

No Better Time:

A 2010 Report on Opportunities and Challenges for Deliberative Democracy

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Executive summary

In July 2009, more than 250 campus and community leaders came together at the University of New Hampshire to talk about the “deliberative democracy” field, the tide of civic change on campuses and in communities, and what those changes mean for the practice and teaching of democracy.¹ [No Better Time: Promising Opportunities in Deliberative Democracy for Educators and Practitioners](#) (NBT) was hosted by the Democracy Imperative (TDI) and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC), two organizations that work to promote best practices, research, and teaching for a strong democracy.

A number of factors made this conference timely: an historic election, increasing use of dialogue and deliberation in communities across the country, record-setting youth political engagement, a presidential administration that is experimenting with e-democracy to increase transparency and public participation, and a growing interest on campuses (without distinct ownership in any one academic department or administrative office) in teaching democratic principles and practices.

All of these developments seemed to highlight the need for more just, comprehensive, democratic systems and the need to educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in those systems. People working in these areas were asking questions about how to “embed” democratic principles and practices in the daily routine of campuses and communities.

The conference gave people a chance to make progress on these challenges as a field. The discussions seemed to coalesce around eight priorities for “embedding” democracy, and conference participants generated a number of plans, proposals, and new activities for moving forward in each area. For each of these priorities, we will give the context preceding *No Better Time*, summarize the conversation at the conference, and describe what has happened since.

Priority #1 – Rethinking what we call this work (see p. 7)

Priority #2 – Connecting deliberative democracy, advocacy and organizing, and social justice (p. 8)

Priority #3 – Preparing students more comprehensively for citizenship and leadership in a democracy (p. 9)

Priority #4 – Restoring higher education’s role as an agent for democracy and social change (p. 10)

¹ The participants included democracy practitioners, academic researchers, university administrators, student leaders, public officials, community organizers, and foundation program officers.

Priority #5 – Fostering international exchanges and initiatives to advance global democracy (p. 12)

Priority #6 – Routinizing and democratizing evaluation and measurement (p. 12)

Priority #7 – Understanding and incorporating online tools for democracy and participation (p. 13)

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Introduction

No Better Time was designed to provide people on the “front line” of democracy-building, research, and teaching an opportunity to identify the opportunities and challenges we face as we work to build a more just, deliberative democracy. The purpose of this report is to summarize what happened at NBT and what issues emerged as critical to the advancement of a just and deliberative democracy. It also highlights some steps that conference participants have taken in the few months since the conference.

The report is divided into four sections:

- The first section clarifies the intended scope of the conference and sorts through the language we chose to use, both at the conference and in this paper.
- The second section reviews the conference design. Unlike most academic conferences, NBT was intended to be a working conference, with common themes and tasks for the participants. We also felt that the conference should model best practices in dialogue and deliberation, so there were no keynote speeches or panel discussions. In the post-conference survey, we asked participants what they might like to know more about, and many answered, “how to run a conference like this.”
- The third section describes seven topics that emerged from NBT as critical issues in teaching and practicing democracy. We compiled this list from reports from the conference sessions and surveys during and after the conference..
- The final section examines what we feel emerged as the greatest tension – and opportunity – identified at the conference: the intersection between advocacy work and deliberative democracy and, in particular, social justice as a desired outcome of public deliberation vis-à-vis “inclusion” as a process goal.

Part 1 – Why “no better time?”

Over the past twenty years, a new field has emerged that seeks to increase citizen² participation and generate effective and just outcomes in public decision-making and social change. Some scholars and democracy reformers, including TDI and DDC, use the term *deliberative democracy* to describe a form of democracy characterized by a high level of participation of everyday citizens in matters of public concern at the local, national, and global levels. While some equate this work with a process of deliberation for the purpose of making government policies (political efficacy), we are promoting a broader framing: democracy as both a form of government and as a set of principles and practices that

² We use the term “citizen” broadly to mean members of a community, which can be local, regional, national, and/or global (e.g., “global citizens”). In this paper, it does **not** refer to someone with official citizenship or other legal status.

guide how people interact and work together every day to improve public life and create a more just society. Our framing reflects the confluence of two historic forces in public life: cyclical efforts to increase public participation and ongoing efforts to advance social justice (social and political equity).

While some refer to this work as a “movement,” we prefer to describe it as a broad and varied set of experiments – projects in communities that employ public conversations, issue forums, study circles, intergroup and intercultural dialogue, collaborative planning, on-line engagement, and other civic processes. These experiments share some guiding principles:

- They mobilize participation by diverse groups of ordinary citizens (usually in very large numbers, but sometimes in carefully constructed representative samples);
- They involve those citizens in structured, facilitated meetings (usually face-to-face, but increasingly in online settings as well);
- They give people the opportunity to compare values and experiences, and to consider a range of views and policy options (rather than promoting a single cause);
- They result in action and change at a range of levels (policy changes, organizational changes, small-group efforts, individual volunteerism, changes in individual behavior and attitudes, raised awareness and understanding, or all of the above).

Philosophically, deliberative democracy work draws on theories of power articulated by theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire, and Iris Marion Young. In lay terms, these theories emphasize the importance of building constructive communication between different kinds of people, providing safe spaces for citizens to wrestle with questions of power and privilege, conveying a degree of political legitimacy by formally connecting these discussions to official policymaking processes, and enabling people to think of themselves as public problem-solvers. These visions of deliberative democracy also emphasize the twin benefits of better policies and better citizens.

On college campuses, deliberative democracy has no single academic or administrative hub. Teaching and learning for democracy can be found “across the curriculum,” in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary departments, offices of diversity, civic engagement, and first-year experiences, and distinct centers, institutes, and programs. It is often incorporated in programs that focus on civic learning/social studies, intergroup dialogue, conflict resolution, peace and justice studies, intercultural and global studies, and leadership development. As in public life, deliberative democracy on campuses can be described as a broad and varied – and usually disconnected – set of programmatic experiments.

Using this framework, we sought to bring together academics and democracy-builders to consider these questions:

- 1. How do we move from diffuse democratic experiments to more just, comprehensive, democratic systems?**
- 2. How do we educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in a just and deliberative democracy?**

(To view these questions and their probes, see Appendix A.)

Part 2 – Designing *No Better Time*

No Better Time was intended to be a working conference, and our goals for both the conference dynamics and outcomes were not modest. We wanted to attract a broad range of people doing work that might fall under the umbrella of deliberative democracy, including those doing intergroup dialogue, conflict resolution, issue-based deliberation, intercultural learning, collaborative governance, and youth engagement. It might have been easier and more efficient to work with a small, hand-picked group, but we wanted to widen the circle of people doing this work and encourage new perspectives. We wanted attendees to consist of a close-to-even mix of academics and practitioners – even though we wondered whether academics and practitioners would want to talk about the same things. We wanted to model best practices in deliberative democracy, which meant letting the participants set the agenda and decide what topics needed to be addressed. Given the economic context, we needed to keep the conference affordable, so it couldn't be a week-long institute or think tank. We also wanted to build mutual awareness, without micromanaging the sessions, so that, by the end of the conference, practitioners would know about programs on campuses that complement their work and academics would align their teaching and research with the needs of the field. And we wanted to generate outcomes that could be acted upon. All of these objectives presented design challenges.

The kinds of working dialogues we envisioned wouldn't have happened with the standard panel-discussion-followed-by-Q&A or presentation format. We settled on concurrent *learning exchanges* as the dominant format. We defined learning exchanges as “truly democratic and interactive discussions, rather than traditional academic panels” (See Learning Exchange Leaders “Job Description,” Appendix B). We were prescriptive about our expectations of learning exchange leaders: in short, they “didn't get to go first.” We offered this template for sessions:

- Spend some time talking as a group about how to frame your topic (What assumptions are you bringing to this? What core questions do you have? And so on),
- Invite stories, case studies, and research findings from participants (as well as the leaders), and
- Move the conversation from the descriptive to the strategic. Develop some proposed next steps (There are some different ways to approach this: How might people in this room work together? How might researchers and practitioners and researchers, or campuses and communities, work together? What research questions does the field need to tackle next? And so on).

We reiterated these instructions in a Learning Exchange Leaders' FAQ (Appendix C) and in a pre-conference meeting with session leaders. To increase the likelihood that the sessions would be interactive, we capped most of them at 25 people. We disseminated through our networks an open call for ideas, but no formal RFP. We accepted vague suggestions (even if the person expressing the interest did not feel s/he knew enough about it to run a session). When we received more than one proposal on a related topic, we acted as matchmakers and requested that those who share an interest work together to design a session. We were careful about who led sessions: most were organized by both practitioners and academics, and we were attentive to diversity in perspectives, social identity, position, and geography in session leaders, topics, and framings.

In the six months preceding the conference, about 100 conference participants proposed what became about 50 learning exchanges. They covered a broad range of topics, including social networking, embedding deliberative democracy in national and local politics, intercultural dialogue, deliberative democracy within particular disciplines, classroom pedagogy, community organizing, race and justice, and community-university partnerships (for a list of keywords and learning exchange titles, see Appendix D).³

We also knew that ideas would emerge at the conference, and that people would be torn between concurrent sessions. We set aside breakfast roundtables for new topics and for learning exchange leaders to meet with participants who had been unable to attend their sessions.

Our goals for the opening plenary were to build community, frame the issues, name some key themes that had emerged during the planning phase, and set a congenial yet focused tone. Matt Leighninger created a home video (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0pf7_Xcuxw) using his children as actors as a way to define the work. David Campt used keypads to explore the demographics of attendees (see chart on p. 16). We wrote and performed a skit that framed the issues while simultaneously revealing some of the dynamics between us as organizers (see Opening Plenary Skit, Appendix E).

We wanted to participants to think about and become involved in the conference before it started. We sent participants an FAQ to prepare them for a different kind of conference experience (see Appendix F). We posted a similar FAQ on the web site. We invited participants to review the learning exchange descriptions and to volunteer to co-lead an already proposed session and to contribute advance reading materials. We compiled a conference packet that included an introductory letter (Appendix G), conference framing questions (Appendix A), and ground rules (Appendix H).⁴

To monitor and understand the themes and issues that emerged throughout this working conference, we solicited feedback and viewpoints from participants in a number of ways. Learning exchange leaders were asked to complete a worksheet and to turn them in by the close of each day (see template, Appendix I). We invited participants to share ideas on index cards that we collected and analyzed. We conducted surveys in the opening and closing plenaries. We asked participants to complete a survey (with a 56% response rate) in which we asked not just about the structure and logistics but about their views on substantive issues (Survey, Appendix K). What follows are summaries of the priorities that emerged at NBT.

