



MILLIONS OF VOICES

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A BLUEPRINT FOR ENGAGING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IN NATIONAL POLICY-MAKING

AMERICASPEAKS
Engaging Citizens in Governance
www.americaspeaks.org

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September 1, 2004

Dear Friends,

Can you picture it?

Millions of Americans deliberating on a regular basis about critical national issues like health care, foreign policy, and the economy?

Citizens from Buffalo, Charlotte, San Diego, and Colorado Springs listening to each others' views and finding common ground?

An educated and thoughtful American public guiding the actions of policy-makers in Washington?

This would be democracy. It would be a republic that listens to its diverse citizenry and then benefits from their wisdom. It would be a nation truly of the people, by the people, and for the people.

At *AmericaSpeaks*, we believe in this vision and we are working to make it a reality. Since 1997, we have been developing new kinds of forums that can engage thousands of citizens in deliberations about critical policy issues, and then connect the results of those deliberations to decision-making. In 1998, I directed a 15-month National Discussion on Social Security reform that engaged nearly 50,000 Americans in 50 states in face-to-face deliberations, and reached 12 million more through media and public education efforts. The Americans Discuss Social Security project demonstrated that citizen deliberation *can* inform thousands of Americans about important public matters, *can* break the deadlock created by special interests, and *can* re-connect people to the nation's decision-makers.

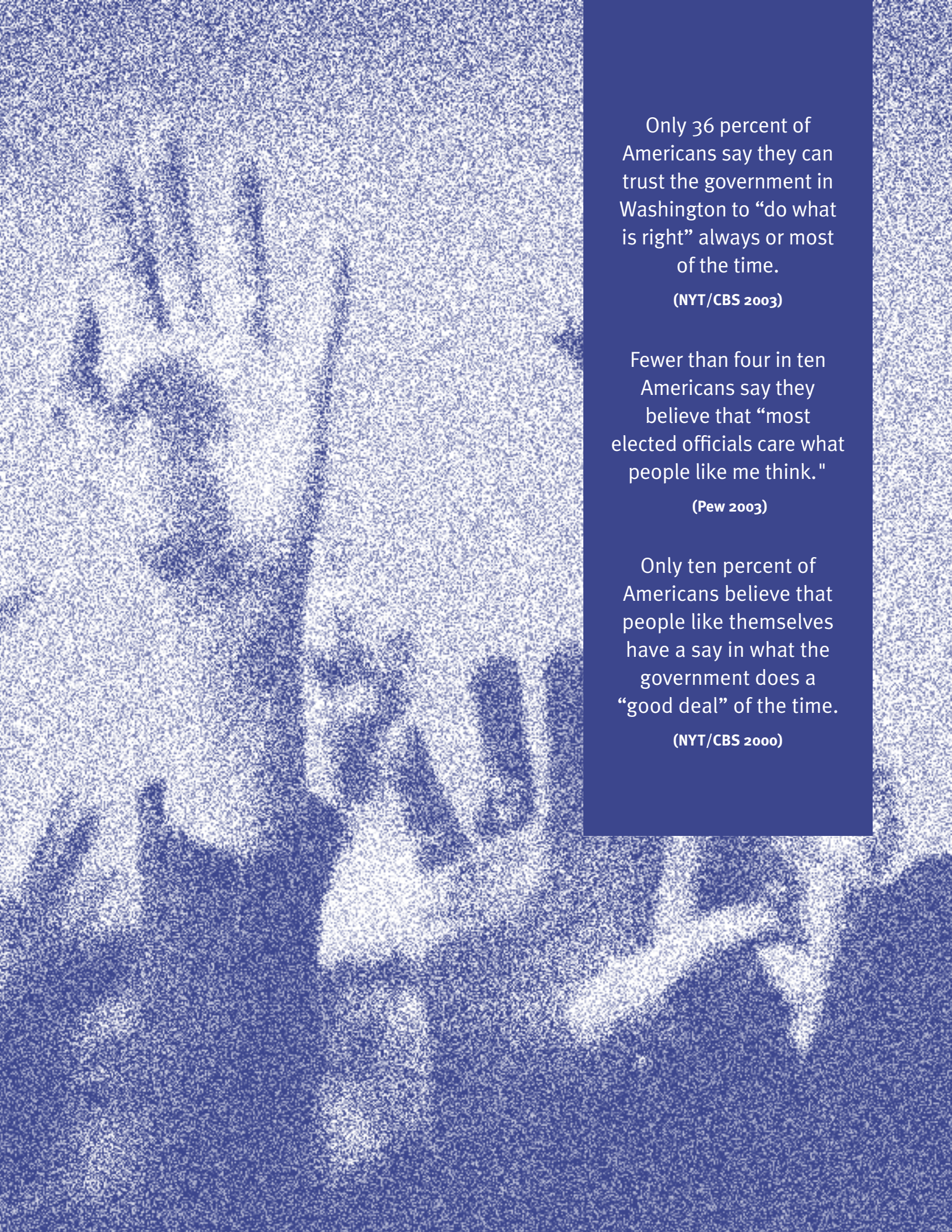
The time has come to build this kind of democratic participation on a whole new scale – to ensure that millions of Americans routinely engage in national-level policy deliberations on key issues, and that decision-makers truly listen to what they have to say. Last year, *AmericaSpeaks* convened more than a dozen leaders in the field of citizen engagement to develop a strategy for doing this: for holding National Discussions on a regular basis. The following pages outline a plan to ensure that the informed voices of average citizens are heard and heeded at the highest levels.

It is my pleasure to share this blueprint with you, and I thank you for joining us on this journey.



Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Ph.D.
President and Founder, *AmericaSpeaks*





Only 36 percent of Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to “do what is right” always or most of the time.

(NYT/CBS 2003)

Fewer than four in ten Americans say they believe that “most elected officials care what people like me think.”

(Pew 2003)

Only ten percent of Americans believe that people like themselves have a say in what the government does a “good deal” of the time.

(NYT/CBS 2000)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2002, Republican Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon introduced legislation that called for a national conversation on health care reform. The following spring and summer, *AmericaSpeaks*¹ convened more than a dozen leading citizen engagement practitioners to develop a plan for making it happen: to figure out how to involve more than a million Americans in deliberations that would identify shared priorities for reforming the nation's troubled health care system – or any other matter of pressing national importance.

“Millions of Voices” is an articulation of the plan that emerged. The strategies described in these pages represent the best collaborative thinking in the citizen engagement field, and offer a blueprint for holding National Discussions on issues of great importance to us all. This blueprint is based on the premise that in order to reinvigorate American democratic institutions and engage citizens in the nation's policy-making, we will need new structures and processes. Put into action, this plan will transform not only how we think about democracy, but how we experience it.

THE PROBLEM: AN AILING DEMOCRACY

The American public feels profoundly disconnected from its representatives in Washington. Citizens no longer believe their government represents their interests. They look on in dismay as heightened partisanship eliminates any middle ground and many elected officials lose site of the common good. Policy-makers find it increasingly difficult to govern in a poisoned political environment defined by a compressed media cycle, the constant need to raise funds, and sophisticated special-interest campaigns. The signs that something is wrong are everywhere.

- Only 36 percent of Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to “do what is right” always or most of the time. (NYT/CBS 2003)
- Fewer than four in ten Americans say they believe that “most elected officials care what people like me think.” (Pew 2003)
- Only ten percent of Americans believe that people like themselves have a say in what the government does a “good deal” of the time. (NYT/CBS 2000)

“Put into action, this plan will transform not only how we think about democracy, but how we experience it.”



