Deliberative democracy at the local level

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Deliberative Democracy at the Local Level
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Introduction

This thesis addresses the role that deliberative democracy can play in local politics. Deliberative democracy is a theory that posits discourse among free and equal citizens as a route to better public policy outcomes, a more just society, the fostering of social capital, and the cultivation of civic virtues. While both liberals and civic republicans have endorsed the theory, it stands in direct contrast to the economic theory of democracy. This view equates citizens to consumers, whose private preferences are to be aggregated by the political system. Votes are the equivalent of capital in the market, according to the economic theory of democracy. For deliberative democrats, this overlooks the moral obligations citizens have to one another and the benefits that can come out of critical thinking on public policy issues. As many experiments have shown, once people have to defend their views in public, they often come to change their mind.

I argue that deliberative democracy will yield the best results at the local level. Forums held in cities and towns have the advantage of civic associations that can take a stake in deliberation and the simple fact that it is easier for people to come together. Moreover, deliberation can serve as a means for bringing diverse groups of people together to reaffirm their shared identity as members of a particular community. I also maintain that it is effective at developing civic virtues such as trust, respect, cooperation, and other forms of civic engagement. As people take a greater interest in public policy and those in their community, they are likely to become better citizens.

After providing an overview of existing theoretical approaches and the outcomes of many studies and experiments, I describe an original experiment in deliberation conducted in Richmond, Virginia. The original intention of the experiment was to compare in-person versus
online deliberation for local nonprofit leaders, but the online portion ultimately failed. Therefore, I focus on the in-person forum and describe its deliberative quality, its effect on civic virtues, and whether participants changed their minds on the question they discussed. I also consider the substance of what was said and, finally, why no action ultimately emerged from the discussion. Since my guiding research question was whether deliberation would be a mobilizing tool, this was of concern.

I conclude by drawing connections between deliberative democracy and leadership. I argue that there is a substantial leadership challenge to organizing forums and carrying out what the participants decide. While the need for leaders seems counter to the deliberative ideal of equality, good leadership is essential for deliberation to make a difference. People lead busy lives and any single individual is unlikely to organize a forum. Interestingly, though, there may be an opportunity for a new theoretical approach that would have elected representatives serve as the leaders who organize discourse and implement what citizens decide.
Chapter 1: Deliberative Democracy as an Ideal

Origins and Meaning

Deliberative democracy maintains, as its name suggests, that the political participation of citizens should not be limited in a representative democracy, such as the United States, to merely voting. Although no one disputes that citizens are free to deliberate in American society, deliberative democrats argue that citizens *ought* to come together to discuss and decide upon public policy issues. Moreover, they argue that their collective decisions should influence and shape public policy. Thus, deliberative democrats generally agree that in some combination and to a certain degree government, citizens, and organizations should create forums for discourse. The reasons offered for why citizens should deliberate include ethical considerations, its epistemic value, the fostering of social capital, and the cultivation of civic virtues.

While it has emerged as an important theory, deliberative democracy remains relatively amorphous. It also faces the arduous task of responding to critiques from not only the political science community, but also social psychologists, behavioral psychologists, sociologists, rhetoricians, scholars of gender, and those from numerous other disciplines. To say the least, proposals for expanded citizen deliberation are receiving considerable interdisciplinary attention. While there is debate on the subject, it is necessary, in any case, to describe more fully what the theory entails.

Jon Elster defines deliberative democracy as “decision making by discussion among free and equal citizens…” (1). Extended further, Jürgen Habermas maintains that the collective judgment of the people, confined by deliberative norms, is the sole source of legitimacy for public policy (Gutmann and Thompson 9). Gutmann and Thompson are also concerned with the moral dimensions of discourse. Indeed, they argue that deliberative democracy is “the most
justifiable conception for dealing with moral disagreement in politics” (10). Considered together, deliberative democracy is a public reasoning process that has the unique capacity to generate legitimate outcomes and procedures, especially on questions of morality.