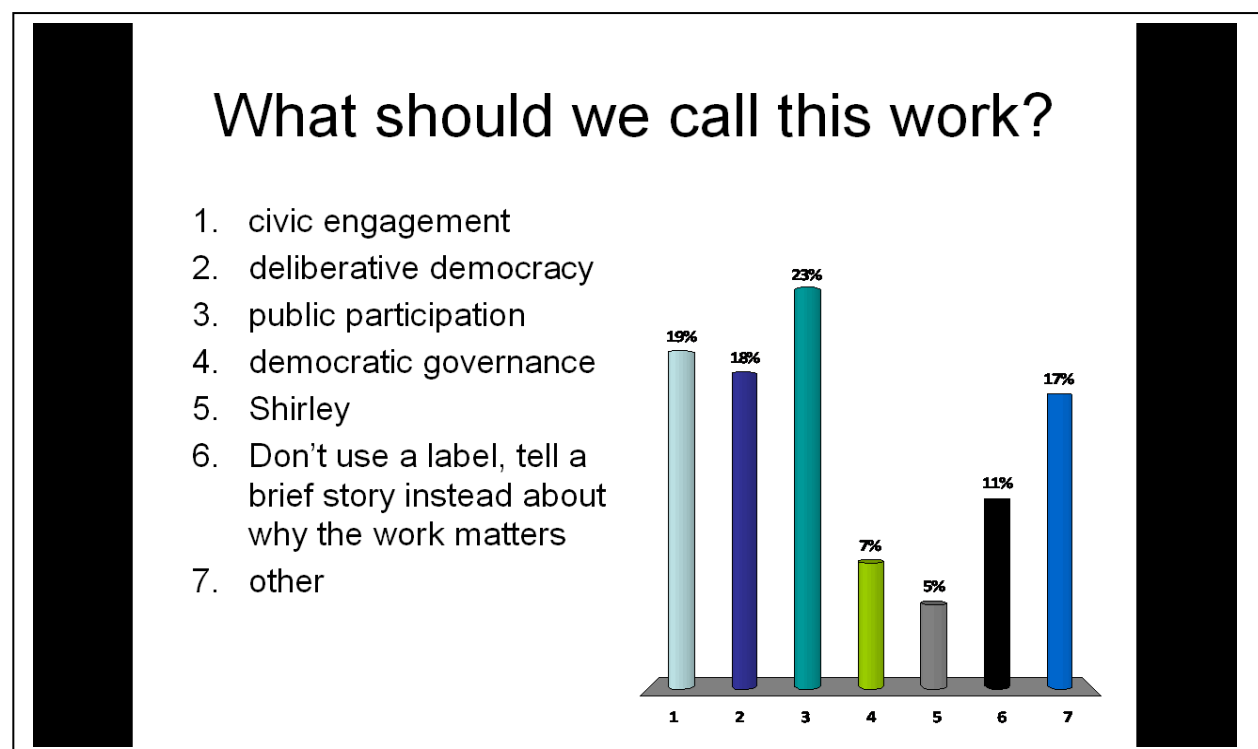
³ The learning exchange format was well-received overall, but it was not perfect, according to post-conference survey results. Some session leaders ignored the instructions and made presentations or talked too much. Some participants (and even some session leaders) complained that they felt excluded from the discussion or that others dominated. Other conference participants commented that they actually wanted more presentations and access to the expert knowledge.

⁴ In hindsight, we should have included a glossary of terms as well.

Part 3 – Seven Priorities

Priority #1– Rethinking what we call this work

Context – Although the work that some of us refer to as “deliberative democracy” is becoming more and more common, it has developed in an extremely diffuse, disjointed way. One of the main reasons is the abstract, technical, unappealing language used to describe these civic experiments. Terms like “deliberative democracy” and “democratic governance” are unfamiliar, have little meaning, and have so far failed as a rallying cry for citizens, public officials, or other audiences. They come off as utopian-sounding concepts, rather than ideas grounded in the political realities at the neighborhood, community, and increasingly state and federal levels. Other commonly used civic synonyms, such as “citizen involvement,” “public engagement,” “citizen participation,” and “civic engagement” are used to describe a broad range of public and private activities: voting; attending a political rally, writing an op-ed piece, charitable giving, serving as a foster parent, attending PTO meetings, community service and volunteerism, community organizing, choosing a public service career, and much, much more. These terms too fail to clarify or inspire.



What happened at NBT – Language was cited frequently as a “sticky issue” in plenary sessions, in a number of learning exchanges, and in the post-conference survey. In the closing plenary, participants voted (using keypads) on several different possible labels for this work; it seems clear from this poll that “deliberative democracy,” “civic engagement,” and “public participation” are more or less equally unpopular.

Several participants said that the language has helped obscure the fact that community organizing, deliberative democracy, and other forms of civic engagement have far more similarities than differences.

“Deliberative democracy” did have some fans: several people who had considered themselves outsiders to the field thought it was an apt and welcoming term. “It has meaning,” commented one participant, “and it provides a hook for a longer elevator speech.” “It’s awesome – don’t give it up,” said another. Having been coined by scholars like Amy Gutmann, “deliberative democracy” (and sometimes “participatory democracy”) plays well on college campuses, where the connection between traditional academic disciplines and democracy-building – getting faculty to view democratic teaching and learning as part of their job descriptions – can be hard to establish.

In the learning exchange specifically on language, “Reframing and Reclaiming Democracy,” participants suggested that there will always be a need for “inside the box” and “outside the box” language: the former to clarify what the work entails, the latter to promote it to the general public. Inside the box, the learning exchange participants agreed, “the integrity of the process demands a cleaner language” (in other words, the fact that the terms are unclear makes it easier to cut corners and lower the quality of the effort). Outside the box, “the key is to use whatever works in your community. Often this is a name developed by the community.”

Since NBT – One of the NBT participants, Tim Bonnemann of Intellitics, is taking the lead on a project that will help democracy builders and academics work from common language without eliminating or devaluing the use of popular or commonly used terms. He is circulating a draft “glossary” of terms which people can edit or supplement. The end product will not be a mandate; it will be a set of terms and their common, and sometimes multiple, definitions. The glossary will be disseminated through DDC and TDI.

Priority #2 – Connecting deliberative democracy, advocacy and organizing, and social justice

(This has been a particularly hot topic, not only before and during NBT but in the aftermath as well – see Part 4 for a full description, including quotes from many conference participants.)

Context – People who practice or preach “active citizen participation” are a diverse lot, and their work is inspired by several different philosophies. Some practitioners, such as community organizers, tend to describe their work mainly in terms of “justice” or “equity.” Others, including most deliberative democracy practitioners and advocates, usually frame it in terms of “democracy” or “public deliberation.” But this generalization doesn’t begin to capture the complexity of the differences. Some observers claim that both sets of people are using the same basic tactics, with only small variations in the language they use. Others say that, particularly at the local level, organizers shift back and forth between justice-oriented and democracy-oriented approaches, depending on the situation.

What happened at NBT – Though NBT included the term “deliberative democracy” in the subtitle, and included many people who identify more with the democracy framing, it also attracted a number of

practitioners and researchers who prefer the justice framing, or who feel that their work incorporates both philosophies. Furthermore, a grant from the Kellogg Foundation enabled us to support the participation of 17 community leaders who had been involved in Kellogg's Civic Engagement Learning Year.⁵ Kellogg's Kara Carlisle and the DDC's Matt Leighninger convened these participants, plus a small number of others, for discussions before, during, and after the conference. One thing that became clear during this conversations is that people coming to this work from different angles have many misconceptions and stereotypes about one another, based partly on the "language problem" in civic engagement (see Priority #1). When they had the chance to meet face-to-face and compare notes on the terms and strategies they use, they were better able to identify the commonalities and differences between their philosophies. Many participants, however, did not get this opportunity because they attended other sessions. Comments in the post-conference survey results are sharper and reflect continued disagreement.

Since NBT – The insights from *No Better Time* and Civic Engagement Learning Year participants were brought together in *Creating Spaces for Change: Working towards a "story of now" in civic engagement*, which will be released by Kellogg and the DDC on April 6th, 2010 (look for it at www.deliberative-democracy.org). The report summarizes the areas of convergence between justice and democracy practitioners, the remaining differences, and the recommendations of the participants for how they might learn from one another. Both groups were interested in improving their organizing practices, but both were even more enthusiastic about creating better structures for citizen participation. "Our purpose," said one participant, "is to transform systems."

Priority #3 – Preparing students more comprehensively for citizenship and leadership in a democracy

Context – Colleges and universities support civic education activities that range from interdisciplinary programs (e.g., intercultural learning, global studies, and leadership) to student political engagement. As in the field, however, these programs are usually small and disconnected from each other and from core academic work. Few campuses offer comprehensive, academically based programs to educate all or even most students for public deliberation, leadership, and agency.

What happened at NBT – By the time they graduate, all students should, as Carolyn Lukensmeyer of *AmericaSpeaks* suggested in NBT's closing plenary, "know how to behave in a democracy." Many participants felt that the curriculum is the place to start building a more comprehensive approach to educating students for public participation. One participant wrote, "I appreciated the focus at this

⁵ The Civic Engagement Learning Year was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and coordinated by PolicyLink in 2008-2009. It engaged representatives from over 40 organizations across the U.S. to promote learning within civic engagement through a series of national convenings, working groups, online exchanges, and joint projects among organizations who approach civic engagement from different perspectives, including community organizing, deliberative democracy, race and equity, youth and next generation leadership, communications and technology, and outcome measurement.

conference on how different academic fields ... incorporate deliberative democracy into their work.” NBT included sessions on infusing democracy in teacher education, political science, philosophy, public administration, communication studies, art, and journalism.

Some participants expressed the view that the disciplines need to do more to link theory and practice. A second approach is to redesign courses, programs, and even disciplines around pressing public problems. “Give students real decisions to make,” one participant suggested. Community-based study and research were identified as ideal venues for problem-based learning. One participant noted, “Knowledge is socially produced. The co-creation of knowledge through collaboration between academic and many sorts of non-academic institutions is paramount.”

Classrooms can be venues for practical skill-building. One participant wrote, “I’m not in higher education, but I thought the idea of [educating] students to be tooled in DD techniques is wonderful!” Participants identified specific skills such as: facilitation; working with diverse cultures; community organizing; conflict management; leadership; advocacy and persuasion; consensus building and democratic decision making; and listening. In the session on democratic strategies in the classroom, participants agreed that faculty members can adopt exemplary democratic practices used in the field – study circles, intergroup dialogue, choice work, issue framing, viewpoint learning, rules of engagement – to make classroom teaching more interactive, manage the “unexpected,” and capitalize on inevitable conflicts that emerge.

One group observed, “The parts drive the whole rather than vice versa.” The challenge is to consider each student’s total learning experience and eliminate what one session leader described as “balkanized student learning.”

Since NBT – Student participants at NBT have formed a working group that will be sponsoring a national conference for students. *Connect the Dots: A national student conference on public dialogue, deliberation, community problem solving & action*, will be held March 3-6, 2010 at the David Mathews Center, a state-supported center to promote deliberative practices in Alabama public life. Although they were not at NBT, students at Bowdoin College and Bentley University are helping with the conference design. The conference offers a broad range of skill-building workshops and learning exchanges on critical public issues.

