

Much of the National Civic League's work in communities was developed over the same period in which policymaking authority and responsibility were being devolved from the federal government to state and local governments. As communities adapted to the challenge of meeting new obligations, the need to change how they did business became apparent. With its stress on governance and the development of new roles for citizens, businesses, governments, and nonprofits, NCL's approach to community building and citizen democracy found a receptive audience.

Of course, NCL was far from alone in stepping up to help communities understand and improve how local political decisions are made. The past several decades have seen impressive growth in the number and sophistication of community-oriented movements and local intermediary organizations, some of which were described in volume 90, number 4 of *NCR*, published in 2001. Collaborative processes and consensus-building techniques are now in widespread use in communities across the country.

While this reinvigoration of civic engagement is encouraging, it is clear that much remains to be done. The resources and political will required to ensure homeland security, improve educational outcomes, and provide access to affordable health care must be drawn from all sectors of society.

Political reform is like repairing a leaky boat while on the water—you can't replace everything all at once. Our belief at NCL is that sustainable political reform begins at the state and local levels. But this focus is not meant to preclude engagement with national politics. As we in the reform community seek to reengage citizens and renew political institutions, we must develop ways of more effectively connecting political activity at the local level with ongoing national debates. This issue of *NCR* takes up this goal and contains articles on a number of important reform ideas and issues.

One of the most promising ways to improve how public decisions are made is to engage more citizens in the dialogue surrounding community decision-making processes. Forums for public deliberation are one of the best means of convening local dialogues on political issues that affect communities across the country. In a pair of companion articles in this issue, practitioners from the Study Circles Resource Center detail the conceptual underpinnings of deliberative dialogue and describe the outcomes of several statewide deliberative projects. An article by officials of the Montana Consensus Council complements this perspective and presents an analysis of public participation in environmental decision making in Montana.

Foundations also have an essential role to play in broadening the reach and deepening the impact of democratic discourse in the United States. The

president of the Kettering Foundation, David Mathews, offers his ideas on how philanthropy can support deliberation to further democracy's mission of self-rule expressed through collective action. Accurate and reliable information is a prerequisite for deliberation, and the importance of keeping citizens informed is given an interesting twist in an article by Sean P. Treglia of the Pew Charitable Trust. Treglia calls for cooperation between the nonprofit sector and commercial media to make the case that high-quality news broadcasts can be economically successful. Finally, passage in San Francisco this spring of a proposition endorsing the use of instant run-off voting underscores the importance of voting reforms for widening participation.

The great Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter memorably linked the productive capacities of capitalism to a process of creative destruction. Paraphrasing this notion, we can identify creative adaptation as the wellspring for the productive forces of democracy. Democratic renewal is a work in progress. Over the years complacency and narrow self-concern have attenuated the bonds of community in our country. Our present circumstances in the continuing disquiet of this new and never-to-be-innocent century make unfamiliar demands on us. While the rich associational life that characterized our past can provide some inspiration, it does not present a model that is adequate to the new challenges we face. We must develop new, more inclusive forms of community that will support the responsibilities of self-governance to which we are obligated. We think that the ideas expressed in the articles composing this issue have a valuable role in this collective endeavor.

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