Political philosophers have argued that a just society demands discourse among citizens on matters of public policy. Henry Richardson claims that, “Within a system in which we rule ourselves, a due respect for the autonomy of our fellow citizens does indeed require that we be willing to offer one another reasons and arguments and to attend to the ones that others offer” (83). Thus, proponents of deliberative democracy insist that the public square must be more than a free forum for people to say what they think; the process of public policy-making should occur through public reasoning. In turn, a completely new set of demands are made. Citizens are not merely free to speak, but are obligated to listen, reflect, reason, and collectively seek truth. “...[T]he liberal ideal of individual autonomy that underlies democracy... requires that we reason with each other” (Richardson 83). If not, citizens fail to respect each other as autonomous and important. Of important note, though, the process of actually coming to a deliberative decision and implementing the group’s decision remain unclear and are under heavy debate.

Robert Talisse further explains the concept of deliberative democracy and its implications. “Just as scientific inquiry is a cooperative effort directed primarily toward the resolution of specific problems, deliberative democratic citizens are to reason together with the objective of arriving at workable solutions to political problems” (107). Thus, citizens are expected to participate collectively in critical thinking about policies. In the process, they must provide reasons, listen to others, ask questions, and eventually draw conclusions. Talisse provides an account of the reasonable deliberator as one who “is able to recognize relevant considerations, to weigh contradicting considerations, to listen effectively to new considerations,
to be critical but open to objections, to articulate her own ideas and suggestions, and to revise her beliefs when reasons suggest that she do so” (113). As deliberators, citizens are expected to enter into public discourse with what are described as “deliberative virtues,” including traits such as honesty, modesty, charity, and integrity (Talisse 113). At the most basic level, citizens need to be well-intentioned, open-minded (i.e. willing to change their beliefs), and in possession of the requisite skills of deliberation, namely to think, speak, and listen.

Talisse provides moral claims for both why people ought to deliberate and how people ought to deliberate. On question of why, Diana Mutz accounts for two crucial reasons. She points out Mill’s argument that those in error ought to be given the opportunity to approximate truth and Habermas and Arendt’s argument that exposure to additional views promotes more thorough deliberation and personal reflection (8). In a majoritarian system in which citizen deliberation is neither required nor encouraged, many minority views will not receive the opportunity for public consideration. This can be troubling for multiple reasons. First, policy decisions affecting fundamental minority interests may not reflect important cultural differences. Accordingly, “plural deliberation can ground concrete political action aimed at securing greater democratic fairness among members of diverse but fluid collective identities” (James 82). Even when there are antagonistic relationships, the mutual benefits that arise from discourse provide at least some hope for reconciliation. Another assumption is that a polity that fails to account for multiculturalism will legislate in ways incompatible with one or more cultures, but which might have been easily amended by a deliberative process.

James D. Fearon offers a straightforward list of six reasons why a group might want to discuss a policy:

1. Reveal private information
2. Lessen or overcome the impact of bounded rationality
3. Force or encourage a particular mode of justifying demands or claims
4. Help render the ultimate choice legitimate in the eyes of the group, so as to contribute to group solidarity or to improve the likely implementation of the decision
5. Improve the moral or intellectual qualities of the participants
6. Do the “right thing,” independent of the consequences of discussion

Presuming that participants have both an incentive and the desire to be truthful, sharing relevant information that is uniquely held or not universally accessible would seem to increase the likelihood of a superior outcome. The challenge of bounded rationality is that individuals’ ability to conceptualize complex issues is limited, so deliberation offers the possibility of heightened collective rationalization. These two ideas constitute cognitive dimensions of deliberation.

The remaining four encompass normative and pragmatic considerations. Fearon’s third point implies that raw self-interest will not suffice when justifying one’s preference to others. While no one disputes the freedom of any citizen to express his raw self-interest, it is unlikely to be a very successful approach to persuading others. Instead, deliberative norms, such as reciprocity, equality, and respect, are likely to be followed and arguments will possess a “public-spirited” (Fearon 55) character. One argument for deliberation is that without it, people struggle to move beyond their own self-interest. Even if citizens enter into deliberation narrow-minded and egocentric, the process itself might lead to significant reorientation of beliefs. In other words, the discovery that reasons will only be deemed acceptable if they are in the public interest can have the beneficial effect of leading people to care more about the common good.

