

Reinventing the Town Meeting:  
The History of the Domestic Policy Association  
And the National Issues Forums

Draft by Carolyn J. Macchia  
May 1997

The National Issues Forums (NIF) embraces the idea and tradition of the “Town Meeting.” The NIF has been through its share of growing pains, but the fundamental belief in the public voice endures. The birth of the NIF, fifteen years ago, started with the Domestic Policy Association (DPA). The DPA, modeled after the Foreign Policy Association (FPA), was intended to do what the FPA’s Great Decisions program did for the American international citizenship—“bring the average person” into the conversation about the public policy issues of the time. The new organization would have to define domestic issues, using such topics as social security, inflation, and jobs and productivity.<sup>1</sup> The DPA learned the first lesson of participatory politics, which was citizens were the policymakers.<sup>2</sup>

The DPA would be a grass roots level organization formed by a volunteer network of educational institutions and collaborating national organizations. The DPA would not owe its existence to federal funding but to local groups. The organization believes that a democratic society requires an informed public, and its convening institutions should provide the public discussion that is essential to its soundness. The convening institutions could be more effective if they collaborated in their forums on major public issues. A decision to work together on a selected number of major policy issues each year would materially enhance the quality and effectiveness of their programs.<sup>3</sup>

One concerned citizen was Dr. David Mathews, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Gerald Ford. Mathews, at the end of his cabinet appointment, returned to the University of Alabama as president. He was preoccupied with the relationship, or lack of one, between the government and the citizens. Bob Kingston, Executive Director of Public Agenda Foundation, informed Mathews he had two avenues of exploring this problem. One, he could go through government channels, where there was increasing legislation for establishing agencies; or move ahead with the idea of a citizen’s policy education network.<sup>4</sup> Mathews would hold four conferences in Washington, D.C., to discuss the beginnings of an organization through a series of

---

<sup>1</sup> Harlan Cleveland, “The Making of Policy,” *Kettering Review*, (Summer, 1983): 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Domestic Policy Association, “Planning Report” (October 16, 1981): 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Bob Kingston, “Notes on NIF” (a memo to Carolyn Macchia dated February 28, 1997): 2.

exploratory meetings to examine the question in greater detail.<sup>5</sup> A variety of representatives from public and private institutions attended. Some would come from the American Council on Education, the American Association for Community and Junior Colleges, and the National University Extension Association attended. The non-university representatives included the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies, the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies, and the Learning Society Program of the College Entrance Examination Board. These meetings opened a doorway for the DPA, but the “founding” meetings would not take place until 1981.

Stephen P. Strickland, Chairman of the Task Force on the DPA stated “the Domestic Policy Association would seek to identify, through its individual members and directors, the most critical and substantive issues facing the nation, perhaps on an annual basis, and would seek to build structured, focused, and open dialogue about those issues. The first function of such an association would be an educative one.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Mathews would also recruit the help of Diane Eisenberg. She had run the “The American Issues Forum” for the National Endowment for the Humanities, in conjunction with the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States. This program would continue after the Bicentennial year under the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. “The America Issues Forum” aimed at a type of nationwide dialogue on “We the People,” business, labor, liberty and other topics throughout the year.<sup>7</sup> Dr. Mathews would again recruit Diane Eisenberg to prepare plans for the DPA. Eisenberg called Bob Kingston to meet with Dr. Mathews for the purpose of advising him on the project. Eisenberg stated she tapped into the national organizations that worked on “The American Issues Forums” to form the participants for the Wingspread meeting. Eisenberg continued that Mathews was not asking these organizations anything different than their mandate: to educate the public. She also helped to nurture the network by developing tools and resources, such as the Leader’s Guide, and using teleconferences to connect the public with the DPA meetings.<sup>8</sup> The “founding” meetings would take place at Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin. The Prospectus was never finished since Mathews was appointed the president of the Kettering Foundation.<sup>9</sup>

\*\*\*After a general consensus about the mission of the DPA was accepted, a plan for a series of conferences to be held throughout the year as a test run for involving citizens in the formation of public policy unfolded. The program was called “Public Action and Social Change,” a phrase taken from David Mathews’ 1976 address to Phi Beta Kappa, a national honor society. The program would run from November 1979 through May 1980.<sup>10</sup> The first conference participants gathered at the University of Alabama, followed by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Aspen Institute, and Transylvania University. The conference identified the obstacles: how a partnership with the government could be formed so the citizens were provided a forum for enlightened discussion of domestic issues, how the discussions could become part of a

---

<sup>5</sup> Annabel Dunham Hagood, “Full Circle: The Domestic Policy Association” (1983): 86.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen P. Strickland, “Report of the Task Force on a Domestic Policy Association.” ...and Social Change Book (1980): 15-16, quoted in Annabel D. Hagood, “The Domestic Policy Association Full Circle (1983): 88.