Priority # 4 – Restoring higher education’s role as an agent for democracy and social change

Context – American higher education consists of nearly 5400 different colleges and universities and they all support a broad range of activities designed to fulfill their civic missions. Despite these efforts, higher education as a whole⁶ is not viewed as critical to democratic renewal and social change. In national meetings on democratic renewal, higher education as an institution is rarely at the table with civic

⁶ Individual public scholars are well-respected for their valuable contributions to society.

organizations. On the local level, most civic leaders do not automatically turn to area universities as partners in local problem solving.

What Happened at NBT: This is not just a public relations challenge. Higher education is viewed as distant and overly theoretical. One participant wrote, “The higher education community should work hard on destroying elitist perceptions about its aims and identify more public opportunities to link theory and practice, research and application.” Scholars should write for public audiences, not for each other. Public scholarship needs to be connected to action and meaningful change – “passive” research is inadequate. Too much research and teaching is designed in a vacuum without adequate consideration of existing public capacity or needs. Scholars need to “pay attention – really listen to – work going on in communities. Don’t just talk to each other.” Colleges and universities should act as parts of complex educational and social systems. One participant commented, “There needs to be a conversation about the role of higher education as a micro-section of a larger society. Higher education cannot do it alone.”

Campuses also appear to be resource rich, and their resources can be put to more public uses. Campuses – particularly community colleges – can work with civic organizations and communities to offer programs that strengthen citizen (not just enrolled students’) capacity for public engagement. They can serve as sites for public discourse and problem solving. They can provide meeting spaces, coordinate community-based student research and service, link faculty scholarship with deliberation, policy making, and social change, and help communities assess community conditions and map assets. Many conference participants recommended that colleges and universities host gatherings like NBT, where academics and practitioners can build relationships and work together on a local or regional level to increase citizen capacity for public engagement.

Ramping up higher education’s role as an agent for democratic change will be hard for what some participants called the “timid” university. In one report, session leaders wrote:

40 years ago universities were integral to the growth and social impact of the democratic youth movement. By contrast, during the last eight years and despite the intense political and ethical controversies facing the country, our campuses remained quiet. Why are universities no longer resources, platforms, spaces for democratic organization, for public work, and for wide-ranging critical political conversation?

Faculty and campus leaders need to overcome their aversion to risk and conflict. They can learn from the deliberative democracy practitioners how to design values neutral (not values-free) spaces for political deliberation, how to frame issues for productive public discourse and action, and how to be political yet nonpartisan.

Since NBT – A participant from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) proposed that AACU host public forums on higher education’s role in a democracy at all of its six yearly conferences. The first of these forums was held on October 2 in Minneapolis at a national conference on “Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility.” Approximately 150 attended, including local politicians, civic leaders, faith leaders, and academics at the conference.

Priority #5 – Fostering international exchanges and initiatives to advance global democracy

Context – There is a growing conviction that the U.S. should turn from its traditional position of “exporting” a rather static, republican form of democracy, and begin to take part in more even, two-way exchanges with other countries about the key lessons and latest innovations in strengthening democracy.⁷ A number of people brought this perspective to NBT, including attendees from other countries and U.S. researchers and practitioners who focus on democratic governance abroad. DDC has been part of these discussions through its partnership with [LogoLink](#), and TDI has participated in [International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy](#), an initiative sponsored jointly by the Council of Europe and several U.S. higher education associations.

What happened at NBT – Nina Best (Instituto Polis, Brazil) and Kaustuv Bandopadhyay (PRIA, India) represented LogoLink at NBT and led a learning exchange on *Lessons from the Global South*. During that session, there was shared recognition that universities could serve as vehicles for greater international learning about democracy, especially between the north and south, not only through research but by adding a democracy focus to student exchange and faculty exchange programs. There was also a great deal of discussion about the need to bring together public officials from different countries so that they can compare notes on civic engagement practices. Learning about the LogoLink work in this area got other participants thinking about the value of bringing delegations (including public officials, democracy practitioners, and academic researchers) across borders to visit and learn from their counterparts in other countries. Participants in the session developed an idea to “Expand the ‘Sister Cities’ concept so that it is more than just a cultural exchange: so that it allows delegations to learn from each other about democratic and participatory practices in local governance.”

Since NBT – A local official who is active in the Democratic Governance Panel of the National League of Cities pledged to take the Sister Cities idea back to NLC, in order to explore it further and gain support. Meanwhile, the idea to “convene an international democracy conference” – now entitled the “Global Innovations in Democracy” conference – was made one of the top ten recommendations of the Strengthening Our Nation’s Democracy (SOND) process, which involved a number of NBT participants. DDC and LogoLink have begun working with other SOND participants to plan this meeting.

Priority #6 – Routinizing and democratizing evaluation and measurement

Context – The rapid but diffuse growth of deliberative democracy has led to a continuing crisis of confidence about assessment and measurement. Most projects are local, issue-focused, and organized on shoestring budgets that leave little money (or time) for comprehensive evaluation efforts. Still, the sheer volume of these efforts has led to a wealth of evaluations, reports, and academic articles – but this literature has not been adequately collected, organized, summarized, or disseminated. So when

⁷ See John Gaventa and Nicholas Benequista, “[Reversing the Flow](#).”

they are challenged on the efficacy of their work, most practitioners resort to talking about their own experiences rather than speaking more broadly for the field. Furthermore, much of the early academic research focused very narrowly on questions of process and facilitation within public deliberations, whereas many local organizers focused narrowly on whether/how their projects led to action and change. All of these factors have produced a general angst in the field about “How do we show the outcomes?” (These discussions are also part of a much broader, equally angst-filled debate about the validity of evaluation as an overall concept.) Many participants brought these questions and concerns to the conference; some also brought concepts like ‘action research’ and other ways of engaging citizens in the process of evaluation and measurement. A DDC white paper on “Impacts and Outcomes of Participatory Processes” provided fodder for several of the sessions. And the Knight Foundation’s “Soul of a Community” research, which shows a positive correlation between community engagement and economic growth, provided yet another entry point into the assessment discussion.

What happened at NBT – In a number of different sessions, NBT participants compiled long lists of assessment tools, variables, resources, and people who had gained some expertise and authority on these issues – along with lists of daunting challenges to evaluation efforts. Participants stressed three critical priorities:

- Establishing a broader “culture of evidence” for this work
- Conducting “developmental evaluation” which allows organizers to measure their progress as the work unfolds
- Adding a social equity perspective to evaluation and research (for example, asking not whether projects lead to tangible outcomes, but exploring how those outcomes benefit or affect different segments of the population)

All three priorities seemed suggest the need to engage local leaders, organizers, and citizens themselves in the work of goal-setting, measurement, and assessment. “[We need to] promote different knowledge bases and challenge the assumption that ‘academics know best,’” said one participant. Another called for the development of “systematic, comprehensive evaluation frameworks that can be applied across processes and settings.” Yet another pointed out that “There are a number of initiatives under way, but it would help if there was coordination at the organizational level (e.g. DDC, IAP2, NCDD, universities, etc.).”

Since NBT – Ideas from the NBT discussions are being incorporated into the Kellogg Foundation’s *Creating Spaces for Change* report, which lays out recommendations for the field, and in the upcoming DDC volume *When the Public Meets: Assessing the Value of Deliberative Civic Engagement*. A number of people have become committed to the idea of “developing online tools for tracking, measurement, and accountability – particularly methods and systems that would allow ordinary people to participate in the evaluation process in ways that enhance learning and accountability.”

Priority #7 – Understanding and incorporating online tools for democracy and participation

Context – For a number of years, the discussion about technology and democracy was polarized between the futurists, who talked in celebratory tones about the impact the Internet would have on politics, and the traditionalists, who voiced their misgivings about online forms of communication. Now that we have a number of examples of online engagement to learn from, the conversation seems to have taken a more pragmatic turn: most practitioners and researchers have concluded that online and face-to-face approaches to democratic participation have their own strengths and weaknesses – and that any serious effort to engage citizens ought to be a blend of the two. *Promising Practices in Online Engagement*, the report from Public Agenda’s Center for Advances in Public Engagement (CAPE) which was released at NBT, provided a valuable jumping-off point for conversations on technology at the conference.

What happened at NBT – Two sessions in particular, *A Tech-Savvy Citizenry: New media for public participation, policy deliberation, and social change* and *Tech Ethics: The values questions raised in a digital democracy*, and to some extent many other session, gave conference participants the chance to roll up their sleeves on these questions. Both sessions modeled their topic by taking advantage of social media to get people talking before, during, and after the conference. There was a great deal of discussion about the effects of technology on the media, and the need to help public officials make sense of the new online tools. One overarching theme, however, was the importance of setting goals for a participation effort, and then considering the right tools and models, rather than the other way round. “The tail shouldn’t wag the dog,” as one participant put it. Another acknowledged that “Face-to-face or online, we still have to think about some of the same issues.” In that sense, learning more about advanced tools and methods got people thinking more about the basics of democratic governance. Participants wanted to talk more about how to design an engagement effort, given variables like timing and issue that would include a comprehensive set of online and face-to-face elements.

Since NBT – At the request of the National League of Cities, three of the people who led tech-oriented sessions at the conference teamed up to lead a workshop on “E-Democracy for Cities” at the NLC annual conference in November. Meanwhile, the DDC applied for, and received, a grant from the IBM Center for the Business of Government to write *Using Online Tools to Engage the Public: The latest lessons, the newest technologies, and the next directions for innovation*. Building on the CAPE report and the NBT discussions, the report will provide guidelines for public engagement planning, suggest ways to incorporate online tools and face-to-face models, and take stock of developing technologies.

Priority #8 – Working with the Obama Administration

Context – Many conference participants had, in one way or another, been part of efforts to encourage and support the work of the new administration to engage citizens in more productive ways. Some had served on transition committees, others had attended the *Strengthening Our Nation’s Democracy* meetings, and others had taken part in the administration’s *Open Government Dialogue*.

What happened at NBT – Some participants remained enthusiastic about the opportunities to ‘ramp up’ citizen participation in the new administration; others were disappointed that the administration had

offered more rhetoric than action thus far; still others kept their focus on the work already happening at the local level. Participants saw several main avenues for moving forward: the Office of Public Engagement; the continuing Open Government Initiative; and working directly with federal agencies. “The public deliberation field should continue to provide the same depth of input to the Obama Administration Open Government Directive on ‘participation’ and ‘collaboration’ as has been done for ‘transparency,’” said one participant. “We should focus on connecting with federal agencies already doing citizen engagement in policy discussions (e.g. EPA, CDC, Interior) to launch pilots and capture successes,” said another.