Skipping temporarily over the fourth point to address the final two, the fifth and sixth points are moral claims about public reason regarding its effect on both individuals and collective decisions. The very process itself is educative in nature. Critical thinking skills, vital
to full participation in society, are limited by one’s natural abilities and education. In turn, if deliberation fosters the kinds of skills needed for the fulfillment of a better life, it posits a critical secondary educative benefit to society. Moreover, if deliberation helps individuals clarify values and moral issues, it expands the moral imagination of participants and is likely to aid in their conception of “the good life”. Such optimism, however, must be tempered by the role that inequalities, in terms of education and otherwise, might have on deliberative outcomes.

Considering public policymaking, collective decisions can be seen as legitimate and reasonable only if opened up to public discourse. Otherwise, they will reflect the arbitrariness of preconceived notions and preferences, untested and unexplored in the public sphere.

Coupled with the fourth point, regarding legitimacy, solidarity, and implementation, deliberation may help redeem the loss of social capital that has been lamented by many (Putnam, 2000). Putnam argues that declining civic engagement, such as membership in civic organizations, threatens democratic self-rule. Content with individual rights, citizens have not only weakened their informal bonds to one another, but have participated increasingly less in basic, non-taxing elements of representative democracy such as voting. If Americans are truly “bowling alone,” how can their political preferences reflect an empathetic consideration of others and an understanding of human needs within society? Simple aggregation, then, further lacks legitimacy in a society in which societal engagement is limited. Forums for deliberation propose a solution, or at least an improvement, in that they allow those who disagree to feel more comfortable with decisions, affirm everyone’s commitment to society, and present information to participants about how people feel and think. As an example, inequalities in distributive justice, education, quality of life, and health care may be perpetuated because those on top are not confronted with the circumstances facing those less well off. The building of social capital
across demographic lines, with forums for deliberation as a contributor, poses substantial benefits to citizens and may lead to a more just society.

An Outline of Deliberation

Deliberative democrats have been forced to confront the criticism that theirs is an incomplete theory of democracy. At the end of the day, critics maintain, the votes must still be counted. Put another way, citizens deliberate, and then what? “If all the reasons have been exhausted and deliberation does not lead to unanimity, some people must behave against their reasons” (Przeworski 142). Early on, theorists sought to avoid this question by focusing on the shortcomings of modern representative democracy and the possible benefits of citizen discourse. While consensus remains an ideal, most deliberative theorists accept the fact that voting will be the likely conclusion to most discussions.

This does not imply, though, that all decisions made via aggregation following deliberation can be seen as legitimate. Deliberative theorists generally adopt the liberal principles of freedom and equality as preconditions for legitimacy. Talisse, in fact, contests liberals’ fears that deliberation can lead to the subjugation of individual rights by emphasizing the way in which deliberative standards reaffirm crucial rights (119). Notably, freedom of speech is not only protected within deliberative forums, but encouraged, as well. Moreover, proponents of public reasoning aim to ensure the equality of participants and viewpoints. Echoing Gutmann and Thompson (1996), this is acceptable to the extent that participants express views amenable to free and equal deliberation. While deliberation is regarded as truth-seeking and not all viewpoints will be received equally by others, no special status should be afforded to any citizens or specific positions for reasons that should be obvious. Under ideal deliberation,
arguments will be received according to the facts and reasons offered in support. In this way, deliberation fulfills the requirement that it be reasonable. Additionally, by engaging those from disparate backgrounds, citizens can overcome cultural assumptions and stereotypes.

The moral claims regarding deliberation have come from a variety of perspectives. For those who emphasize the importance of social relationships among citizens within a community, a respect for others requires that we provide reasons for our views. Such a practice reaffirms everyone’s commitment to one another as citizens and helps those who disagree understand the reasons why. If we believe our views are justifiable and correct, there should be little hesitation about airing the arguments behind them in public. The discovery that a viewpoint is arbitrary or based on narrow self-interest would only support the notion that public deliberation ought to occur prior to collective decision-making.