<sup>7</sup> Kingston, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Diane Eisenberg, Telephone interview with Carolyn Macchia, (May 12, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Hagood, 87.

national organization, and how the results would be reported. Their conclusions served as mandate for the Consortium on Public Policy Education to proceed in its mission of identifying new directives for citizen participation activities.

\*\*\*In the spring of 1979, the National Consortium for Public Policy Education (NCPPE) was founded. The purpose of the group was to “improve the processes by which the public educates itself on policy issues so that it might better act upon them.”<sup>11</sup> The objectives of the NCPPE were to find a way of improving how citizens inform themselves, how to get institutions in helping the government in informing the citizens, and to improve the current forums by creating non-special interest forums. The Consortium devised specific strategies to involve universities, citizens, independent groups, and federal agencies. The Consortium would develop and implement an “institution” to train and educate federal officials and citizens. The Consortium would also create a grass roots domestic policy “association” to provide the non-special interest forum for the analysis of policy issues. The “association” would function as a catalyst for better public insights and new choices. Assistance would also come at the university level in the form of civic ethics and civic values classes to help prepare the next generation for public service.<sup>12</sup>

Mathews resigned as the President of the University of Alabama and moved to Washington, D.C. where the University had an office. This became the home of the National Consortium for Public Policy Education (NCCPE). Mathews stated “the consortium is the sum total of our institutional efforts.”<sup>13</sup> The Johnson Foundation agreed to sponsor four conferences, between May and September 1981, to plan the DPA at their Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin. The NCCPE newsletter of winter 1981, stated “the new association is intended to establish a process for annual dialogue on domestic policy issues...a process that will serve to increase citizen understanding...”<sup>14</sup> In the same newsletter, Mathews announced his resignation from the University of Alabama to become the president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation on February 1, 1981. His personal interest and commitment to the Consortium and the DPA would continue.

The DPA began to take shape at the Wingspread Conference Center. There were representatives from twelve organizations present including: William Boyd, President of the Johnson Foundation (host), David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation (chair), Diane Eisenberg (organizer of the meeting), Thetis Reavis (instructive experience- Foreign Policy Association), and Bob Kingston (sustaining influence). At Wingspread, they agreed this new venture would not be another symposium for expert opinion or an occasion for partisan politics. The venture would provide a public forum, like a New England town meeting, “where concerned citizens could discuss specific issues, air their differences, think them through, and begin to identify the common ground among them.”<sup>15</sup> The participants, from the AFL-CIO and other organizations, determined the viability, and considered the structure and establishment of the DPA.

---

<sup>11</sup> The National Consortium for Public Policy Education, “Public Policy Education” (year unknown).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>13</sup> The National Consortium for Public Policy Education (1980), quoted in Annabel D. Hagood, “The Domestic Policy Association: Full Circle” (1983): 89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The National Issues Forums, “The Domestic Policy Association: A Report on its First Year,” 10.

Kingston stated along with these groups, the community college leaders and the university extensions/adult education leaders had experienced the public forum discussions through the NEH's "public programs." These were non-academic and issue oriented.<sup>16</sup> William Boyd and David Mathews urged the participants to think of themselves as "designers, inventors, and strategizers" in their considerations of DPA.<sup>17</sup> It would be a new "Town Meeting" for the 1980's.

Participants agreed that the DPA should:

- encourage the largest possible participation of national, regional, state, and local organizations;
- be open to everyone interested in thoughtful discussion;
- choose issues general enough to allow flexibility for local programming, but specific enough to engender common debate;
- reflect sound scholarship in its materials which should be easily understood by a wide range of leaders;
- not be an advocacy organization.<sup>18</sup>

The annual meetings at Wingspread were used to train moderators and convenors. The sessions were not only to train but to inspire individuals from around the country to develop National Issues Forums based in their institutions. Bob Kingston, Margaret Holt, Len Oliver were a few who led sessions on such topics as choice work and how to moderate a forum. Jon Kinghorn, a Program Officer at the Kettering Foundation, became the one who maintained the sense of camaraderie and generated the sense that the participants were joining a network. He did this through telephone and face to face conversations, answering questions, and showing up at local training sessions. David Mathews was also there to lend his seriousness, his inspiration, and his energy to keep the meetings going.<sup>19</sup>

