



www.nifi.org

The Risky Business of Economic Security: A Framework for Deliberation

Shaken by the recent recession, Americans have serious concerns about the economy. What can and should we do to shape it in a way that offers us—and our children—a more secure future? We have choices, though none of them are easy. Each option offers advantages as well as risks. If we pursue stability, for example, it may be at the cost of economic agility.

Each option is driven by differing views about what we hold most valuable. Each represents a general direction and suggests a number of actions that can be carried out by different actors. Some of those actions are listed below.

The Options	What should be done?	What might be compromised?
<p>Focus on stability of income and employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens could increase savings and cut down on borrowing. • Lawmakers could raise taxes on businesses that move their production facilities to other countries. • Employers could offer incentives to promote long-term employment. • The government could pursue trade policies that protect US industries. • Community organizations could offer courses on managing family finances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option may put the United States in a less competitive position globally. • Changing jobs—and even careers—may present individuals with better opportunities for growth and success than hanging on to the jobs they have.
<p>Focus on competitiveness and innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens could pursue new training or education to cope with changing job markets. • The government could enact more comprehensive free-trade laws, and open immigration policies. • Businesses could prioritize hiring new talent over seniority. • Tax laws could create incentives to stimulate innovation and new-business start-ups. • Community organizations could develop innovative “idea incubators.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaker industries will die and new ones may not fully employ all displaced workers. • When new and disruptive enterprises thrive, their success may cause other unwanted changes in the local economy.
<p>Focus on building healthy, prosperous communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens could strengthen their communities by supporting local businesses. • Towns could develop policies that promote sustainable agriculture and local food security. • Citizens and civic groups could work to improve community connectedness—the sense that we have each others’ backs. • Businesses could use local vendors and suppliers. • Government could provide incentives for small-business start-ups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local economies may become marginalized in a global environment. • Communities determined to hold large national box stores at bay may miss out on opportunities for economic development and prosperity.

About This Issue Advisory

The US economy is slowly recovering from the battering it has endured in recent years, although Americans remain deeply uneasy about what lies ahead. We have difficult choices that are best made by considering options for action in the light of what we hold most valuable. Should job security be our highest priority? Do we want the freedom to change course and take chances when opportunities arise? Can we find ways to exercise more control over the economic forces that affect our lives?

This issue advisory is designed to support deliberative forums that can help us reach some collective judgments on the direction we want to take to gain economic security.

In productive deliberation, people examine the advantages and disadvantages of different options for addressing a difficult public problem. Each option is rooted in a shared concern, proposes a distinct strategy for addressing the problem, and includes roles for citizens to play. Equally important, each option presents the drawbacks inherent in each action.

One effective way for people to hold deliberative forums on this issue:

- Share ways in which the concern for economic security has affected them or their families.
- Consider each option, one at a time, making sure to explore the trade-offs that each option would require. Give each option a fair hearing.
- Review the conversation as a group, identifying any areas of common ground as well as issues that still must be worked through.



This issue advisory was prepared for the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. National Issues Forums issue guides are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. These organizations use the books in locally initiated forums convened each year in hundreds of communities. Recent topics have included US politics, the national debt, America's role in the world, and immigration. For more information on the National Issues Forums, visit the website: www.nifi.org.



Founded in 1927, the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio (with offices in Washington, DC, and New York City), is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute that studies the public's role in democracy. It has provided issue guides and other research for the National Issues Forums. For information about the

Kettering Foundation, please visit www.kettering.org or contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799. Phone: 1-800-221-3657.

Copyright 2015

National Issues Forums Institute