That citizens feel removed from their representatives in Washington should come as no surprise. Especially when it comes to national issues, there simply aren't many ways for average citizens to feel a sense of ownership over the decisions that are being made in their names. Our democratic institutions lack mechanisms for bringing people into the governance process beyond the periodic elections that may or may not offer them a real choice on their issues of greatest concern. In effect, national policy-making has become a spectator sport for the citizens whose priorities should be driving it.

The closest thing we do have to a “mediating institution” that can bring the public's voice to policy-makers in Washington is public opinion polling. Unfortunately, polling is woefully inadequate for building a healthy democracy. Polls provide decision-makers with aggregate data about citizens' opinions, but do nothing to identify or help build a collective view upon which decision-makers can reasonably act. They survey opinions without providing any way for people to learn or to be challenged. In the end, a public that has no opportunity to deeply engage with an issue (and only registers its opinions in snap judgments made to pollsters) will always be a ripe target for manipulation and influence.

When citizens are so disconnected from government, their needs, concerns and priorities go unanswered and the quality of their individual lives – and our collective life as a nation – suffers. Unless we find a new way to involve citizens in the governance of the nation, our political institutions will continue to decay.

THE SOLUTION: NATIONAL DISCUSSIONS TO IMPACT POLICY

A healthy democracy requires that we have the capacity to involve Americans in the policy decisions that most affect their lives – that citizens have regular opportunities to wrestle with tough questions and articulate their views to decision-makers. People from every walk of life should have the chance to come together to learn about, and discuss, the nation's problems. Because together, they will find solutions.

National Discussions actively engage millions of Americans in conversations with each other on issues of critical national importance. In doing so, they accomplish what a public opinion poll cannot. They educate people on the issues and make them less susceptible to manipulation by special interests. They provide citizens with an actual role in the policy-making process.

Because those involved in a National Discussion hear and respond to the views of people from across the country, the solutions they develop do not represent the interests of a city or a state, but rather of the American public as a whole. National Discussions build a constituency for the consensus views that are reached and, in doing so, give policy-makers the political support they need to act on the public's behalf.

A BLUEPRINT FOR GETTING THERE

This blueprint for conducting National Discussions outlines a three-step process that begins with the framing of a public issue, moves to the convening of a National Discussion, and ends with bringing the results of the deliberations to decision-makers and implementing strategies for sustaining public involvement on the issue.

Step 1: Issue Framing

Large numbers of Americans will decide to participate in a National Discussion only if the issue selected is truly pressing and speaks to their everyday concerns. The issue must be named and framed in terms that are accessible to the average person. The public will be able to participate in a meaningful way only if the preparatory materials are not only accessible, but neutral, non-partisan and fair.

Prior to the launch of a National Discussion, a bi-partisan policy advisory board oversees the selection of an issue and the development of neutral educational materials that present the range of policy options available. It is assisted by a Citizen Jury-style forum, which is made up of a random sample of the American public that spends several days together reviewing the facts about the issue and considering how it should be framed for the deliberations. Finally, key policy-makers from across the political spectrum are engaged in the issue framing process to increase the likelihood that the results of the National Discussion are translated into actual policy.

Step 2: Convening a National Discussion

To engage a very large cross-section of the American public (without which, policy-makers will be unlikely to pay attention), a diverse set of approaches is needed. The blueprint sequences and integrates six different kinds of forums (summarized on the next page) to engage the public in deliberation. While the six approaches share several elements (e.g. reliance on high-quality and politically-neutral discussion guides, use of small group dialogue and skilled facilitation) each brings unique strengths to the strategy. These approaches are offered in a sequence that begins with larger, more centralized forums that generate momentum and visibility, and then moves to smaller-scale, less centralized forums with the capacity to bring even more people into the discussion.

In its various forms, a National Discussion relies heavily on technologies (interactive video conferencing, the Internet, broadcast television) to ensure that the dialogue has a truly national character and spans geographic boundaries. Use of technology allows citizens in Portland, ME to interact with citizens in Portland, OR, and helps ensure that the perspectives of people living in the deep South influence the views of people living in the Midwest. Key decision-makers play a critical role in the deliberations to increase their support for the process and to publicly secure their commitment to act on the results.

“Large numbers of Americans will decide to participate in a National Discussion only if the issue selected is truly pressing and speaks to their everyday concerns.”

The six deliberation approaches that comprise the National Discussion are summarized in the following table.

APPROACH	DESCRIPTION	STRENGTHS
National 21 st Century Town Meetings®	Multiple large-scale forums are conducted simultaneously and linked together through interactive video teleconferencing to create a “National Town Meeting.” Each site uses keypad polling and groupware computers to enable thousands of people to deliberate face-to-face.	These nationwide televised events generate substantial national media coverage and momentum. They attract and secure the participation of policy-makers and major stakeholders.
Local 21 st Century Town Meetings®	Large-scale forums that engage thousands of people in discussion at a single location, supported by keypad polling and groupware computers.	These large, highly visible events generate substantial local media coverage and local momentum.
Proxy Dialogues	A television program that takes viewers through the deliberative process and then solicits their views over the web.	Through the use of television, these events reach millions of Americans, many of whom may not attend a forum. They generate momentum for local forums and self-led discussions.
Online Deliberations	Small-group dialogue facilitated over the Internet.	Dialogue over the Internet supports nation-wide discussions, while reaching those people who may not participate in face-to-face forums.
Community Forums	Smaller, decentralized forums facilitated by local civic organizations who receive technical assistance and training.	These local forums are more cost efficient than a 21 st Century Town Meeting. They utilize the momentum created by the larger forums to attract sponsors and participants.
Self-Facilitated Discussions	Self-facilitated discussions conducted by citizens in their homes and places of work supported by discussion leader kits that include videos and discussion guides.	Self-facilitated discussions leverage participation in the other forums by reaching the networks of past participants and bringing them into the dialogue. They are lower cost and highly decentralized.

Step 3: Bringing the Results to Decision-Makers and Sustaining Citizen Involvement

A National Discussion will impact policy-making if the results have credibility with decision-makers and if the process builds an active political constituency for the priorities that have been articulated. At the completion of the National Discussion, the nation's strongest priorities are compiled through an online database and reported to decision-makers at all levels of government.

To sustain momentum an online platform – a “National Discussion website” – provides a variety of options for getting involved, from signing petitions to joining like-minded advocacy groups, to organizing additional local dialogues. Through sustained public involvement, decision-makers come to understand that the product of the National Discussion is not just another report, but rather a living statement about what matters to their constituents – in effect, a record of those things for which they will be held accountable.

MOVING FORWARD

To begin the journey of revitalizing our democracy we must demonstrate that it is possible to convene the American public in National Discussions that can have a meaningful impact on policy-making. We must therefore:

- Raise awareness among policy-makers about the possibility of engaging the public in National Discussions and the potential value of doing so.
- Identify national organizations and institutions with the financial capacity to support engaging the American public on a national scale.
- Grow the public constituency for National Discussions, so that elected officials feel obligated to respond.

Once we have demonstrated the possibility of conducting meaningful National Discussions, the long-term challenge will be to develop a national infrastructure that can support people coming together to deliberate about policy issues on a regular basis. With such a national infrastructure in place, National Discussions could be quickly convened when pressing issues arise, such as a discussion after 9/11 on American foreign policy. While it may be some time before we have the capacity to support the nation regularly coming together to deliberate about policy issues, even a single National Discussion would do much to begin establishing this infrastructure.