Since NBT – The “town hall meetings” held by members of Congress on health care reform provided a (painful) reminder that the most basic group process techniques used by deliberative democracy practitioners are still unknown to many of the people trying to organize public meetings. Some meeting participants continued their outreach to the new administration through the Strengthening Our Nation’s Democracy series of meetings (the second major SOND meeting was held a month after NBT). This effort has established stronger connections with the Office of Public Engagement and the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the White House. Another set of participants, acting on ideas developed at the conference, are planning a meeting called “Partnering with Communities,” which will involve federal managers from several agencies along with local leaders, academic researchers, and practitioners who are experienced in deliberative democracy. The meeting, which will take place in early 2010, will focus on developing better ways for agencies and communities to work together on local engagement projects.

SOND participants who had been at NBT took the lead on one of the ten SOND recommendations: Build Skills and Capacity for Public Engagement. That subcommittee, which is being led by TDI board chair, Bruce Mallory and another TDI member, Paul Markham, will be pursuing many objectives that had been identified at NBT as critical to strengthening democracy.

Part 4 – The intersection of deliberative democracy, advocacy, and social justice

A major focus of the conference planning discussions, and the conference itself, was the intersection between advocacy work and deliberative democracy and, in particular, social justice as a desired outcome of public deliberation vis-à-vis “inclusion” as a process goal. If a *process* is inclusive and deliberative, will the results be more socially just? If a process is values-neutral, will it welcome a range of ideological and social perspectives? Does the desired outcome of the public process matter – if the goal is community building, raised awareness, and individual commitment, would the process be the same as a process aimed at policy change and social action?

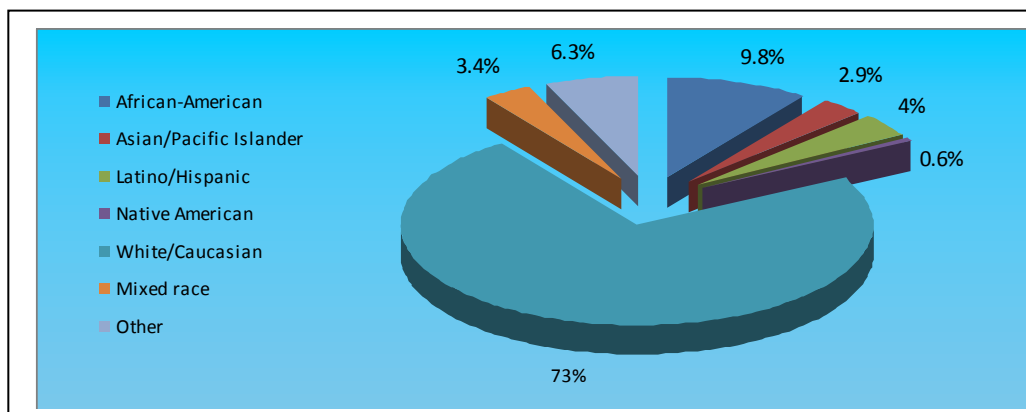
Although the line-up of learning exchanges at NBT included sessions on race, poverty, the achievement gap, art and social justice work, intercultural dialogue, community organizing, restorative justice, values-inquiry, and diversity offices, we agreed that this concern about the field itself deserved more attention.

We edited the conference framing questions⁸ and the Learning Exchange worksheets (Appendix I)⁹ and added this session:

And Justice for All: Straight talk about social and racial justice and deliberative democracy

The essential meaning of democracy is free citizens with an equal opportunity to participate in the social, political, and economic systems that affect their lives. In this session, we'll take stock of some of the forces that are driving this work: efforts to engage individuals in public life, to promote deliberative politics, and to increase social, political, and economic equity and justice. Is this a happy alliance, or are there underlying tensions? Is a more open democracy inherently more just for all, or can deliberative democracies still exclude historically marginalized groups? Is the language of "inclusion" sufficient and which groups respond positively or negatively to it? We'll talk about these and related questions. And we'll brainstorm ways to work collectively toward a vision of a more just and deliberative democracy.

This challenge is compounded by the perception that the most visible deliberative democracy advocates nationally are white, whereas the people who describe themselves as community organizers or advocates of social justice are a more racially diverse group.¹⁰ For the record, NBT participants were 60/40, females to males, and 73% white, 10% African American, 4% Latino/Hispanic, and 3% Asian.



The organizers of the *And Justice for All* session reported that 80% of their participants were women and 40-50% were people of color, “a very different demographic profile from sessions that focused on

⁸ We edited the conference questions to read, *How do we move from diffuse democratic experiments to more just, comprehensive, democratic systems?* And *How do we educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in a just and deliberative democracy?*

⁹ *How can we ensure that democratic reforms foster freedom, equity, and justice?* and *How can we ensure that changes in how people are educated and trained are advancing freedom, justice, and equity?*

¹⁰ We knew that, as two like-minded white people, we had an organizing problem. A diverse set of organizers is more likely to attract diverse people, perspectives, and, in this case, ideas for sessions. Yet the simple fact is that the two of us are mostly on our own running two lean organizations. We reached out to TDI board members, Everyday Democracy, social justice practitioners and educators for advice. From these conversations, we made changes in the program goals and sessions. The “Broadening the Democracy Discussion” grant to the DDC from the Kellogg Foundation allowed us to support the participation of a number of session leaders and participants who are people of color/and or justice-oriented practitioners.

deliberative democracy.” They suggested that these demographic gaps deserve attention. It should be noted that this was also the most popular session at the conference, with over 60 people in attendance (the average was 25).

Responses to the post-conference survey question, “How should the deliberative democracy crowd respond to critiques about an insufficient focus on social justice (equity re: race, class, gender, etc.)?” fell into three categories. Some expressed the view that socially just outcomes should be the stated goals of the work to build a more deliberative democracy. One wrote, “Why work for democracy or be in a democracy if you are not working for justice and equality?” Another said that we need to “Recognize [that] the critiques are valid.” Another participant wrote:

We need to talk about what we mean by "democracy" - is it only a procedural notion - being heard, having voice taken into account OR a substantive notion that incorporates "substantive" criteria (equality, etc). We tend to think the former leads to the latter but the process does not by itself deal with power. We need to talk about that.

Another wrote:

It is, for me, the most serious shortcoming of the Deliberative Democracy cohort, and it's not even that there's insufficient activism on social justice. It's that there's insufficient curiosity about who is doing the most powerful intercultural work, work on cultural citizenship, on cultural democracy. I'm not interested in the activism sweepstakes, but there is very little real awareness, on both sides, of the rich, complex projects and programs that overlap sometimes in the same space and (almost) the same time frame. Appropriate for a 'learning exchange' event, the answer is, more learning. DD and SJ need to go hand-in-hand.

Many others strongly disagreed. Here are some comments from the survey:

-Our job is to create the space within which democracy can happen. Once people are involved, it's their job to use the tools of democracy AS THEY SEE FIT to achieve social justice, etc. Perspectives of what SJ is, and how to go about pursuing it, will differ. Because our crowd leans left and believes fervently in its own views about SJ, we should keep it out of the work.

-Have confidence that deliberation will result in social justice. Advocacy is a different strategy, that we are advocates for diverse voices of all kinds and work relates to the ways to assure that those voices are heard; that we about advancing process rather than solutions and committed to educating regarding democratic practice; social justice will follow strong democratic practice.

-It shouldn't -- it is procedural with attention to race, class, gender as input, but not necessarily "liberal" output -- deliberative democracy can deal with this issue, but should not put itself in the position of aligning with a particular 'progressive' perspective.

-The social justice thing is tricky because it can easily be construed as partisan --which is not what deliberation and dialogue groups/orgs tend to want to do. I think this is a serious challenge. Although I am ethically in favor of working toward social justice, I'm not sure that the framing of issues in terms of social justice is a good fit with the premises of deliberation. It seems to me that being issue-oriented would work (focus on environment, poverty, crime, etc.)

because the issues themselves are public issues that have multiple perspectives and choices available. But, I think using the language of "social justice" will further alienate conservatives and mark the deliberative movement as a liberal/big-D Democrat effort.

Another category of responses reflected the view that deliberative democracy advocates need to "hold up a mirror" to themselves and explore their own, personal commitment to social justice. One wrote, "The deliberative democracy crowd doesn't need more people of different races and ethnicities to begin to have conversations among itself about issues of white privilege and whiteness and how that may be contributing to the fact that it's mostly white (as I think it is). I'm not saying that it's not important to create bridging relationships; I'm just saying that exploring our own "stuff" might be a good place to start." Another agreed, writing "First off, the critiques must be taken seriously. I'm sure that the white folks in the DD crowd probably need to honestly examine white privilege."

The organizers of the *And Justice for All* session concluded:

Democracy, without intentional focus on social justice, may/will not necessarily include all groups as we know too well from the American historical experience. Deliberative democracy, like democracy, is a great idea – but will it serve to bring the voice of all social identity groups or merely broaden the participation of disenfranchised elites in society? A deliberative democracy approach that ignores a social/racial justice analysis will remain an exclusive process and not advance the fundamental values of democracy.

When the TDI board met six weeks after the conference, the board considered the challenge posed by conference participants to "hold up a mirror" and apply a social equity lens to the organization. We agreed that, as the board turns over, we'd seek board members who "have a fire in their bellies" for this work and add social diversity to the board's makeup. We also examined TDI's mission statement, which was "to strengthen public life and advance deliberative democracy in and through higher education." As part of that discussion, the board framed and discussed three perspectives for TDI's work that emerged from the exchanges at NBT:

- 1) Deliberative democracy involves quality democratic practice – dialogue and deliberation – that is attentive to equity, access, and inclusion as a process standard. The work is, by definition, is values-neutral (not values-free) and outcomes-neutral. As a result, DD is increasingly narrow.
- 2) Deliberative democracy as stated above but matters of power, privilege, and justice are explicitly identified and discussed. Social equity is still not identified as a stated outcome of the work.
- 3) Deliberative democracy is a means to an end, and the end is social justice. To many, however, this isn't, by definition, deliberative democracy. It is advocacy work.

Reflecting TDI's commitment to democracy building as more than working to advance "inclusive processes," the board decided to drop the term "deliberative" from the mission statement and TDI tag line. TDI's mission is now "to strengthen public life and advance democracy" and the tag line is now "mobilizing higher education for democracy."

The board also edited TDI's [Statement of Principles and Practices](#) to reflect a greater commitment to examining matters of power, privilege, equity, and justice in and through higher education:

We acknowledge that structural inequalities exist both within higher education and society at large and that these inequalities are detrimental to democracy and freedom. Further, when such inequalities grow large enough, they undercut and threaten the fragile foundation of our democracy. Therefore, *we challenge* colleges and universities to question their own policies that may reinforce inequalities of power, access, and opportunity. *We implore* educational institutions to teach all students how to rigorously analyze and effectively address injustices. *We welcome* diverse ideological perspectives on how to define and bring about a more just society.

Conclusion

We had several goals for *No Better Time*: to capture a unique moment in the history of American democracy and consider how, given the context, we can move to more comprehensive democratic social and political systems; to bring together academics and practitioners for learning exchanges on a broad range of topics; to highlight and find ways to increase higher education's role in strengthening democracy; and to identify any sticky issues in the work. What we've identified are some priorities that emerged from the learning exchanges, and we've tried to provide short summaries of those priorities. We know they are more complex than we've been able to capture here.

