Barros gave a positive example from his work with a foundation in San Diego. He was hired by the community and refused to play the role of "bridge" between them and the foundation. Instead, the foundation and staff agreed to meet with the community every three months, a process that continued for his 16 years there. The foundation was changed.

Questions and comments that arose in the group:

- Can spaces be created where both community and foundation can learn?

- How can foundations learn that the messiness of the process is legitimate?
- Garland is still unsatisfied; we haven't gotten deep enough, even if you know what the mistakes are and have good intentions.
- What are the differences between foundations based inside the community and those outside in terms of community engagement?
- Can we learn from the engagement work of people in other fields, such as affordable care or universities.

Anne Kubisch reported that after 20 years of writing books about lessons learned from foundations' efforts toward community change, she's eager to learn how to actually do it. "In theory there's no difference between theory and practice; in practice there is." (often credited to Yogi Berra).

*Group 3* came up with two provocative questions, one of which is, What mitigates against our becoming what we're fighting against? We've created a split between insider and outsider, between resourcer and resourced. People actually move back and forth between these roles.

The group also talked about the infrastructure a community needs to reinforce democratic behavior. Their second provocative question is the one about infrastructure. John mentioned that questions Kettering asks itself are what it means to build an infrastructure and what is philanthropy's place in that work. He can provide materials.

### **Provocative questions**

The resulting provocative questions, as cleaned up by Mary, were these:

- Given all we've done and all we know about community engagement, how do we make it work (more consistently) on the ground? We're still not satisfied with what we have achieved. How do we operationalize what we know?
- What mitigates against our becoming what we are fighting against? RISK!
- What are the infrastructures and choices that have to be made to reinforce democratic behavior and elevate the thinking and strategic action of communities?
- How can we increase the probability that philanthropy doing this work can partner well? Honest dialogue among grantor and grantee are required.

**THURSDAY, MAY 22**

### **Culture and Tradition**

On the second day, Garland guided our work together. He first expressed appreciation for the work done the day before and for the contributions of people involved with CDW before this workshop. We don't start from zero.

He also spoke of the value of yesterday's global thinking and said the challenge of this second day was to begin to operationalize that thinking. One way he started the conversation was to describe a community view of anyone coming in to help: "I don't care how much you know philosophically or abstractly until I know you care, until I can see how it shows up in my life."

He also anchored the discussion in culture and tradition through storytelling by asking Terry Supahan to take a turn. Terry referred briefly to a word that had come up the day before: sovereignty, both community sovereignty and individual sovereignty. And then he told a story about a 20-year journey by the Karuk people to bring back a dance that hadn't been danced for 100 years in a place where salmon are born. As a people the Karuk have been dancing there for 10,000 years. Bringing it back took practice and work and didn't happen right away. They made it their place, they didn't ask permission, they claimed their sovereignty.

### **Community field work**

Without knowing the culture of a community, the kind of culture Terry described, someone entering a community can make a critical blunder, Garland said. The first step is crucial, you can't go back. He once had a donor who made his money in deep oil drilling. The sweet spot, the donor said, is 10,000 feet down. If you're attentive and prepare well, the first 1,000 feet – even the first 100 – will tell you whether the oil is there. If you're not careful at the start, though, and you don't find oil at 10,000 feet, you have no choice but to start over. The same is true of community work. The way we enter a community, how we go forward once we get an OK, and how we leave are all crucial.

### **Small groups**

Three groups were created to discuss these three questions:

- How do we enter communities? (as a foundation with an agenda? when invited?)
- How do we behave when we are there?
- How do we leave (What is the protocol for this?)

**Group 1.** The group made three main points:

- 1) Listening: When entering a community listening is central. Tufara talked of her work listening and making maps of what she hears and learns. It could seem a little like stalking.
- 2) Outsiders may have different views from those of insiders. Sometimes the distinction can be between philosophy and real circumstances.
- 3) The way people in a community *feel* about those coming in and how community members feel when they leave. Humility is needed.

Roque made the point that how we enter and how we leave have the same value to him. When you talk about entering the community, you need to talk about leaving it. This led to a discussion of whether or not entering and leaving are similar.