The time has come to build democratic participation in this country on a whole new scale. We must affirmatively address citizens' disenfranchisement from their government by making sure that millions of Americans routinely deliberate on key issues, and that policy-makers truly listen to what they have to say. Ultimately, we must take our ailing democracy in our hands and breathe the life of its citizens back into it.

“The time has come to build democratic participation in this country on a whole new scale. Ultimately, we must take our ailing democracy in our hands and breathe the life of its citizens back into it.”



A healthy democracy requires that the nation involve citizens in the policy decisions that most impact their lives. It must help them wrestle with tough choices and articulate their views to decision-makers.

MILLIONS OF VOICES

A BLUEPRINT FOR ENGAGING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IN NATIONAL POLICY-MAKING

THE PROBLEM: AN AILING DEMOCRACY

The American people feel profoundly disconnected from their representatives in Washington. Citizens no longer believe their government represents their interests. They look on in dismay as heightened partisanship eliminates any middle ground. At the same time, policy-makers find it increasingly difficult to govern in a poisoned political environment defined by a compressed media cycle, the constant need to raise funds, and sophisticated special interest campaigns.

The signs that something is wrong are everywhere.

Growing Public Alienation

Voter turnout in recent presidential elections has hovered around 50 percent, down from 62 percent in 1960. In the 2002 mid-term election, less than 40 percent of eligible voters chose to participate. While the public's trust in their elected officials has improved slightly since the 1990s, it is still remarkably low. According to a New York Times/CBS News poll, the percentage of Americans who "think they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right" always or most of the time dropped to 18 percent in 1995. This number rebounded after 9/11 to 55 percent, but has since fallen back to 36 percent as of last summer.²

A recent poll conducted by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that fewer than four in ten Americans believed that "most elected officials care what people like me think." Only 10 percent of Americans said they believed people like themselves had a say in what the government does a "good deal" of the time, according to a NYT/CBS poll in 2000. More than 60 percent of those surveyed said people like themselves did not have a say most of the time.

Declining Participation in Civic Life

As trust in the governing process has declined, so has participation in civic life. In *Bowling Alone*, Harvard professor Robert Putnam finds that the number of Americans taking part in the public life of the country has declined significantly. Putnam cites a study by the Roper Center for Public Research, which found that over a twenty-year period:

- The number of Americans who served as an officer of some club or organization declined by 42 percent.
- The number who worked for a political party declined by 42 percent.
- The number who served on a committee for some local organization declined by 39 percent.

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- The number who attended a public meeting on town or school affairs declined by 35 percent.
- The number who attended a political rally or speech declined by 34 percent.³

Deficits in Governing Institutions

At one time or another, we all have experienced feelings of being disconnected from our government – especially when it comes to national issues, where there aren’t many ways for average citizens to feel a sense of ownership over the decisions that are being made on our behalf. Policy decisions made on national defense, health care, social security, campaign financing and federal taxes often feel beyond our control. But while an array of factors contribute to increased public distrust and declining participation, first and foremost, we must look to the failure of our governing institutions to address the problem.

There was a time when mediating institutions, like political parties and the media, served as a link between the public and its representatives. However, these institutions have declined in their capacity to authentically represent the public’s voice. As journalist William Greider wrote in *Who Will Tell the People*:

*“The empty space at the center of American democracy is defined ultimately by its failed institutions. At the highest level of politics, there is no one who now speaks reliably for the people, no one who listens patiently to their concerns or teaches them the hard facts involved in governing decisions. There is no major institution committed to mobilizing the power of citizens around their own interests and aspirations.”*⁴

Greider points to an important failure of our democratic institutions often overlooked by government reformers. The critical problem that must be addressed in order to reinvigorate our democracy, he says, is far more fundamental and systemic than campaign financing, voter registration or public apathy. Our nation is missing an institutional link between citizens and decision-making. At the most basic level, there is no vehicle for people to feel they are part of the process outside of periodic elections that may or may not offer them a real choice concerning the issues about which they are most concerned.

In effect, national policy-making has become a spectator sport for the citizens whose priorities should be driving it.

Dependence on Polling

In a sense, public opinion polling is the closest thing we have to a “mediating institution” that can bring the public’s voice to policy-makers in Washington. On a daily basis, random samples of the American public are questioned about the issues of the day. The results of these polls are reported to policy-makers, political parties, advocacy groups and the public to provide a snap-shot of public opinion. These quick

glimpses into the opinions of average Americans are used to make decisions, lobby policy-makers, and design public relations campaigns.

Unfortunately, polling is woefully inadequate for meeting the needs of a healthy democracy. Polls survey opinions without providing any way for people to learn or to be challenged. Pollsters claim a level of insight into the public's views that they cannot truly have, and this less-than-accurate information is fed directly into the policy-making process. In the end, a public that has no opportunity to deeply engage with an issue (and only registers its opinions in snap judgments made to pollsters) will always be a ripe target for manipulation and influence.

The dramatic swing in public opinion health care reform in 1992 after a multi-million dollar ad campaign sponsored by special interests is a case in point. Without any way to reach a stable judgment, the public's views on health care responded to spin from public relations campaigns on all sides of the issue. As a result, leaders were left to pursue reform without a constituency. They were unable to truly act on the public's behalf because they had only shifting polling data to inform their actions.⁵ As long as our political system relies on the whims of public opinion polling, our policy-makers will remain captive to special interests and heavily-funded public relations campaigns.

Perhaps most importantly, polling does nothing to help the public to engage with an issue and find common ground. Polling does not assist citizens in understanding the views of their fellow Americans or provide them with the opportunity to develop creative options to public problems. Public opinion polling provides decision-makers with aggregate data about citizens' opinions, but does nothing to identify a collective view. Polling forces the public to take static positions on pre-developed questions, stifling opportunities for growth and change. It fails to mobilize the energy and commitment of the public to stand by their opinions or do their part towards supporting the common good.

THE SOLUTION: NATIONAL DISCUSSIONS TO IMPACT POLICY

A healthy democracy requires that the nation have the capacity to involve Americans in the policy decisions that most impact their lives – to help citizens wrestle with tough questions and articulate their views to decision-makers. People from every walk of life should have the chance to come together to learn about and discuss the nation's problems. And together, they will find solutions.

Creating a Healthier Democracy

In short, our nation needs to develop a more deliberative democracy. *Deliberation* is an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about the options before them, and enlarge their understanding, perspective and opinions. A *Deliberative Democracy* strengthens citizen voice in governance by including people of all races,

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National Issues Forums

One of the first real innovators in the field was the Kettering Foundation, which has supported the National Issues Forums since 1982. Over the past two decades, thousands of citizens across the country have taken part in NIF forums on a diverse range of national issues, such as health care, campaign finance reform and national security. In any given year, hundreds of discussions are facilitated by NIF's decentralized national network of facilitators on a selected topic. Reports compiling national priorities that emerge from the forums are presented to policy-makers in Washington. Learn more about National Issues Forums at www.nifi.org

Deliberative Polls

In 1996, the Center for Deliberative Polling convened a National Issues Convention that brought a randomly selected sample of the American public to a central location to deliberate about issues critical to that year's presidential election. Surrogates of the presidential candidates were available to respond to questions generated by participants and the outcomes of the dialogue were broadcast on PBS. Since the 1996 Convention, other national deliberative polls have been conducted in Australia, England, Romania and elsewhere. Another U.S. national deliberative poll was conducted in 2003 on American foreign policy, called *By the People*. Learn more about deliberative polling at cdd.stanford.edu.