In the final analysis, *No Better Time* points to the need for communities to work toward more comprehensive systems. Strengthen existing networks and relationships, particularly across social groups and civic organizations. Offer training and development community-wide. Identify and challenge structural or informal habits that reinforce patterns of power and exclusion.

One way to do that is for campus and community leaders to host local versions of *No Better Time*. This is why we included a long section on how to run this kind of conference, and why we've made all of our work products open-source. (How-To Guide is posted on the web site.) The notion of "learning exchanges" sent a powerful message to conference participants: that communities need more opportunities for mutual learning in which both academics and practitioners are presumed to have valuable knowledge and experiences to contribute. We need to strengthen democracy community-by-community, with networks like the Deliberative Democracy Consortium and the Democracy Imperative in place to facilitate inter-community learning. Please keep us in the loop, and let us know how we can be helpful, as you move forward with your own democracy-strengthening work.

Appendix A: *No Better Time* Conference Themes

1. How do we move from diffuse democratic experiments to more just, comprehensive, democratic systems?

We've learned a great deal about how to engage citizens more productively in public life – and how to reshape public life so that it better meets the needs and goals of citizens (everyday people).

What are the main challenges and questions we face as we try to apply these lessons to the ways in which our institutions function?

Some probes to consider:

- **How do we share the lessons learned from work that is already underway?**
- **What strategies will most effectively help these reforms “take hold” and become a part of local, state, and federal governance?**
- **How can we do a better job measuring how this work meets the needs of many different kinds of communities and people?**
- **How can new technologies help us?**
- **How should academics and non-academics be working together? How should colleges and universities be working with governments and other institutions in the public, private, and civic sectors?**
- **How can we ensure that democratic reforms foster freedom, equity, and justice?**
- **How can we describe and explain this work in plainer, more compelling language?**

2. How do we educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in a just and deliberative democracy?

Education for democracy is happening both on campuses and in the field, but we have a long way to go before we get to scale. How can we improve civic learning for *all* citizens: high school and college students, practitioners, public servants, historically marginalized populations, and anyone else working toward community change?

Some probes to consider:

- **What core values should guide this work?**
- **How should college and university curricula be reshaped to meet these goals?**
- **What priorities, policies, and practices should change in the academy to advance deliberative democracy?**
- **How do we revitalize higher education's role as essential to a strong democracy and as critical partners with the public, private, and civic sectors?**
- **How can we support public officials to be effective champions of deliberative democracy?**
- **How should we evaluate our progress in these efforts?**
- **How can we ensure that changes in how people are educated and trained are advancing freedom, justice, and equity?**

Appendix B: Learning Exchange Leaders' "Job Description"

Hello Friends of TDI and DDC –

We are thrilled that you are lending a hand at the **No Better Time** conference at UNH this summer. There has already been a strong response to the conference announcement, and we think that this will be a fascinating, timely, and important gathering.

We thought we should clarify our expectations about what it means to lead a "learning exchange." First, we do indeed want these to be truly democratic and interactive discussions, rather than traditional academic panels. So while we know you all have valuable experiences and expertise to share (and we approached you for that reason!), we are hoping that you can bring that knowledge to bear *in the course of the discussion*, rather than in formal presentations followed by Q&A.

Learning exchanges will most likely be 2.5 hours. Here is one general suggestion about how to structure that time:

1. Spend some time talking as a group about how to frame your topic (What assumptions are you bringing to this? What core questions do you have? And so on),
2. Invite stories, case studies, and research findings from participants (as well as the leaders), and
3. Move the conversation from the descriptive to the strategic. Develop some proposed next steps (There are some different ways to approach this: How might people in this room work together? How might researchers and practitioners and researchers, or campuses and communities, work together? What research questions does the field need to tackle next? And so on).

Ultimately, the agenda is up to you – we just wanted to be clear about the kind of interactivity and dynamism we were hoping these discussions will achieve.

A second important clarification is that we are not (unfortunately) able to waive the registration fee for learning exchange leaders, nor can we cover travel expenses. Several months ago, we faced a decision with this conference: wait until we landed a substantial grant to fund this gathering or go ahead with a conference in which participants pay their own way. Given the state of the economy as well as other factors, we were concerned that waiting for a grant would mean postponing the conference indefinitely (and perhaps not having it at all). We also felt the time was right for this gathering (hence the conference title). We've worked very hard to keep costs down to a reasonable amount.

Logistically, there are several specific things we are asking learning exchange leaders to do:

1. If you need additional co-leaders, reach out to someone or let us know (most of you are already beyond this stage). In many cases, you volunteered for a session that someone else also volunteered for, and we put you together (Nancy has taken to calling us the national DD "besherts" – Yiddish matchmakers). People are still volunteering, and the teams are not quite set yet. So we suggest you wait a bit longer before moving to #2 and 3;
2. Look at and edit (if you are so inclined) the title and;
3. Work together to develop goals and an agenda for your learning exchange;
4. Reach out to your networks and colleagues to invite them to your session and to the conference in general. We particularly need help approaching people in specific academic disciplines (e.g., APSA)

and in other associations. Think of other people who might be interested in this topic and encourage them to come to the conference.

Last thing: We are working on how, exactly, we're going to connect dots, design next steps, and report out what happens at the conference, and we're open to suggestions. Give some thought to how you might record what happens in your session, and how we can use that on the final day of the conference, and beyond.

Thank you so much for joining us! Please don't hesitate to contact us with suggestions, questions, or comments. We're looking forward to seeing you in July – Nancy and Matt

Appendix C: Learning Exchange Leaders' FAQs

May 20, 2009

Hello Learning Exchange Leaders:

Thanks again for agreeing to lead a session at the **No Better Time** conference at UNH this summer. We're pleased (OK, ecstatic) by the positive response and brisk registrations. We also appreciate your patience in receiving your "orders" as session leaders. We still get special requests daily ("Please schedule my session on Friday" or "Can you move me to a different learning exchange ...") We're doing our best to accommodate these requests, but it's slowed us up a bit with respect to solidifying teams and giving you the green light to start planning.

Here are some questions we think you'd like answered:

How many people are attending the conference?

We're expecting between 225 and 250. Our capacity is 250, and as of today, 195 people have registered. We're running a little betting pool if you want to weigh in. The winner gets a jar of jelly beans, or something. Just to demonstrate how cut-throat this is, Nancy bet 250, and Matt followed with 251. Nice.

How many learning exchanges are there?

45. We received many, many more proposals. In some cases, we steered people to existing sessions. In others, we said OK. We then ran the survey and learned which sessions might be the most and least popular, and based on those results, we combined a few. Our goal is 8-10 concurrent learning exchanges per time slot.

How many people can we expect in our session?

Based on the survey results, we guess that 11 sessions are going to be very popular, so we've put those in rooms that can handle a slightly larger group, about 45 people. Those sessions are:

Embedding deliberative practices in local democracy

The dark side of deliberative democracy

Neighborhood democracy

Community organizing and deliberative democracy

A tech savvy citizenry

Making the case for this work: Improving the way we collect, report, and explain outcomes

Stakeholders, citizens, or both: the interplay between conflict resolution, collaborative governance, and deliberative democracy

Campuses and communities: Better together

Combining, mixing, and adapting methods or models

Using democratic strategies in the classroom

New frontiers for assessment and measurement

All of the other sessions will be in rooms that hold about 25 people.

Some sessions might attract a small number, and we're OK with that. These are supposed to be in-depth discussions about a particular dimension of this work – we think that a few people can be very effective, perhaps more-so than a large group.

To the learning exchange leaders of the sessions that might be oversubscribed: if you would like to keep your group smaller, let us know. We'll think of something.

What happens if the room is packed beyond capacity?

You'll have to send people on to another session. You can probably squeeze in more (we're not sure how many more), but you should only do that if you are willing to work with a larger group and the space is still comfortable.

Based on the survey results, we think this is likely, and we considered moving some sessions to larger spaces. Instead, we decided to keep them small but add plenary time during the conference for sharing/reporting out. There are also options of breakfast roundtables both Friday and Saturday mornings. Participants and/or learning exchange leaders can volunteer to host breakfast tables to involve people who were not at the original session.

How many concurrent “time slots” are there for the learning exchanges?

5 – The math works out. It comes to 8-10 concurrent learning exchanges per time slot.

When is my session scheduled?

The schedule will be posted on line at <http://www.unh.edu/democracy/conference2009/schedule.html>. We’re still working out a few small details. Look for it in a few days.

How long are the sessions?

Sessions range from 90 minutes to 2.5 hours. Check the schedule to see what you’ve got. If you are doing a session that you suspect needs *less* time, please let us know. We’d like to give the longer time slots to those who really need them, if we can.

What if we think we’ll need more time?

We’ve tried to build into the schedule flexible time in the wee-morning hours and after 5:30 pm. You can meet for meals to continue your conversations. You can convene at the end of the day. And for the really, really determined, we have reserved one extra break-out room so that groups who want to forgo the next round of activities can go there (assuming another group hasn’t beaten you to it). Your best bet, however, is to try to accomplish what you want to accomplish in the time you have.

We co-leaders have communicated, and we think the title and/or description of our learning exchange needs to change. Can we still do that?

Yes, but sooner is better than later. The conference schedule will go into print on June 20. We cannot make changes after that date.

We want to post advance readings, links, or a reading list. Can we do that?

Yes, we’re constructing a site for documents relating to each learning exchange. You do not have to post anything, but you can. We’d like to have everything by June 20.

Do you have a “template” for the learning exchanges?

No, but in an earlier memo to you, we made some suggestions on how to structure your time:
Spend some time talking as a group about how to frame your topic (What assumptions are you bringing to this? What core questions do you have? And so on),
Invite stories, case studies, and research findings from participants (as well as the leaders), and
Move the conversation from the descriptive to the strategic. Develop some proposed next steps (There are some different ways to approach this: How might people in this room work together? How might researchers and practitioners and researchers, or campuses and communities, work together? What research questions does the field need to tackle next? “Where are we? Where do we want to be? And How are we going to get there?” or “What, so what, and what next?” And so on).

For the most part, the agenda is up to you – we just wanted to be clear about the kind of interactivity, dynamism, and scope we were hoping these discussions will achieve.

How will the rooms be set up? Can we rearrange the furniture or request a particular arrangement?

There are basically two types of rooms. Seven of them hold 25 people (maybe 30) each if the chairs are arranged in a circle, with no tables. Three of them will have round tables with 8 chairs at each. You can rearrange the chairs in seven of the rooms, but the rooms with the round tables have to stay put. Please note that the rooms with the

round tables are also the rooms that will accommodate more people – so this will, again, affect the leaders of the sessions listed above.

Will we have to produce something to report? What, how, when? What is our role in reporting out?

The short answer is yes. We're working on exactly what, when, and how.

Will there be reporters/recorders in each session?