David Mathews and Daniel Yankelovich, PAF, believed the public needed to be better informed on public policy issues. The citizens should be able to move from a top of the head response to a better informed opinion through the use of forums. To the meeting Yankelovich brought a very clear theory of what it took to engage the public in policy questions. He believed that the public needed their options laid out in relation to their concerns rather than the expert's solutions. Second, the public needed time to work through together the pros and cons of the issues; and finally the public wanted assurance that someone "in authority" would listen to their views.<sup>20</sup>

The first step in bringing the issues to the citizens was to create a medium that they could understand. Daniel Yankelovich and his colleagues at the Public Agenda Foundation (PAF) provided advice about what citizens needed to understand issues and how that need could be met. After the upcoming issues for the year were decided, PAF prepared a magazine-length review of each issue. The booklets explained the urgent issues and presented an unbiased opinion of the costs and benefits of each. The issue books would be designed to help the people understand and begin to reach an informed

---

<sup>16</sup> Kingston, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Recorder's Report, "Domestic Policy Association Planning Conference I," (Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, Wisconsin, May 18-19, 1981): 3.

<sup>18</sup> "Domestic Policy Association is Formed," Wingspread Journal (Winter 1981-1982): 4.

<sup>19</sup> Kingston, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3.

response. The issue books were written by Keith Melville and the issues were identified and framed by Bob Kingston, Jean Johnson, John Doble, and others. The realization that most citizens have no basis for making informed choices caused PAF to include the cost/benefit analysis. The National Issues Forum wanted to provide a place where citizens could discuss the issues as value choices and how the issues affected them personally.<sup>21</sup> The issue books allow for citizens to examine all sides of a policy.

John Doble, former vice president and director of research at PAF, said they believed the public would deliberate on an issue by using their values and opinions which were consistently logical. He, along with others, learned that their expectations had been unrealistic in that the public would make a considered judgment quickly. Ballots were used to help show the change in the public's opinion. Doble went on to state that the pre- and post ballots did not really show a change in the public's opinion. The changes were subtle, complex, and made gauging the public's opinions harder.<sup>22</sup> The public had to relearn how to be a citizen and to be partner with the institutions of their society, and to develop the sense of what it's like to be a citizen that can trust its institutions.<sup>23</sup>

Keith Melville believed in retrospect the issue books were a successful achievement. He stated that without the issue books there would be no anchor for the NIF discussions since they provided a common definition of problems and solutions. The act of framing the issues was instrumental since it provided the task of looking at issues to deciding choices for the books. The various editions of the booklets served as primers for the public discussions. Without them, the public could get sidetracked to other issues. The books provided the background information that the public needed to discuss the choices and provided an unbiased opinion of an issue.<sup>24</sup>

The DPA was the reincarnation of the "old town meeting." It is a program of locally initiated forums and study circles that bring citizens together for non-partisan issue discussions. Three topics are chosen each year to discuss, which range from abortion to social security. There is no perfect solution to the problems but alternatives are presented and discussed in trying to decide what is best for the nation and the individual. This is called deliberation, the process of making choices. Civic and educational organizations sponsored the forums or study circles. The key concept is "community ownership." Each participating organization assumes ownership of its NIF program, proceeding in its own independent fashion to adopt a forum and tailor it to its community context.<sup>25</sup> The DPA changed its name to the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) on January 27, 1989.<sup>26</sup> This ended the confusion between the DPA and the FPA.

The culminating event of the NIF year was the Presidential Library Conferences. The Presidential Library Conferences wanted to demonstrate to the public they would be doing something directly in the public's interest and were not just monuments to a former president's administration.<sup>27</sup> The Presidential Libraries were chosen to provide the link

---

<sup>21</sup> National Issues Forums, 12.