Americans Discuss Social Security

Between 1998 and 1999, The Pew Charitable Trusts sponsored a two-year national dialogue on social security reform, called *Americans Discuss Social Security*. The effort used an array of different formats to engage tens of thousands of people across the country, including 21st Century Town Meetings and online discussions. ADSS had an immediate and direct impact on the Social Security debate in Washington. For example, contrary to insiders' expectations, participants overwhelmingly supported an increase in the payroll tax on higher incomes. Eventually, each of the major reform proposals being considered by policy-makers included a payroll tax increase. Learn more about ADSS at www.americaspeaks.org.

classes, ages and geographies in the discussions. In a deliberative democracy, citizens influence – and can see the result of their influence on – the policy and resource decisions that impact their daily lives and their future.

National Discussions that regularly engage millions of Americans in deliberation with each other about the nation's most pressing policy concerns are the cornerstone of a truly deliberative democracy. National Discussions will:

- *Foster consensus and encourage people to focus on solutions for the common good.* Rather than just talking with their neighbors, citizens respond to the opinions and views of people from across the country. Together, they seek to identify the common priorities, not of a city or a state, but of the American public as a whole.
- *Empower the public and increase the capacity of our governing institutions to address difficult policy issues.* Not only does a National Discussion identify clear public priorities, it mobilizes citizens behind those priorities. It builds the political will needed to act by creating a constituency behind a given action.
- *Make the public less subject to manipulation.* By providing the public with a chance to learn about an issue and struggle through the tough policy trade-offs involved, deliberation would increase resistance to spin by special interests.

The Origins of the Blueprint

In 2003, *AmericaSpeaks* convened a group of more than a dozen leaders in the field of citizen engagement to develop a strategy for conducting a National Discussion that could meet the requirements of authentic deliberation, while generating enough influence to shift the terms of the political debate in Washington.⁶ The group came together around the issue of health care reform in response to legislation calling for a National Discussion on the issue, sponsored by Republican Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon.

The blueprint for conducting a National Discussion described in the following pages was influenced by *AmericaSpeaks'* work with this group. It represents a vision for a National Discussion that would engage more than 1 million people – enough to influence Congress as it addresses an issue like national health care reform. It assumes that the public must have the opportunity to work through policy trade-offs, so that public opinion will guide policy-makers and withstand attempts by special interests to sway it.

Principles of a National Discussion

The blueprint begins with several critical principles. A National Discussion must:

- 1) **Educate Participants.** It must provide accessible information to citizens about the issues and choices involved, so that they can articulate informed opinions.
- 2) **Frame Issues Neutrally.** It must offer an unbiased framing of the policy issue in a way that allows the public to struggle with the most difficult choices facing the nation.
- 3) **Reach the Nation's Diversity.** It must recruit a demographically representative group of citizens to participate in the National Discussion.
- 4) **Build Credibility with Policy-Makers.** It must engage a large enough and diverse enough segment of the American public to have credibility with policy-makers as well as the national media.
- 5) **Support Quality Deliberation.** It must facilitate high-quality deliberation that ensures that all voices are heard.
- 6) **Demonstrate Public Consensus.** It must produce information that clearly highlights the public's shared priorities.
- 7) **Sustain Involvement.** It must support ongoing involvement by the public on the issue.

The great challenge in designing a National Discussion is taking public deliberation to a national scale. Considerable work has been done over the past two decades to develop approaches to engaging the public at the local and regional levels. These innovative models ensure diverse, informed participation and support high quality deliberation that fosters consensus building. However, limited steps have been taken to apply these approaches to national policy-making. The blueprint for conducting a National Discussion described in the following pages seeks to meet this challenge.

GETTING TO MILLIONS: AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY

This blueprint for National Discussions seeks to balance the principles of high-quality public deliberation with the conditions and sheer numbers needed to impact policy-making on the national level. It takes the best of what we know about engaging the public and brings it to a whole new scale.

Without the participation of a very large cross-section of the American public, policy-makers are unlikely to pay attention. To adequately engage so many people, a diverse set of approaches is needed. This blueprint calls for the integration and sequencing of six different kinds of forums to engage the public in deliberation. The six approaches share several elements (e.g. reliance on high-quality and politically neutral discussion guides, use of small group dialogue and skilled facilitation), but each brings unique strengths.

“Without the participation of a very large cross-section of the American public, policy-makers are unlikely to pay attention.”

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AMERICANS DISCUSS CLIMATE CHANGE

A Scenario for a National Discussion

The following scenario provides a brief example of what putting this blueprint into action could look like.

January 2006. A bi-partisan group of policy-makers in Washington has concluded that something must be done to address global climate change. While many questions remain, a broad scientific consensus has emerged that climate change is at least partially caused by human activities and that its consequences – while uncertain – are significant. While polling shows that the public is concerned about the issue, many express considerable uncertainty about the science behind it. No public consensus has developed about what should be done to address climate change and it has not held a high enough public profile to affect elections.

Efforts to address climate change in Congress have been the target of strenuous lobbying from interest groups on all sides of the issue. Some groups have hired public relations firms to mobilize “grassroots” campaigns behind their positions. Policy-makers in Washington have repeatedly failed to find a workable agreement that can bridge ideological divisions. No legislation has been able to garner a majority of votes in either house.

Some in Washington have come to believe that no significant policy will be passed by Congress until the American public deeply engages with the issue and determines that it is important enough to affect elections. Bi-partisan legislation is written that calls for a National Discussion on climate change to engage millions of Americans in identifying public priorities. The bill, after it is passed, creates a bi-partisan Commission responsible for overseeing the process and reporting back to Congress on the public’s priorities in 18 months. The legislation requires that Congress convene hearings around the Commission’s eventual recommendations.

Getting to work, the Commission convenes a National Policy Advisory Board made up of experts from across the political spectrum and charges it with drafting neutral informational materials. A menu of policy options is developed that represents the diverse range of choices available to policy-makers. In the meantime, grassroots organizing campaigns are launched across the country. Paid organizers, along with local civic organizations partnering with the Commission, reach out to Americans from every walk of life to participate in what will become a National Discussion.

The National Discussion is launched with a “National Town Meeting” several months later. The evening news leads with a story about 10,000 Americans coming together to discuss climate change across 10 cities. Clips of policy-makers responding to citizens’ questions via satellite are interspersed with exchanges between citizens from across the nation. The next day, newspaper headlines echo the themes from the previous day’s forum. The National 21st Century Town Meeting sparks the attention of elected officials and stakeholders across the nation.

With the start of the National Discussion comes the launch of the Americans Discuss Climate Change web site. Built to be engaging and thought-provoking, a range of web activities challenge participants to consider relevant facts, to think critically about choices, and ultimately to declare their priorities about what should be done regarding climate change. Of the millions of people who visit the site, several hundred thousand participate in online deliberation groups. These groups bring participants with divergent backgrounds together for focused, civil discourse. Other web activities, like quizzes and games, help better- inform citizens about the issue.