The group also offered two references: "Planning the Revolution over Collards," a conversation between Tufara and Javiera Benavente (see references), and "It ain't all about you, Boo" [which I couldn't find on the web].

*Group 2* talked about all three questions.

- 1) On entering, deep listening is important in order to learn community stories and history. Pre-work with staff is needed about skills, tools, organizing, community capacity work, and developing a community-engaged design process.
- 2) Important factors in behavior while in a community: be human, don't pick favorites, own the fact that you belong (if from a local foundation), be honest especially about your limitations, and keep showing up even when the conversations are hard.
- 3) Leaving is especially hard when a foundation's agenda changes even though the community's need continues. Connie offered a story about the end of a Robert Wood Johnson program: the foundation stopped all requirements for a year, allowed the community time to determine what of the program they wanted to keep, and then offered to help develop the resources to support that. Everyone ended up feeling good, and everyone kept their job.

*Group 3* also talked about all three questions.

- 1) Entering: Terri made a distinction between permission and entering, and she's interested in the space between selecting a community (which is outside the community's control) and having permission to enter (which has to be negotiated). Roque's experience is that communities don't mind your choice to be there but want to know whether you'll be a good neighbor. The community can help you find that role, which in turn helps them find theirs. It's similar to buying a home and moving into a new neighborhood; you have to discover how to be a good neighbor.
- 2) Behavior while there: It's important to know the difference between emergence and prescription, between figuring it out together and knowing the outcome in advance, between acting and being acted upon. You have to be vulnerable.
- 3) Leaving: Recognize that in good relationships, changes happen. Be sure that community members know of changes in your relationship with them before others do, and tell them the reasons for the change. It's like raising your kids knowing they'll leave. Organizers get stuck when they take ownership, when they hold it too tightly. Leaving is complicated because resources are involved. What aspects of the relationship are not based on resources?

The group also asked the question: What type of internal community building are you, the foundation, willing to do? If the foundation does not change more than the community does, it will have failed. And the same applies to NGOs, government, and academic institutions. What internal practices do we have that reflect our values? An autocratic style of philanthropy won't work in building a stronger democratic community.

### **What's next for CDW?**

While not presuming to speak for CDW as a whole, Peter referred to the power of the past day and a half. In many ways this is CDW's first full workshop. It is an important part of building the infrastructure that will allow the work to go forward. It's part of the first 100 feet. We don't know, he said, when the next meeting will happen, but we don't want to lose what happened here. (Anne Focke promised follow-up notes and references.) Peter also emphasized the importance of having an experienced and knowledgeable facilitator guide our work together; it was critical to the workshop's accomplishments. Garland concurred saying that Mary was very much part of the conversation through the role she played.

### **Honorable closure**

Everyone took a turn offering closing observations: questions, comments, appreciation. In addition to expressions of thanks and gratitude to Kettering and the organizers, a few of these are:

- We need more time together next time.
- This has been not only about what you know, but how you think. This has been a booster shot; equity, power, and race are so often not part of a foundation's agenda.
- The lack of hierarchy was terrific; it was the people behind the experiences, not their positions that made the difference.
- I was grateful to find other people willing to stretch and be challenged.
- After 13 years in philanthropy and being very conscious of the gap between philanthropy's promise and the reality, it's exciting to see work that might bridge that distance.
- A sense of safety came from having the conversation be part of something larger than myself and my own work.
- The way this group flipped concepts over is impressive and impossible to do alone.
- I want to talk more about the way our organizations have to change. I feel dissected, opened up.
- Kettering is grateful to see that this theme, begun in the 1990s under the rubric "civil investing," is moving forward. This gathering provides convincing evidence that this work has to continue.
- Community democracy is not an end, but a process toward the redistribution of power. How do we live into the promise?
- After a career of working with huge organizations, I became interested in how communities have made changes that affect generations. Everyone in this workshop inspires continuing the move toward democracy.
- I appreciated the chance to learn how much I don't know. The challenge is to accept my limitations, personally and institutionally, and then see what I can do about it.
- It feels we're creating a conspiracy to move forward in a way we couldn't do alone.

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## Community Democracy Workshop

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