<sup>22</sup> John Doble, telephone interview with Carolyn Macchia (March 3, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Idid.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Melville, Telephone interview with Carolyn Macchia (march 20, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Estus Smith, "Summer Public Policy Institute Work Plan," (memo dated December 9, 1988, Dayton, Ohio): 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Maxine Thomas in letter to Thomas Baker, Jr. (dated September 25, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> David Mathews, "The Overview of the DPA" (paper presented at the DPA Convenors Workshop, Johnson Foundation, Racine, Wisconsin, July 21-23, 1983): 6.

between forum participants and the nation's policymakers. The Conferences would give the former leaders a better understanding of the public's perspective and the public a better understanding of the complexity of the policymaker's decisions. Former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter co-chaired the first conference in February 1983. President Ford stated that good public policy depends on the quality and depth of information, not the volume. He continued with the idea that there should be quality information out in the grass roots.<sup>28</sup> The government was expanding at every level and left the public feeling as though the government was more remote and less responsive to them. This frustration was shown in the low voter turn outs and in the distrust of the government. Ford believed the public must be well informed to aid their public official in choosing alternatives. He continued saying the DPA was such a mechanism to broaden the public's knowledge of issues that affected the national well-being. The DPA allowed elected officials to see how the public thought and their willingness to modify their decisions.<sup>29</sup>

The next Presidential Library Conferences were held at the LBJ Presidential Library (1984), JFK Presidential Library (1985), Gerald Ford Presidential Library (1986), and the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (1987). The Conferences would be dedicated to demonstrating how citizens and policymakers should talk to one another and the progress of the citizens working through the issues to find a common ground. The policymakers are also looked at (for) how they delineated the policy choices. The meeting would be an opportunity to assess the quality of the public discussion of the issues.<sup>30</sup> The sessions provided thoughtful dialogue, raised questions, and addressed alternatives and solutions, which evolved through informed discussion. Their opinions would come under close scrutiny during the forums but would emerge sharpened after thoughtful consideration.<sup>31</sup> All the Presidential Library Conferences were successful because they enable citizens and policymakers to create dialogue about issues that face the nation and its inhabitants. The meetings showed the citizens' conviction that they want to be heard and participate in community dialogue.

There were problems with the conferences as the organizers would find out. Bob Daley, who was part of the inaugural plan for the Presidential Library Conferences, commented on the difficulty of getting elected officials to the libraries due to the remoteness of the locations. This dictated the birth of a new idea—Washington Week. The conference enabled the officials to attend since the program was in their back yard. Their involvement with the public did not serve the larger purpose and visibility of the NIF. Daley further commented that the Presidential Library Conferences became local events, not national events. He hopes in the future to generate the ability to excite people to become involved in the Presidential Library Conferences. For the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Libraries are going to be convenors in their local communities.<sup>32</sup>

Washington Week consisted of NIF representatives who would meet with Congressional and White House representatives to discuss the results of the forums and

---

<sup>28</sup> Gerald R. Ford. "The Gap in Public Policy Making." *Kettering Review* (Summer 1983): 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> David Mathews, "An Introduction," (paper presented at The Second Presidential Library Conference: The Public and Public Policy, Austin, Texas, March 1984):4.

<sup>31</sup> Vicki Simpson, "Dee Dee Murphy's Observations from JFK" (memo dated April 19, 1985): 19.

<sup>32</sup> Bob Daley interview with Carolyn Macchia, January 28, 1997, Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio.

their local experiences. The event provided an opportunity for leaders to talk and listen to the NIF representatives. These activities were designed to highlight the informed conversation between the citizens and the policy officials. The conversation was important to the decision making process and to public policy education because it was a necessary step to build and sustain public understanding of complex issues facing the nation.<sup>33</sup> David Mathews stated at the Washington Week Conference in 1984 that “the first and most essential act of government is talking.”<sup>34</sup> The significance of these meetings, both the Presidential Library and Washington Week, permitted “talking” between the two groups and the “feedback” about how the citizens felt about the major issues facing them. The people move from a “top of the head” response to a more informed response. The NIF enables people to receive a fresh and carefully designed opportunity to learn and confront the major issues.<sup>35</sup>

During Washington Week the participants received a drum and fife band, a reception at the National Archives, and a two or three hour video program based on events of the week on the Learning Channel. Participants were coming back to enjoy the conference year after year. But as time elapsed, certain kinks became apparent. Members of Congress were condescending to the public and the participants were not reluctant to lecture the congressmen. The White House session was filled with complaints, not deliberative discussion between citizens and policymakers. Another attempt for deliberation between the two groups was at a “town meeting” held at the National Press Club. This would bring the work of the forums to the attention of the elected officials. The event was lively but did not show the impact of public deliberation.<sup>36</sup>