During the first several months of the National Discussion, local 21st Century Town Meetings are held in every state across the country. At each one of these forums, thousands of people come together at a single location to address the issue. Sitting in groups of ten with trained facilitators, participants begin the day by talking about their common values. Through networked computers, room-wide themes are collected from the hundreds of tables and reported back to the group. Later in the day, participants discuss reform options. They use polling keypads to register their highest priorities and the results are instantly displayed on large screens at the front of the room.

Preliminary reports are available by the end of the 21st Century Town Meetings, describing the themes and priorities articulated during the day. The reports are made available to participants and the media. Participants are also provided with discussion leader kits so they can facilitate follow-up dialogues in their homes and communities. Local leaders and civic organizations that were recruited as co-sponsors of each 21st Century Town Meeting are provided with resources and support to host their own smaller community forums.

Millions of people are participating in the National Discussion. Those who don't take part in a large-scale forum or join an online group, watch a national television program that walks them through the deliberation process. Others are invited to the homes of their friends to participate in self-led dialogues. Thousands of local community forums sponsored by civic groups, churches and local government agencies bring in others. At the end of each dialogue, participants are provided with ways to remain involved with the process and to keep abreast of the issues and the progress of the Discussion as months go by.

Over the 18 month initiative, broad themes emerged from the public discussion. As citizens participated they learned about the issues involved and found common ground. At the end of the National Discussion, a report to Congress was prepared by the Commission. Its themes reflected the work of millions of Americans from every walk of life. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have remained involved with the issue, contacting their representatives, writing letters to the editor or joining advocacy groups. The public has articulated its priorities and expects to see changes in Washington that reflect their views.



A National Discussion involves three steps. First, the issue itself must be selected and framed in a way that has credibility with key stakeholders and is accessible to the public. The framing of the issue is followed by the convening of the National Discussion itself through six different kinds of public forums. Finally, the results of the deliberations are brought to decision-makers and strategies are enacted to sustain public involvement on the issue.

Step 1: Issue Framing

Before the National Discussion itself takes place, considerable work must be done to frame the issue on which the public will deliberate. The degree to which people will be interested in participating in the process – and will have the capacity to do so in a meaningful way – depends heavily on the ability of organizers to make sure the issue speaks to the concerns of the public in terms that they understand. Equally important, the presentation of the issue must have credibility with stakeholders across the political spectrum and be seen by everyone (stakeholders and citizens alike) as neutral, non-partisan and fair.

The first step in the issue-framing process is simply naming the problem that the public will address. Thanks to the leadership of the Kettering Foundation and the National Issues Forums, we know of the central importance of naming a problem in citizens' own terms, rather than in a framework set by policy analysts or elected officials. The challenge is not so much to use simple language, but to use words that speak to the central concerns of the public. A National Discussion would convene a Citizen Jury-style forum early in the process to help frame the issue. A Citizen Jury would consist of a small group of citizens representing the diversity of the nation who would spend several days wrestling with the critical questions involved with the issue.

An important goal of the issue framing process must be to ensure that the National Discussion is perceived to be neutral on the issues involved. A bi-partisan policy advisory board would oversee the development of neutral educational materials that present the range of policy options available. Advisory board members would be selected for their expertise on the issue, but also for the credibility they lend to the process. The background materials developed with the advisory board will be critical to ensuring that citizens can deliberate fully and effectively. They will also help to protect the initiative from charges of bias or manipulation.

Finally, key policy-makers would be engaged in the process to secure their agreement to both participate and respond to the outcomes. The ultimate goal of a National Discussion is to link citizen priorities to actual policymaking. The active participation of policy-makers in the process increases the likelihood that the public will be heard.

Step 2: Convening a National Discussion

To reach as many people as possible while preserving high-quality deliberation, a National Discussion must utilize a variety of approaches. To generate and sustain momentum and visibility these deliberations are offered in a specific sequence beginning with larger, more centralized forums that attract the attention of policy-makers, stakeholders and the media. These larger forums are followed by smaller, less centralized forums on the Internet and in communities, bringing even greater numbers of people into the conversation.

In its various forms, the National Discussion relies heavily on technology (interactive video teleconferencing, the Internet, broadcast television) to make sure that the dialogue has a truly national character and spans geographic boundaries. Use of technology allows citizens in Portland, ME to interact with citizens in Portland, OR, and helps to ensure that the perspectives of people living in the deep South influence the views of people living in the Midwest.

A critical advantage of this integrated approach is that it offers the public an array of options for participating. Those who are motivated to attend a face-to-face forum in their community can do so, or they may also participate online or through a televised program. Citizens are able to participate in intimate deliberations in their homes or take part in national discussions that span the country. Local organizations can sponsor their own forums with guidance from regional coordinators, or they can guide people to participate in larger forums.

The six kinds of forums that would make up the National Discussion are:

National 21st Century Town Meetings®: A 21st Century Town Meeting brings thousands of people into face-to-face deliberation with each other through the use of technology such as keypad polling and groupware computers. A National 21st Century Town Meeting convenes forums at multiple sites across the country and links them together through interactive video teleconferencing to create a truly national dialogue. These nationally televised events generate substantial national media coverage and momentum for the National Discussion, attracting the attention and participation of policy-makers and other stakeholders. (See page 21 to learn more.)

Local 21st Century Town Meetings®: These large-scale forums also combine face-to-face discussion with keypad and groupware technology, but are limited to a single location. These large, highly visible events generate substantial local media coverage and local momentum. (See page 22 to learn more.)

“With sustained public involvement, decision-makers come to understand that the product of the National Discussion is not just another report, but rather a living statement about what matters to their constituents.”



Online Deliberations: Small group dialogue facilitated over the Internet supports nation-wide discussions and engages those people who may not be able to participate in face-to-face forums. The self-moderated deliberations follow a similar agenda to face-to-face discussions. (See page 23 to learn more.)

Proxy Dialogues: This television program features real people going through the deliberative process to help viewers work through the tough value choices associated with the policy issue. Following the program, an online platform captures the input of viewers. By using television, these events take millions of people (most of whom may not attend a forum) through the deliberative process. (See page 24 to learn more.)

Community Forums: Smaller, decentralized forums are facilitated by local civic organizations that receive technical assistance and training. These local forums are more cost efficient and less labor-intensive than a 21st Century Town Meeting. They utilize the momentum created by the larger forums to attract sponsors and participants. (See page 25 to learn more.)

Self-Facilitated Discussions: Self-facilitated discussions are conducted by citizens in their homes and places of work with the support of discussion-leader kits that include discussion guides and a video to take people through the deliberation process. An online tool collects the outcomes of the deliberations. These discussions leverage participation in the other forums by reaching the networks of past participants and bringing them into the dialogue. (See page 26 to learn more.)

Step 3: Bringing Results to Decision-Makers and Sustaining Citizen Involvement

To ensure that a National Discussion can impact policy-making, the process must generate information and specific recommendations that have credibility with policy-makers. A National Discussion must also grow an active political constituency for the priorities it articulates.

At the completion of each phase of a National Discussion, the public's priorities are compiled through an online database and reported to policy-makers. This information communicates the direction of citizen concerns: what they value, how they would handle tradeoffs, and what specific policies they prefer. The reporting also conveys the magnitude of concern by demonstrating the diversity of people that have taken time out of their daily lives to participate in deliberations. In the end, the reporting must carry the persuasiveness, emotional weight, and specificity of detail that characterize citizen deliberation. Such qualities will be as important as statistics in conveying the urgency of an issue, and in driving action.