We've been looking for money to pay graduate students to attend the conference and serve as recorders/reporters for each session, but so far, we've had no luck finding a funder. We're still looking, and we hope to surprise you with your very own graduate student, but for now, the burden rests with you – either to do it yourselves or find volunteers.

What supplies and technology will be in the breakout rooms?

Newsprint on easels (2) (either the paper will be self-sticking or there will be tape)

Markers

Post-its

All of the rooms have **free** wireless access, but anyone wanting wireless access will have to register while in the building with the UNH computer services. That will take a few minutes, so you should factor it in if you want to create a google-groups site or wiki-document, or something like that.

We can make arrangements for you to have an LCD projector, if you want one. Again, you have to let us know soon if you need it.

You probably won't need microphones, but those too are an option. There will be no recording equipment.

We're happy to work with you, if you have other ideas. It just has to be before June 20. We won't be able to do much during the conference.

Will learning exchange leaders have a chance to meet before the conference?

We will be convening learning exchange leaders on Wednesday, July 8, 2009, right before the informal reception, 5:00 – 6:00 pm. This meeting is not mandatory, but if you'd like to get together, meet each other, and ask last minute questions, this will be an opportunity to do so.

What should we do now?

Review the schedule (a separate document) and tell us if there are conflicts we missed (e.g., "I am leading two sessions at once. That might be hard.")

Contact your co-leaders. If you don't have any, and still want someone, please let us know. Work together to develop goals and an agenda for your learning exchange.

Review and edit, if you are so inclined, your title and description.

Get back to us if you want less time than you were allotted.

Get back to us if you're managing one of the sessions listed above, but you want to cap your session at 25 people. (In other words, you'd prefer to work with a smaller group.)

Send us your advance readings, links, resources lists, etc.

Tell us if you want any audio equipment.

Some of the sessions are lean because there are too few people attending who are interested in that topic (e.g., public school administrators). We don't need a lot of any one group, but we need a few to make this a comprehensive conference. Please reach out to "your" constituents – people who are likely to be interested in your sessions – and remind them of the conference.

Appendix D: Learning Exchanges and Keywords

Learning Exchange Titles:

A deliberative framing of (and for) leadership and change in universities
A Session for Students - Participants in Support of Students Welcome
A tech-savvy citizenry: New media for public participation, policy deliberation, and social change
And justice for all: Just how serious are deliberative democracy practitioners and scholars about social, political, and economic justice?
Authentic youth engagement
Building Capacity for All Through Citizen Action and Deliberative Democracy
Beyond the timid university: Rethinking academic professionalism to renew the democratic potential of college campuses
Campuses and communities: Better together
Centers and institutes: What they do and how to create and sustain one
Choosing, combining, and adapting deliberation models and methods
Close the gap!
Communication departments as hubs for teaching and learning deliberative democracy
Community organizing and deliberative democracy: How do they relate?
Creative work, social justice, and deliberative democracy
Deliberative democracy and climate change
Deliberative democracy in federal agencies
Democracy matters: Faculty roles and rewards for engaged scholarship
Democracy, values, and cultural worldviews
Democratic Civic Education
Economic growth and deliberative democracy: Making the connection
Embedding deliberative practices in local democracy (Part I: Defining and measuring embeddedness)
Embedding deliberative practices in local democracy (Part II: Assisting communities and exploring new frontiers)
Embedding deliberative practices in national democracy
Embedding deliberative practices: Updating the legal framework
"Extending" cooperative extension: Promising developments in university-community collaboration
Funding and fostering democracy: What have foundations learned about the field, and what do they want to know?
High impact learning practices
How can federal agencies support local democracy? Lessons and opportunities
Innovations in youth civic engagement
Institutionalizing deliberative democracy on campus
Intergroup and intercultural dialogue, an international learning exchange

Making the case for this work: Improving the way we collect, report, and explain outcomes

Neighborhood democracy: Lessons from the past, possibilities for the future

New frontiers for assessment and measurement

Participatory budgeting in local government

Political theory or practice? How political science and government departments help strengthen democracy

Building Capacity for All Through Citizen Action and Deliberative Democracy

Preparing public school administrators: Fostering democratic leadership

Race and democracy: Latest twists in a long and winding road

Reframing and reclaiming democracy

Renewing the research agenda

Restorative Community Justice

Seeding democracy: Community colleges as community hubs for deliberative democracy

Stakeholders, citizens, or both? The interplay between conflict resolution, collaborative governance, and deliberative democracy

Student democratic leadership education

Students as catalysts for change

Teaching democracy in public administration (PA) schools

Teaching teachers: Deliberative democracy in education programs

Tech ethics: The values questions raised in a digital democracy

The "downside" of deliberative democracy

The kind of scholarship democracy needs: New methodologies in which citizens help direct the goals and methods of research

This just in: The future of journalism in 21st Century democracy

University Network for Collaborative Government

Using democratic strategies in the classroom

Keywords:

- Academic freedom
- Achievement gap
- Advocacy
- Art and democracy
- Assessment and evaluation
- Centers and institutes
- Civic engagement offices/centers
- Climate change
- Collaborative governance
- Communication studies
- Community colleges
- Community organizing
- Community-university partnerships
- Conflict resolution
- Cooperative extension

- Dialogue and deliberation models
- Diversity offices
- Economic growth
- “Embedded” democracy
- Environmental issues
- Engaged scholarship
- Faculty roles and rewards
- Federal agencies
- First-year experiences
- Foundations
- Global democracy
- Higher education’s mission
- Inclusion
- Institutional change
- Intercultural dialogue
- Intergroup relations
- Justice
- Leadership
- Leadership education
- Legal frameworks for democracy
- Libraries
- Local democracy
- National democracy
- Participatory democracy
- Pedagogy
- Political science
- Poverty
- Public administration
- Public capacity building
- Racial equity
- Research and scholarship
- Shared governance
- Social justice
- Student engagement
- Teacher education
- Technology
- Values
- Youth engagement

Appendix E: Opening Plenary Skit

Credits

Actors: NT (Nancy Thomas) and ML (Matt Leighninger)

Authors: NT and ML

Directors: NT and ML

Lighting and editing and publicity and...: NT and ML

Background Powerpoint “bubbles”: David Campt

NT: Hey Matt, It’s Nanc.

ML: (**Bubble**-Oh God, what does she want?) How are you?

NT: (**Bubble**: He’s probably thinking, Oh God, what does she want?)

I’m fine. Can we talk about this conference? So, TDI has already announced it. It’s on our web site. We’ve booked the conference facilities. We’ve ordered the food. Now I guess we have to DO something about it. I’d sure like a partner in crime here. (**bubble**: A TDI-ddc conference)

ML: Yeah, I think it would be a good idea. There’s this small circle of people who identify with terms like “deliberative democracy,” and this much much larger circle of people out there in communities doing DD (without calling it that). It would be great to bring these different sets of people together to talk about our common lessons and challenges. (**bubble**: Aha! DDC-tdi conference) What are you thinking?

NT: Well, I’ve got a few things on my mind. It seems like there’s a lot going on in in the way democracy is being practiced. It would be good to bring folks on campuses up to speed.

ML: There is a lot going on... (list innovations: Obama campaign, melding of online and face-to-face work, budgeting in US, lots of stuff in Global South, huge voter turnout and youth involvement ...)

(**bubble**: Too much information)

NT: Growing TDI membership reflects growing interest. We started with 3 people about two years ago; since we’ve opened up membership about 18 months ago, we’ve grown to nearly 400 members.

ML: (**bubble**: TDI gives a Prius to every new member...) Yeah, that’s pretty impressive.

NT: What’s interesting is to take a look at who is joining: multiple disciplines, offices... No one office or disciplines “owns” this work, which is good. All these disconnected efforts and projects on college campuses. Silos. Did I ever tell you the story about the time I went to a college to help them start a project and ...

(**bubble**: Oh no, not a story)

The flip side, of course, is that because no one owns it, the sum of the parts doesn't add up to much. I call it pointillism (**bubble**: oh no, not the pointillism analogy again), all those small dots on a page, do they blend together to make a clear picture?

ML: You know, that's not all that different from how it looks in the field. There is an awful lot of this work going on, but in a very piecemeal way: school systems trying to get people involved in education issues, city councils wanting input on local budgets, human relations commissions trying to get people to deal with race and racism, community organizers and nonprofit groups and LWV chapters all working on their issues. Most of the people doing deliberative democracy in the same community, let alone the world, don't even know about one another. I guess in the field it's a little like pointillism too

(**bubble**: Oh no. He's going to steal my pointillism analogy!)

NT: Here's the thing. Sure, there's a lot going on, but there's a lot that isn't going on either. Too many students -- citizens in general -- can't tell us how a bill becomes a law, they can't name the five freedoms in the first amendment, and they're not particularly civically literate.

(**Bubble**: she sure is preachy)

And in the meantime, our society continues to face persistent problems, particularly social and economic disparities. And these gaps are not getting smaller, they are getting larger.

For all this attention to citizen engagement, I wonder whether we need to reconsider our strategy. Are we *getting* anywhere?

ML: Yeah, I wonder about that too. It's one thing to improve governance, but to what end? Maybe it's time we (**bubble** slide) stock of these developments and consider future directions for educators and practitioners in teaching, research, and in citizen-centered initiatives.

(**Bubble**: he's so canned)

NT: So Matt, we have no money here. Does that matter?

ML: No, we'll pass this off to those who want to come. You call your people. I'll call mine. We'll get them to design great sessions and make the conference really, really good. That way, we don't have to do anything. (**bubble**: ha ha ha)

NT: OK, that works.

ML: What do you want to call this conference? Given the timing, the growing level of interest, the exponential growth in the field, the innovation on campus and in the field, and all these other things...

(**bubble**: The economy is terrible. Swine flu is everywhere.)

Together: ...It's pretty clear that there's **NO BETTER TIME!**

Bubble: At least summer in New England will be gorgeous. (*We added this. It was pouring out.*)

Appendix F: FAQ for Participants

July 2, 2009

Dear Friends who agree that there's **No Better Time**:

The conference is now just a mere 6 days away and we are excited you'll be joining us!

Based on some "repeater" questions we've received, we've put together this special FAQ for you. Be sure to return to the original FAQ on the web site for things that aren't here. There's information in this note on sessions, your homework assignments (just kidding), parking, meals, travel, sharing rides, weather, registration, directions...

There are 50 learning exchanges on the line-up. Do I have to choose what I want to attend in advance?

No. You choose when you are there, and you do not have to sign up. Just go. That said, we encourage you (plead with you, really) to go to the conference schedule, read the descriptions, and map out your plans A and B in advance. Both Thursday and Friday are packed. We have ten concurrent sessions and about 270 conference participants. Some of the rooms can hold only about 25 people. So you may not get your first choice. We're not trying to turn this into something calling for scalpers and black market tickets, but there will be no time for "shopping." It's the price we pay for an abundance of riches and interest.

What happens if I arrive at the session I want and it's already full?

You'll need to go somewhere else. We've tried to include more than one session on most topics and schedule them at different times.