As the Presidential Library and the Washington Week Conferences extinguished their lights, a new showcase for the DPA/NIF programs would be launched. The National Forums attempted to blend both of these events and add some unique features. The Forums continued the tradition of the previous five years of sharing the outcomes of the forums and the experiences of the participants. These forums provided public dialogue about issues that affected the nation and solutions that were good for everyone. This would be considered deliberative democracy in action. Deliberative democracy is “the practice of engaging together to define our goals as a community, our place within that community, and the practices that must direct it.”<sup>37</sup> As participants warmed to the idea of sharing stories with each other and not directly with the policymakers, the National Forums soared. Participants and policymakers met in the following years but the dialogue for a strong “town meeting” that would close the “Gap” was sparse. Hodding Carter, moderator of the National Town Meeting, stated after such a meeting that the people and the policymakers must continue “talking” and move ahead. Panelists stated the journey to close the “Gap” was attainable and had an idea of how the dialogue should sound. Others believe the policymakers were not convinced of the NIF process.

---

<sup>33</sup> Domestic Policy Associations – National Issues Forum, “Washington Week Program and Videoconference,” (1986): 11.

<sup>34</sup> Cicely d’Autrement, “A Report from Washington Week,” 91985): 3.

<sup>35</sup> The Closing Leadership Conference of the National Issues Forum, (draft paper).

<sup>36</sup> Kingston, 7.

<sup>37</sup> National Forums ’89, (invitation for the National Forums Conference, Washington, D.C., April, 1989): 2.

But what was most important was the continuation of the dialogue between citizens and the policy officials.<sup>38</sup>

Bob Daley commented on the loss of the Presidential Library Conference, Washington Week, and the National Forums. He believed the biggest casualty is the loss of networking for the NIF family. The network was built on the ability to interact and share experiences with others.<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the Presidential Library Conferences, Washington Week, and the National Forums were replaced with the program, "A Public Voice." This television program was introduced to communicate the fact and the quality of public deliberation in the National Issues Forums to the Washington establishment. The series would be produced by Milton Hoffman Productions and largely funded by the Kettering Foundation. The series showed contrasting segments from taped forums and clips from the political debate of an issue and how the media treats the topic. "A Public Voice" then presented a group of congressional leaders and members of the Washington press corps responding to the presented contrast, in their own pattern of deliberation.<sup>40</sup> Mathews believed that there should be three elements; the public, the citizens, and the media, in the program. These three elements continue today in the series. The program is an effective way to introduce NIF and public deliberation to a few politicians every year. "A Public Voice," a staple of the NIF agenda, complements the issue books every year.

In 1987, the Kettering Foundation sponsored the Summer Public Policy Institute (SPPI) at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The SPPI would be the comprehensive orientation/training program for convenors, moderators, and others interested in the theory and practice of the NIF. This program helped local forums to take seed and flourish. The objectives would be to expose participants to the evolution of NIF, its historical and philosophical context in a democratic society, to assist in the participants' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of NIF and how it is tested and honed through the practices of the local NIF. They would learn about choice work, the connection of values to positions on issues, and the importance of deliberation in identifying the public's perspective. The program helped increase the knowledge and skills of the participants and encouraged networking and sharing amongst each other to reinforce the desire to become involved in public deliberation.<sup>41</sup>

While at Miami University, the three issues for the year were discussed. The curriculum consists of the theories of politics, NIF theory, how the NIF issue books are developed, the forum experience, and the role of the moderator and convenor. In the preceding days, the participants would watch a video and attend issue analysis (to create an understanding of choice work and how an issue was framed in public terms), home-rooms and study-circles (small groups of 15 or less to understand deliberation), and plenaries (an introduction to the total story and how the pieces fit together). There would be special sessions for the advanced NIF leaders and theory group which begin a day or two prior to the start of the program. Over the next two days the "novice" or less experienced NIF participants attend workshops designed for their level of experience.

---

<sup>38</sup> Carl Feller, "Critique/Assessment of NF '90," (memo dated April 3, 1990): 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Bob Daley, interview with Carolyn Macchia, Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio (April 1, 199\_).

<sup>40</sup> Kingston, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Kettering Foundation, "Public Policy Institutes," (meeting notes dated November 22, 1988, Dayton, Ohio): 1-2.