While doing this, reporting from a National Discussion must consistently demonstrate the legitimacy of the process by which it was produced. Policy-makers must be able to satisfy themselves that the process was neutral, fair and soundly executed. The report must transparently show whose voices are represented by the report and make available the raw data for analysis by public officials and outside parties.

But it is not enough to simply bring the results of these deliberations to decision-makers. If a National Discussion is to effectively produce policy change, it must demonstrate to policy-makers the presence of an active political constituency for the priorities that have been articulated. This blueprint envisions that the public remains involved with the issue through an online platform, supported by a range of local organizations. A “National Discussion Web Site” would provide a wide variety of options for getting involved, ranging from signing petitions to joining one of the many advocacy organizations working on the issue.

Among the ways in which participants may remain involved through the web site would be to:

- Receive updates on the progress of the discussion and policy-making in Washington through an e-newsletter.
- Contact their representatives in Congress, start a petition, or go to the web site of any advocacy group across the political spectrum working on the issue.
- Participate in online and in-person discussions aimed at “going deeper” on the issue.
- Download materials to organize their own self-facilitated meetings.
- Recruit others to get involved with the process.

Resources for staying involved would be made available to those without web access through partner organizations and national-level publications.

With sustained public involvement, decision-makers come to understand that the product of the National Discussion is not just another report, but rather a living statement about what matters to their constituents, and a listing of those things for which they will be held accountable.

“If a National Discussion is to effectively produce policy change, it must demonstrate to policy-makers the presence of an active political constituency for the priorities that have been articulated.”



This blueprint
sequences and
integrates six
different kinds
of forums in
order to engage
a very large
cross section of
the American
public in a
National
Discussion.

A CLOSER LOOK

AT THE SIX DELIBERATION STRATEGIES



NATIONAL 21ST CENTURY TOWN MEETINGS

A National 21st Century Town Meeting⁷ launches the National Discussion by engaging thousands of people at one time in ten cities spanning the country. Forums of several hundred people in each city are linked together through interactive television. Participants in the event take part in nationally moderated discussions, as well as local discussions in their respective communities. Elected officials and policy experts may answer questions or participate in the discussions from a television studio at the host site. Through the use of interactive television, the format creates the experience of participating in a nation-wide deliberation.

In addition to engaging as many as 10,000 people, National 21st Century Town Meetings may reach thousands of others through smaller forums that view the televised segments over the Internet or through satellite downlinks. This high-profile event generates substantial media coverage and public exposure for the process. In so doing, the forum builds momentum for the National Discussion. National 21st Century Town Meetings may be used periodically through the National Discussion at key points in the process. Ideally, they are used at the beginning and end of the process – engaging 20,000 people in deliberation and exposing tens of thousands more to the conversation through the Internet or satellite downlinks.

A National 21st Century Town Meeting takes three to four months to produce, including identifying sites, recruiting participants, and developing the television program. A National 21st Century Town Meeting is organized and produced by a central staff team. Local organizers in each of the ten sites are responsible for coordinating recruitment, local media, and the logistics of the site. The meeting itself is moderated from a central studio at the host site.

As many as ten forums across the country are linked together through interactive television. Participants take part in nationally moderated and local discussions.



As many as 5,000 people sit at diverse round tables, supported by keypad polling and groupware computers that serve as “electronic flipcharts.”

LOCAL 21ST CENTURY TOWN MEETINGS

The opening National 21st Century Town Meeting is followed by a series of local 21st Century Town Meetings⁸ across the country. Each of these large-scale forums can engage as many as 5,000 people at a single location by using state-of-the-art technology to support intimate table-based discussions. Similar to a National 21st Century Town Meeting, a lead facilitator at each forum guides the group through a day-long discussion. At each table, participants are supported by trained facilitators, networked laptop computers and individual polling keypads. Networked computers ensure that no idea is lost and allow organizers to distill room-wide themes from the discussion. Keypad polling allows participants to vote on questions posed to them and see the room-wide results instantaneously.

The local 21st Century Town Meetings serve as focal points for organizing in regions across the country. The scale of these forums and the unique use of technology generate substantial local interest and media coverage. As the forums are organized, the initiative begins to build a national infrastructure of local and national organizations willing to sponsor their own dialogues (see Community Forums on page 25) and skilled facilitators who will help to facilitate these smaller, local dialogues.

A 21st Century Town Meeting takes two to four months to organize, including time for participant and facilitator recruitment, agenda design, and logistical coordination. The process requires a central staff responsible for coordination, materials production, design, facilitator recruitment, among other things. Local organizers in each community are responsible for participant recruitment and meeting logistics.

ONLINE DELIBERATIONS

Online deliberation⁹ engages the hundreds of thousands of concerned Americans who cannot join the face-to-face events, and/or who are part of the trend toward Internet-based political participation. These participants join focused online deliberation groups (each with no more than 50 members) on the official website of the National Discussion.

Participants are recruited through web, email, and direct mail based on their affiliations with existing organizations, as well as ties to face-to-face events, “invite-a-friend” tools on the web site, and tactical site marketing and promotion. After registering and reviewing background material, members work in small groups, sharing their perspectives on key issues over the course of several days. Groups are monitored for content, conduct and activity levels, using a combination of human observation and automated tracking. Recommendation summaries are collected using customized tools to aggregate recommendations and distill common themes.

A range of web activities challenge visitors on the web site to consider diverse viewpoints, think critically about choices, assess their views and values and ultimately declare priorities. These activities, in combination, steer thousands of web visitors through the component parts of a deliberative agenda. In addition to the online deliberations on the official National Discussion website, thousands of other people may join online deliberations hosted by affiliate web sites. These deliberations adhere to the same standards and core agenda, and the resulting recommendations are collected and reported using the same tools.

Development of the web site and deliberation platform for the National Discussion takes about nine months to complete. Online deliberations would occur continuously over the course of the National Discussion, monitored by a small central web team.



Participants meet in small, diverse online groups to participate in asynchronous deliberations.

From their living rooms, citizens watch a unique television program featuring a highly structured dialogue about difficult public problems. Viewers at home work through the issues along with participants in the television program.



PROXY DIALOGUES

An innovative television program pioneered by Viewpoint Learning¹⁰ expands the reach of the National Discussion to millions of television viewers. A Proxy Dialogue shows real people in discussion coming to grips with the trade-offs necessary to resolve the policy issue at hand. The program, which is broadcast on a major television network, features a diverse group of articulate citizens – not actors – engaging in thoughtful dialogue and struggling through complex issues in much the same way viewers would in their own communities.

By watching a televised dialogue in which participants with different perspectives struggle through a set of values-based choices, viewers find a participant who articulates their own responses, questions, convictions, and reactions. It is through this process of identification that viewers come to understand their own opinions and values and reconcile them with those of other Americans. Crystallizing true dialogue into a broadcast-quality program uses the power of the media in a new and exciting way.

The television program is produced in conjunction with an online forum that allows those who view the program to participate in an online dialogue, ask questions, or register their opinions on the issue.

A Proxy Dialogue takes several months to produce. A significant amount of time is taken prior to the production to identify dialogue participants who can adequately represent the diverse perspectives of the American public.