We've also asked all learning exchange leaders either to seek a volunteer from their group or volunteer themselves to convene a breakfast roundtable on the key themes that emerge from their sessions. You'll have to check the ever-changing breakfast roundtable line-up to learn whether your interest will be covered on Friday or Saturday.

AND, just to be sure everyone gets what they want/need, we've set aside time on Saturday morning for a large-group learning exchange. We've designed a report-out system. We've identified a "Dream Theme Team" of volunteers who will be synthesizing and analyzing what happens in all learning exchanges. On Saturday, you will have another chance to learn about something you may have missed.

Speaking of Saturday, what if I hear the ocean calling me?

We can't tether you to the floor, but we hope you'll stay. This is a working conference. We need all of you to help us craft an agenda for future work. We'll be done at noon. You can take your box lunch to the beach then.

Do I have to do any homework?

No, but many learning exchange leaders are posting advance readings (all optional) and resources and even some session outlines on the web site and on a special wiki site.

You can access the materials on the conference web site here:

<http://www.unh.edu/democracy/readings.html>.

You can access the Wiki page here: <http://nobettertime.wikispaces.com/>

How do I get onto the wiki site?

Here are the instructions for accessing the wiki site:

1. To participate on the conference wiki, you will need to create a Wikispaces account (if you don't already have one), which is very easy.
2. Go to the wiki home page: <http://nobettertime.wikispaces.com/>
3. Click on the "Join This Wiki" tab in the left blue navigation bar.
4. Follow the instructions to create a new account on the next page.
5. You will be asked to set up a username, password and provide your email.
6. Once you register, you will receive an email from Wikispaces and you need to follow instructions in that email to ACTIVATE your Wikispaces account.
7. With your new account info, you will be ready to participate on this wiki easily.

You will find materials organized by the session name.

Is there a ride board for weary travelers?

Check the wiki site. We have 7 students coming in to Manchester airport from Alabama who can't rent a car because they are not 25 yet. Help them out!

I have something I'd like to contribute to certain session(s) or to the conference overall. May I do that?

Yes, you can add to the wiki site. Remember, this is a public space, so anyone can. If you choose to add something, you are responsible for including copyright protections on anything you post.

Will you be selling books at the conference?

You bet. Around 50 books will be on sale through a table set up by the UNH bookstore.

What if I'd like to distribute some written materials about my work, organization, or something interesting?

There will be resource tables set up so, do bring copies. Again, we expect about 270 people. To the extent that you can do it electronically on the wiki, that would be the most environmentally friendly solution.

Remind me. When is registration?

Conference registration will be taking place on:

-Wednesday, July 8th

4:30 pm – 8:00 pm (informal reception from 6-8, and yes, there will be food)

AND

-Thursday, July 9th

7:30 am – 8:30 am (breakfast will be served; this is the same room as the opening plenary;
2nd floor entrance to the Granite State Room)

Click [here](#) for a campus map. See also the attachment for a layout of Holloway Commons and the MUB (Memorial Union Building), where all conference sessions will be held. These will be in your conference materials as well.

Any special instructions about navigating the campus?

Yes, in keeping with our **No Better Time** theme, it appears that every nook and cranny within a mile of our conference is under construction. So entering buildings is sometimes challenging for lack of operational sidewalks. For example, the opening reception and registration on Wednesday will be on the 1st floor of Holloway Commons in the “Squamscott Room.” You’ll need use the Quad Way entrance to the building.

Remind me. How many meals are you covering?

-Wednesday dinner (finger food, light but big enough for a meal) – if you indicated that you will NOT be attending that reception, and now you are, please, please, please let us know by contacting Joanne Lewis-McCoy at 603-860-0863 or via email.

-Thursday, three squares: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

-Friday, breakfast and lunch. You are on your own on Friday night, and there are buses to Portsmouth. You’ll have information about the buses in your conference packets.

Saturday, breakfast and, if you pre-ordered it, a box lunch.

If I am staying in a dorm, do I register first, or go directly to the dorm?

It depends on whether you arrive during one of the two designated registration periods. If you arrive during registration, come there and we’ll tell you what to do. If you arrive at another time, go directly to the dorm.

How do I get to – and get into – the dorm?

The dormitory where people are staying is Mills Hall. It is located in Area 2 of [this map](#). You can check into the dorm daily from 7:00 am – 9:00 pm. If you want to take a look at the dorm, click [here](#). Driving directions are below.

What if I am arriving after 9:00 pm?

The staff person on-duty in Mills can be reached by calling 603-862-2491, and he/she will check you in. PLEASE NOTE: **You cannot get into the building after 1:00 am.** If you arrive late, you’ll have to make other accommodations for that night.

Do I need to know anything more about the hotels?

Both the New England Center Hotel and Holiday Inn Express are located within 5-10 minutes walking distance from all plenary and meeting spaces. The New England Center is on campus: and the Holiday Inn Express is located in downtown Durham, ½ mile from UNH’s campus. For more information on the New England Center, click [here](#). For more information on the Holiday Inn Express, click [here](#).

Tell me about parking?

All cars belonging to dorm residents must be parked with permits in Parking Lot C, off of Mill Road, behind Mills Hall (see map sent as an attachment). The parking attendant booth opens at 6:30 am daily. If you arrive in the evening, after the attendant has left for the day, you may park in Lot C without penalty, but you must pick up your permit at the booth the following morning between 6:30 am – 7:30 am. The parking attendant will have a roster of those who have ordered a permit during registration.

+++ If you still need to obtain a parking permit, you need to get it through UNH Conferences & Catering. Please contact Joanne Lewis-McCoy.

For commuters, there is metered parking on the street during the day.

What can I expect for weather?

We are hoping mightily for some beautiful New England summer weather while you are here, but of course, it's best to come prepared for any eventuality, rain or shine. If you'd like to monitor the forecast for Durham, NH, here's one of our favorite weather sites: <http://www.wunderground.com/>. Just type in "03824" or Durham, NH in the "search" field at the top!

Do you have any more detailed driving instructions?

Yep. You can also check out the original FAQ for other [travel information](#).

[travel directions here]

We look forward to seeing you all next week. Wishing you safe and healthy traveling,

Nancy & Matt

Appendix G: Welcome Letter

Dear Friends:

July 8, 2009

Welcome to Durham, to the University of New Hampshire, and to what we believe will be an informative and exciting conference.

This gathering has been organized jointly by The Democracy Imperative and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium on a wing, a prayer, and a shoestring. We felt we had to pull it off – despite the time we knew it would take, despite the drain on our organizations, despite the economy – because there does indeed seem to be **“No Better Time”** for talking about the challenges and opportunities facing our democracy. The strong response we have received to this conference, in the form of over-capacity registrations, confirms our decision to go forward.

Within the last year, several major trends have become dramatically apparent:

- A sea change in citizen attitudes and capacities, which has been reshaping local political and community action movements for at least a decade;
- The power of those citizen – and particularly youth – capacities as the core ingredient in national, state, and local electoral strategies;
- Growing interest on campuses – without any one obvious “hub” – in deliberative democracy as academic content, pedagogy, and as essential to strong community-university partnerships;
- The increasing use of new technologies to facilitate and accelerate these trends.

And within the field, we have seen much stronger connections between academics and practitioners working on deliberative democracy, and a greater sense that the different models and approaches we use to engage citizens are pointing toward shared goals. We are making progress – and at the same time, our work surfaces new challenges and complications even as it surmounts old ones.

There are two core questions that will guide the deliberations in this conference:

- ***How do we move from diffuse democratic experiments to more comprehensive democratic systems?***
- ***How do we educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in a just and deliberative democracy?***

These questions will surface in different ways in the learning exchange sessions, and we have structured the concluding plenary in order to illuminate the discussions that have taken place and identify key strategies for action.

Thank you for making the sacrifice of time and scarce resources to spend the next few days with us. We are honored to have you here. Please let us know how we can make this conference as rewarding for you as possible. Welcome!

Appendix H: Suggested Ground Rules

What, you thought we could have a conference on deliberative democracy without any ground rules?

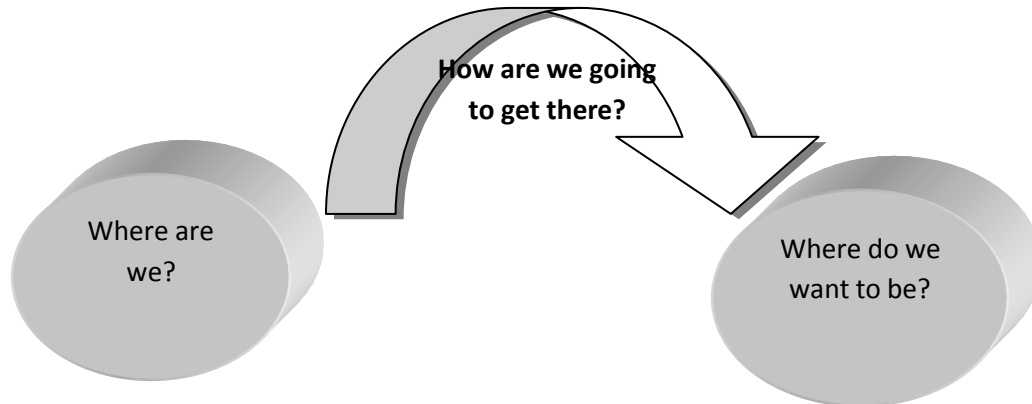
Yes, we're undoubtedly a congenial crew, but ground rules always seem to come in handy. And anytime time is at a premium, it's good to have the option of working with suggested ground rules. We live and work in different places and environments, with different norms for acceptable behavior. Ground rules remind us to think a little more carefully about how we act.

The following suggested ground rules have been distilled from many different deliberative projects and discussion guides, and used in hundreds of places:

- Listen with respect.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself, and not as the representative of a group.
- If someone says something that bothers you, say so, and say why.
- It's OK to disagree but remember, this is a discussion, not a debate.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Unless the group decides otherwise, what is said in the group that is attributable to individuals should be kept confidential. Ideas, themes, action strategies, etc. can be shared.
- Turn off cell phones

Another proven practice is emphasizing that these are **suggested** ground rules. In any small group – your table at a plenary session, for example, or in a learning exchange session – you and your colleagues should feel free to (collaboratively) add to, delete, or tweak these ground rules.

Appendix I: Learning Exchange Leadership Report Sheet__



Worksheet for Learning Exchange Leaders

Dear LE Leaders: We need your help tying together the themes and strategies that emerge from this conference. Please find a volunteer who can listen and answer the questions below. You do not need to answer all of these questions, and there may be things that you discuss that are important but don't necessarily fit below (in which case you can include them in the "comments" below). **Please fill out this form before 6:00 pm Friday night and email it to mica.stark@unh.edu.** We'll use these responses to design the closing plenary on Saturday morning.