These workshops and classes continue for the next few days and ended with a session that would reinforce the importance of the NIF, and why they should feel good about their work.<sup>42</sup>

This curriculum was not always perfect and has been refined through the years. Estus Smith, the first director of the SPPI, commented on the first year. He stated the program was a mess, ill-equipped, and based on college courses. Smith and others thought that everyone could teach what they knew to the participants. The SPPI showed the divisions, not a sense of a cohesive unit, of what NIF was about.<sup>43</sup> The second and third years were much better. There was a curriculum which included ideas about deliberation, politics, and choicework. Smith pointed to the first public polity institute away from Miami University, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The citizens of this institute went out to the classroom, and into the streets and opened the forum to the citizens of the city. They were able to have a forum where people worked out their thoughts and said what they felt. The classrooms had created a false sense of a forum where everyone was polite and said the “right” things.<sup>44</sup>

In 1994, the SPPI was no longer the regional institute for the NIF but considered an independent institute. The SPPI split into the Public Policy Institute (PPI) and the Public Policy Workshop (PPW). The PPIs became the local “training centers” for the general public where they would learn about the NIF. The PPIs used the old SPPI curriculum. The PPW became the “graduate school” for the teaching faculty and for seasoned veterans of NIF. They attended workshops and lectures on public deliberation. The PPW is located at Miami University and the PPIs are located in places like Topeka, Kansas, and Blacksburg, Virginia.

The PPW’s curriculum consists of sessions on:

- What is Politics? – encourages participants to look at a broader view of politics, invites reflection on the qualities they want in a political life, and to evaluate the role of deliberation. This session also lays the foundation for “Hearing a Public Voice”;
- Choices – shows there are choices of purpose and direction, not of specific solutions, and distinguishes the basis for the choice from the “values” of a belief system;
- Moderating for Deliberation – distinguish the kind of moderating needed to promote a set of principles for when and when not to intervene in a forum;
- Hearing a Public Voice – a synthesis of what people have learned from other forums and shows that deliberation helps us move toward a shared sense of direction;
- Using the Outcomes of Forums to Inform Officeholders – builds on the other sessions and sets the stage for comparing forums to let the policymakers know what the public is thinking.

The information taught in the PPW are the building blocks for identifying the connecting purposes, which allow public actions to reinforce one another.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Estus Smith, “Summer Public Policy Institute Work Plan,” (1988): 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Estus Smith interview with Carolyn Macchia, Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio (March 28, \_\_\_\_)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> David Mathews, “NIF Guide,” (memo dated July 11, 1995):1-7.

From conception of the NIF to today, the fundamental beliefs of public deliberation are still passed on to the participants. The impact of the NIF is seen in numerous studies and interviews. John Gastil's study of "Democratic Education and The National Issues Forums" concluded that NIF promoted an increased sense of one's political judgment, deliberation, and action. There was also an improvement in how the participants understood and presented theirs and others' political views.<sup>46</sup> Chip Hamlin studied the results of the local ownership of forums in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He concluded that by allowing the community ownership, the number of forums have grown and that the network of civic and educational organizations builds social capital.<sup>47</sup> Kim Downing reported in the "National Issues Forums Network Study" that NIF convenors believed the program "encourages voice and discussion", "allows individuals to understand other people's views", and "increases awareness."<sup>48</sup> Judy Stang, a first year local faculty member at the University of Delaware PPI, was intrigued by how fast NIF gets people to focus and saw it as a way to peacefully discuss important issues about the infrastructure of society.<sup>49</sup> There are professors and high school teachers using the issue books to educate students on how to be citizens who participate in the deliberation process. One such professor is James Ford, an associate professor at Stillman College, who focuses on different issues each semester.<sup>50</sup>

Entering the fifteenth year, the NIF network is still rebuilding and creating new avenues as the new participants join in the public discussion. When the small group of pioneers gathered in 1981, they envisioned a network of people deliberating about important issues. Their concept of educating the public about issues and the importance of participation in forums still thrives in communities across the nation. The National Issues Forums is a strong and viable source of public deliberation. As long as the public and the policymakers continue to talk and move forward, the National Issues Forums program will continue to grow.

---

<sup>46</sup> John Gastil, "Democratic Education and The National Issues Forums," (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1994): 3.

<sup>47</sup> Chip Hamlin, "A Grand Rapids Narrative," (unpublished manuscript for Kettering Foundation, \_\_\_) 33.

<sup>48</sup> Kim Downing, "National Issues Forums Network Study," (study prepared for Kettering Foundation, April, 1996): 32.

<sup>49</sup> Kettering Foundation, "Compilation of 29 Interviews: Conducted Summer/Fall 1995 and the NIF Connections Found Within and Among These Various Individuals and the Organizations They Represent," (1995):9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 15.