COMMUNITY FORUMS

The centrally-planned meetings described previously are followed by several thousand smaller, decentralized Community Forums. Community Forums feature small-group dialogue supported by locally-trained facilitators and discussion guides. Each Community Forum can engage between 25 and 200 people and is sponsored by local civic organizations like the League of Women Voters. Local sponsors are recruited through national organizations with local chapters, local groups that participate in the 21st Century Town Meetings in their respective areas, and other groups recruited by one of several hundred local organizers working for the initiative across the country.

Local organizers are responsible for providing training and technical assistance to Community Forum sponsors. These organizers train sponsors to recruit diverse participants, facilitate the discussion and collect data from the meetings. Agenda templates, discussion guides and other related materials are also provided to sponsor organizations.

Community Forums are highly replicable and relatively inexpensive to conduct. The principle cost for the Community Forums is the local organizers who will coordinate efforts on the ground. Over the course of several months, each organizer is responsible for coordinating more than 30 forums – engaging more than 1,500 people each. Small stipends cover the logistical costs faced by local sponsors, and larger stipends support groups in low-income areas.



Local civic organizations sponsor forums of 25 – 200 people, using flipcharts and volunteer facilitators.

Individuals who organize discussions in their homes or places of work are provided with discussions guides and videos to help facilitate the discussion process.



SELF-FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

Wide dissemination of Discussion Leader Kits enable individuals to organize dialogues in their homes and places of work. Each kit includes a discussion guide, worksheets, and a video that walks groups through the dialogue process. The video incorporates diverse viewpoints on the subject in order to compensate for those meetings that lack the diversity of perspectives that are found in larger forums. As a lead facilitator would in a larger forum, the video takes participants through the process of sharing their values about the issue, learning about policy options and seeking agreement on solutions. An online form will be available for groups to report the results of their discussions.

Everyone who participates in the National Discussion through face-to-face or online forums is invited to organize their own self-facilitated discussions. At the completion of every forum, participants are provided with discussion kits and a web site from which they may download additional materials. If ten percent of participants in the National Discussion volunteer to organize their own dialogues, it is possible to engage several hundred thousand people through these forums. Additionally, corporations and other places of employment are encouraged to sponsor meetings among their employees.

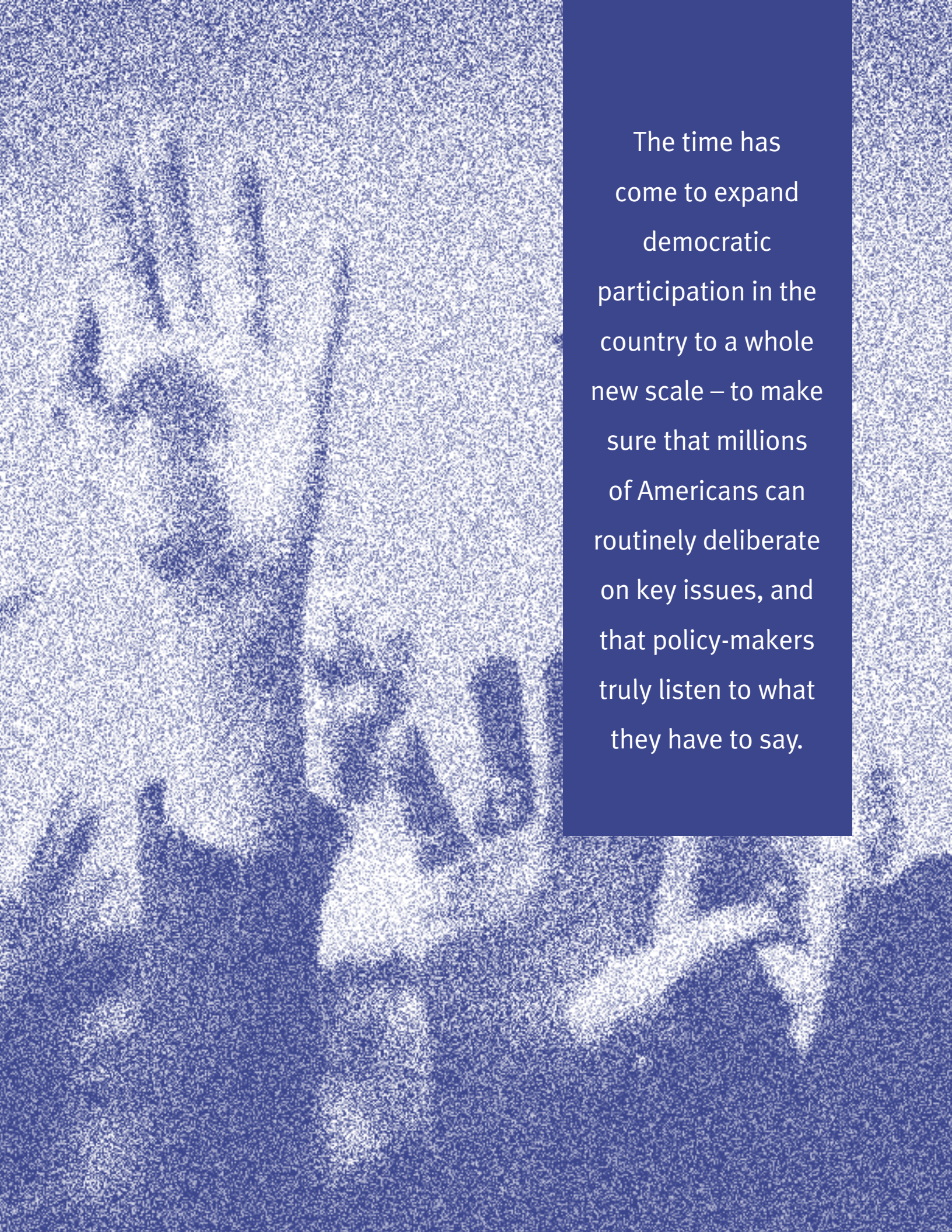
The initiative would also partner with national facilitator networks, so that thousands of already-trained facilitators nation-wide have kits from which to lead their own dialogues. It is estimated that another 100,000 people may be reached through networks like these.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

A range of variables will determine how many people may be engaged in a National Discussion. The figures below are offered to provide a sense of the potential scale and geographic distribution. It should be noted that the numbers below are only a rough estimate. It is likely that many thousands more will be incidentally touched by the process through the media, the Internet, advertising, and increased communication about the issue within communities.

Type of Forum	Estimated Number of People
National 21st Century Town Meetings®	20,000 people in 20 cities
Local 21st Century Town Meetings®	50,000 people in 50 cities
Community Forums	300,000 people in 6,000 forums across the nation.
Online Deliberation	+500,000 people in small groups on the web.
Proxy Dialogue	Millions of television viewers at home.
Self-Facilitated Discussions	250,000 people in homes and places of employment across the nation.

“The solutions that emerge from a National Discussion do not represent the interests of a city or a state, but rather of the American public as a whole.”



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MOVING FORWARD

To secure the long-term health of our democracy we must bring citizens back into the governance process. We must reconnect their voices to the decision-making that governs their lives. Certainly, there is no shortage of issues ripe for a National Discussion. Health care reform, global climate change, public education, race relations – an array of topics – cry out for a deep discussion among the American people about our national priorities. But do we have the will to do it?

The passage last year of the “Healthcare for All Americans Act”, which called for a National Discussion on healthcare reform, is reason to be hopeful that some enlightened leaders understand the need to engage the American public in new ways. The initial legislation was passed by Congress as part of a Medicare reform bill in the fall of 2003. An appropriation to fund the legislation will hopefully be passed in the fall of 2004. It remains to be seen, however, whether the funding will be high enough to adequately support a truly National Discussion that meets the basic requirements described in this document.