Core conference themes (see probes on the back cover of your program):

3. **How do we move from diffuse democratic experiments to more just, comprehensive, democratic systems?**
4. **How do we educate and prepare citizens to be more effective participants in a just and deliberative democracy?**

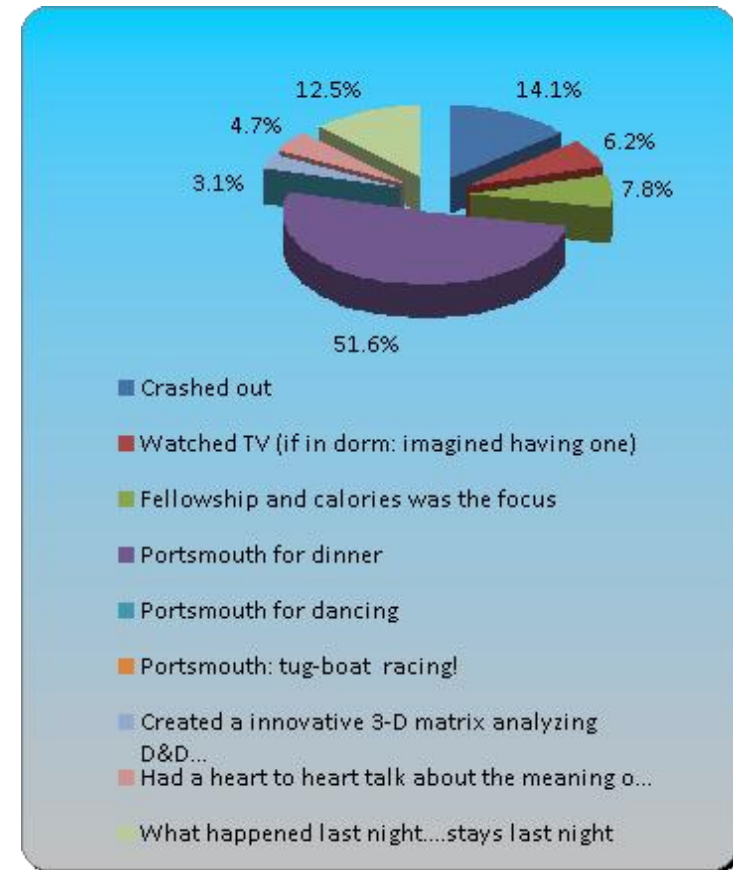
Learning Exchange _____ Reporter _____

- What **innovations, ideas, opportunities, and/or action steps** received the most support among your group?
- In the probes (suggestions, not mandatory questions), we ask about **language, assessment, and technology**. Please share with us anything regarding these topics that resonated with your group.
- In the probes, we ask about **justice, equity, and freedom**. Please share with us anything regarding these values that resonated with your group.
- Were there **people** in your group who were interested in working on these ideas? (If so, please be specific about who and the plans being hatched.)
- Based on the discussion, what do you think should be the **top priorities** for educators and practitioners?
- Additional comments:

Appendix J: Closing Plenary Vote Results

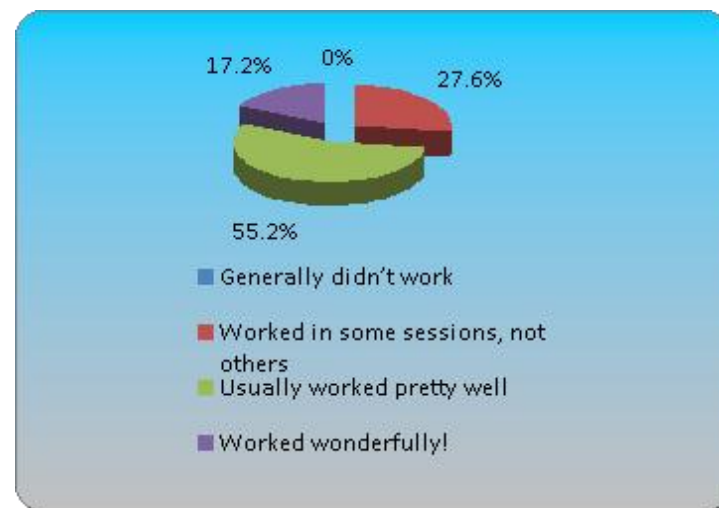
1.) Which of these comes closest to describing what you did last night?

	Responses	
Crashed out	9	14.06%
Watched TV (if in dorm: imagined having one)	4	6.25%
Fellowship and calories was the focus	5	7.81%
Portsmouth for dinner	33	51.56%
Portsmouth for dancing	0	0%
Portsmouth: tug-boat racing!	0	0%
Created a innovative 3-D matrix analyzing D&D...	2	3.12%
Had a heart to heart talk about the meaning o...	3	4.69%
What happened last night....stays last night	8	12.50%
Totals	64	100%



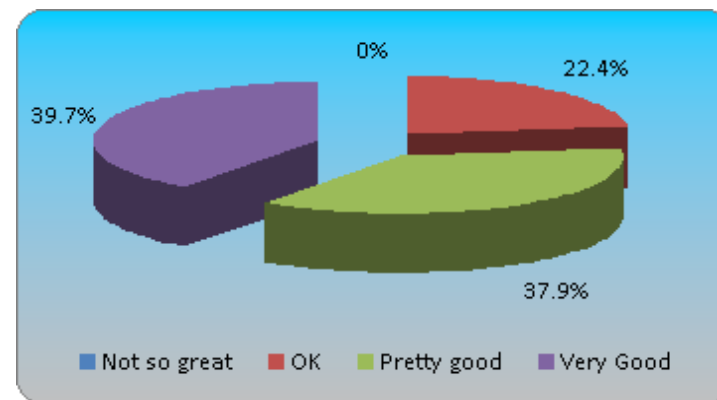
2.) How did you find the Learning Exchange model for information sharing?

	Responses	
Generally didn't work	0	0%
Worked in some sessions, not others	16	27.59%
Usually worked pretty well	32	55.17%
Worked wonderfully!	10	17.24%
Totals	58	100%



3.) How would you rate the plenary sessions?

	Responses	
Not so great	0	0%
OK	13	22.41%
Pretty good	22	37.93%
Very Good	23	39.66%
Totals	58	100%



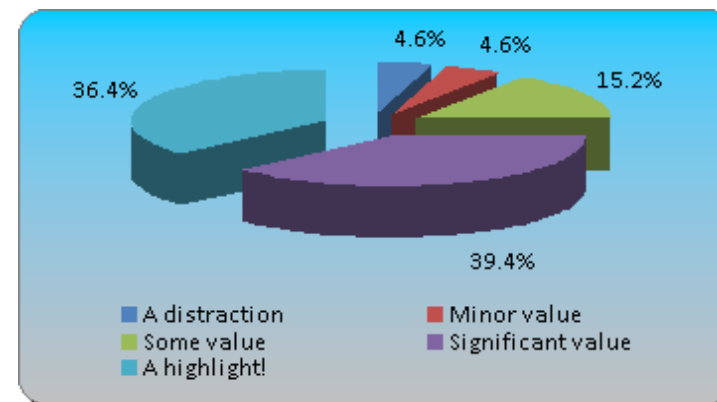
4.) Which did you value most? (up to 3)

	Responses	
Experiencing/learning about new methodologies	18	9.52%
Promoting/getting feedback on my own approach	16	8.47%
Collaborating, finding partners/new projects,...	45	23.81%
Talk to others who approach this work rather ...	24	12.70%
Developing strategies for disseminating/insti...	18	9.52%
Networking with leaders and peers	51	26.98%
Meeting and mentoring newbies	5	2.65%
Hooking up with new colleagues for "stimulati...	7	3.70%
Other	5	2.65%
Totals	189	100%



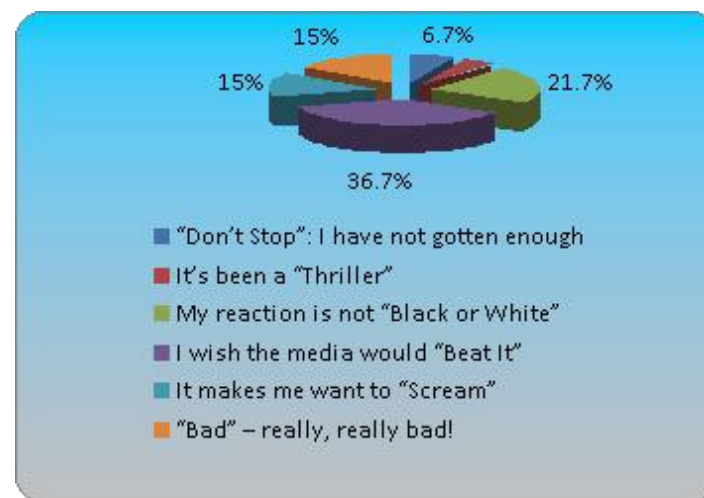
5.) How would you assess the value of the keypads to the plenary sessions

	Responses	
A distraction	3	4.55%
Minor value	3	4.55%
Some value	10	15.15%
Significant value	26	39.39%
A highlight!	24	36.36%
Totals	66	100%



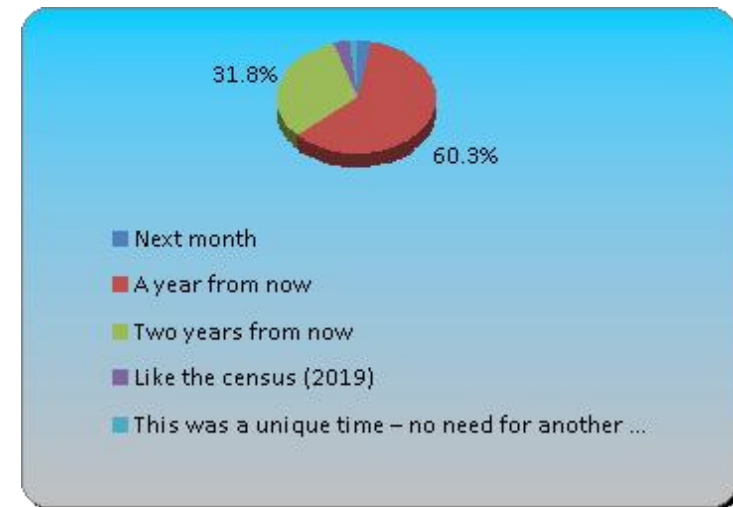
6.) Which of these is closest to your reaction to the amount of Michael Jackson press coverage?

	Responses	
"Don't Stop": I have not gotten enough	4	6.67%
It's been a "Thriller"	3	5%
My reaction is not "Black or White"	13	21.67%
I wish the media would "Beat It"	22	36.67%
It makes me want to "Scream"	9	15%
"Bad" – really, really bad!	9	15%
Totals	60	100%



7.) When should we do this again?

	Responses	
Next month	2	3.17%
A year from now	38	60.32%
Two years from now	20	31.75%
Like the census (2019)	2	3.17%
This was a unique time – no need for another ...	1	1.59%
Totals	63	100%



Appendix K: Survey Results

For an evaluation of the No Better Time Survey Results, [click here](#).