Once the potential for National Discussions has been demonstrated, the long-term challenge will be the development of a national infrastructure that can support people coming together to deliberate about national policy issues on a regular basis. With such an infrastructure in place, National Discussions may be convened in a relatively short period of time when pressing issues arise, such as a discussion on American foreign policy after 9/11. While it may be some time before we have the capacity to support the nation regularly coming together to deliberate about policy issues, a single National Discussion would do much to begin establishing this infrastructure.

The profound disconnect between citizens and the federal government continues to grow, showing no sign of abating. Most Americans see no way to have any real say in the making of critical government policies. It is critical that we find fundamentally new ways to revitalize our democracy before it permanently becomes a spectator sport.

The time has come to build democratic participation in this country on a whole new scale – to affirmatively address citizens’ disenfranchisement from their government by making sure that millions of Americans routinely deliberate on key issues, and that policy-makers truly listen to what they have to say. We must start by demonstrating the possibility of National Discussions. Ultimately, we must take our ailing democracy in our own hands and breathe the life of its citizens back into it.

Three significant challenges lie ahead:

We must raise awareness among policy-makers about the possibility of engaging the public in National Discussions and the potential value of doing so.

We must grow a public constituency that supports National Discussions, so that elected officials feel they must respond.

We must identify and engage national organizations and institutions with the financial capacity to support engaging the American public on a national scale.

ABOUT AMERICASPEAKS

“Since 1995, AmericaSpeaks has sought to transform democracy as we know it by engaging citizens in the most important public decisions that impact their lives.”

A COMMITMENT TO ENGAGING THE NATION

Since 1995, AmericaSpeaks has sought to transform democracy as we know it by engaging citizens in the most important public decisions that impact their lives. More than 65,000 Americans have participated in 21st Century Town Meetings organized by AmericaSpeaks to link the public to decision-makers. Each forum integrates intimate, face-to-face discussion with state-of-the-art technology to provide a new kind of venue for the public to be heard.

While significant innovation and experimentation is taking place around the country to involve the public in local and regional governance, little has been done to ensure that the public will be listened to in the national arena. AmericaSpeaks has made a firm commitment to reinvigorate American democratic practice at the national level by developing new institutions that link citizens across the country to policy making in Washington. In order to meet this commitment, we have developed new approaches for engaging the public that take democracy to a larger scale, so thousands and even millions can take part in nation-wide deliberations.

AMERICANS DISCUSS SOCIAL SECURITY

AmericaSpeaks' most ambitious initiative at the national level to date was a two-year national dialogue on Social Security reform, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, called Americans Discuss Social Security (ADSS). Between 1997 and 1999, Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer – Founder and President of AmericaSpeaks – directed the two-year nation-wide dialogue about the future of Social Security. This project served as a groundbreaking laboratory for designing new methods to engage the public.

The goal of ADSS was to take the best of the New England town hall meeting – citizens talking with citizens to solve problems – and utilize technology to efficiently and effectively involve hundreds, even thousands, of citizens at the same time. Through these efforts, combined with television coverage of ADSS interactive video teleconferences and large city forums, literally millions of Americans had the opportunity to be touched by ADSS in a 15-month period.

The ADSS strategy for reaching millions of Americans included:

Public Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-partisan, balanced public education materials distributed to public deliberation participants and disseminated widely over the Internet and through community organizations
Public Deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two ten-city national 21st Century Town Meetings (1,000 participants each) • One five-city regional 21st Century Town Meeting (1,000 participants) • Five large-scale local 21st Century Town Meetings (500-750 participants each) • One seven-week online policy dialogue (15,000 participants) • Youth forums on more than 100 college campuses • Local forums hosted by members of Congress in their respective Districts (175 – 300 participants each)
Grassroots Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home discussion kits, frequent legislative updates, and links to national and local advocacy groups
Public Opinion Polling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative polls measuring attitudes toward Social Security reform conducted by Princeton University’s Research Survey Center
Media and Advertisements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread cable broadcasts of teleconferences and public deliberation meetings • A PBS Fred Friendly Seminar on Social Security • Advertisements in opinion-leader publications disseminated results of public opinion polls and public deliberation

“ADSS [has] done a great service in bringing citizen concerns about Social Security to our attention here in Washington and in educating the public about ensuring the financial integrity of the Social Security system.”

— President Clinton

ADSS had an immediate and direct impact on the Social Security debate. The project demonstrated the intense public interest in the future of Social Security reform and showed that Americans agreed with more of a “middle ground” approach than special interests or lawmakers had believed. For example, contrary to insiders’ expectations, participants overwhelmingly supported an increase in the payroll tax on higher incomes. These results were considered credible because of ADSS’ neutral stance on the issue, the diversity of participants, and lawmakers’ direct involvement in the process. Eventually, each of the major reform proposals being considered by policy-makers included a payroll tax increase.

In the long-term, ADSS demonstrated the value of citizen voices and the positive impact citizen deliberation can have on public decision-making. Although Congress was eventually not able to agree upon a reform package, the outcomes of the deliberation altered the perception in Washington of what the public would and would not accept. Furthermore, the ADSS methods revealed that citizen deliberation efforts can re-connect decision-makers and constituents, break the deadlock created by special interests, and inform thousands of citizens about important public matters.

At the project’s conclusion in 1999, President Clinton reflected, “ADSS [has] done a great service in bringing citizen concerns about Social Security to our attention here in Washington and in educating the public about ensuring the financial integrity of the Social Security system for the next generation and beyond. In the process, ADSS has also expanded and refined the models through which citizens can become engaged in public policy discussion.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 *AmericaSpeaks* is a national nonprofit organization committed to engaging citizen voices in public decision-making at the local, regional and national levels of governance.
- 2 “Skepticism is the Status Quo.” *The New York Times*. January 2, 2004.
- 3 Putnum, R. (2001). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 4 Greider, William (1992). *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 5 Yankelovich, D. “The Debate that Wasn’t: The Public and the Clinton Plan.” *Health Affairs*. Spring 1995.
- 6 Two groups were convened by *AmericaSpeaks* over the spring and summer of 2003, one to focus on a strategy for engaging the public in face-to-face forums and one to focus on online deliberation strategies. The organizations represented in these discussions include: Community Initiatives, CoVision, E-thePeople, Group Jazz, Information Renaissance, the Kettering Foundation, Koro5hin.org, the National Issues Forums, Participate.com, Politalk, the Public Forum Institute, the Study Circles Resource Center, Viewpoint Learning, and Web Lab.
- 7 The 21st Century Town Meeting® was first created by *AmericaSpeaks* in 1997 and is a trade-marked process of *AmericaSpeaks*.
- 8 The 21st Century Town Meeting® was first created by *AmericaSpeaks* in 1997 and is a trade-marked process of *AmericaSpeaks*.
- 9 The online deliberation strategy described here was developed by a team of leading online deliberation practitioners from Web Lab, Information Renaissance, E-thePeople, Participate.com, Politalk, Koro5hin.org, Group Jazz, and CoVision. To learn more about the detailed online strategy, contact *AmericaSpeaks*.
- 10 Proxy Dialogue is a term coined by Daniel Yankelovich in “The Magic of Dialogue.” Viewpoint Learning has pioneered the use of Proxy Dialogues to engage the public on critical policy issues.



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