Another moral component to deliberation involves collective consideration of “the good life”. Since its inception in ancient Greece, philosophy has posed the question of how humans ought to live. Public discourse on philosophical questions addresses what Dryzek (1993) describes as noninstrumental rationality, or deliberation on ends. To the contrary, he is critical of instrumental rationality, which involves consideration of the best means to achieve previously established ends, because of its propensity to instill a sedentary bureaucracy and technocracy that is unresponsive to citizens’ demands (Ibid.). It also has the effect of reducing civic engagement and, in particular, the public’s belief in the importance of deliberation. If the aims of government are predefined or restricted to the platforms of a handful of parties, why should ordinary citizens get involved in public discourse? A focus on instrumental rationality promotes the idea that citizen deliberation is either unnecessary given smarter and wiser bureaucrats or that it is simply unlikely to make any real impact in an entrenched political system. Thus, even those
who criticize politicians and bureaucrats are left feeling impotent about their ability to effect change. Citizen deliberation, then, hardly seems like an attractive proposition in these circumstances.

Public reasoning on ends can be formative if we accept that not all citizens enter deliberation as intellectual equals and that the outcome of deliberation can be greater than any single person’s pre-deliberation view. The first point emphasizes the differences in the capacities and abilities of citizens even if we agree to treat each other as political equals. For many, public reasoning on ends can be instructive for those who lack the ability to do so individually. While this implies exposure to manipulation and deception, the commitment of citizens to a justifiable conception of deliberation would mitigate this risk. As to the second point, a sort of Gestalt view of discourse, the convictions and principles that emerge out of deliberation are likely to be distinct from any one person’s initial views. This conception of public reasoning, even on moral issues, is interactive, fluid, and dynamic. Over the course of deliberation, citizens will stimulate each other’s moral imagination and develop viewpoints that no individual would have adopted without communicating with others.

It is also argued that the outcomes of public discourse will have an epistemic quality superior to the mere aggregation of preferences. In this respect, the value of deliberation is its ability to lead participants to the truth. This becomes more evident when the nature of the question to be addressed is clarified. While disagreement on moral grounds is inevitably a component of political life, value pluralism does not imply that public reasoning is useless. In fact, social relationships help clarify our own identity and deliberative forums would ideally create new bonds that would force participants to rethink their moral and pragmatic conceptions of public policy. Within a society with more forums for and a greater commitment to
deliberation, people may begin to care more about others and look toward the common good. This notion of citizens seeing their fate tied together complements the communitarian vision of a more collectivistic society.

On some questions, value pluralism suggests pragmatic considerations for public policy questions. In particular, policies with direct implications for cultural subsets of the population must reflect knowledge of such groups. To provide an example, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 had good intentions, but tried to impose a corporatist model on a culture unaccustomed to corporations and failed (Dryzek, 1990). While resolving the areas where competing value systems clash is difficult, choosing not to listen to cultural minorities can have disastrous implications. Thus, even when citizens agree on a particular end, such as assisting Alaskan natives, it is vital that any measures taken reflect a descriptive understanding of their culture. Of course, the best way to gain such an understanding is through public discourse. Dryzek highlights the aforementioned policy because it indicates the shortcomings of a well-intentioned, but rationally bounded bureaucracy. It is fine to accept that people are different and can come to different conclusions on issues, but ignorance on alternative viewpoints and minority cultures implies policies that will fail unnecessarily.

Apart from the truth of conclusions on policy matters, one of the epistemic components of discourse is the sharing of evidence and reasons. Since no single individual has control of all available evidence and perspectives, those who participate with an open mind and empathy, as well as a willingness to abandon unfounded convictions, will come to see deliberation as a collective learning process. We are all biased by the particular experiences we have had, so exposure to those in our community with a different set of experiences can be illuminating. For example, if my children attend a thriving public school, I may not understand why others in my
community are calling for improvements to the education system or even have a clear sense of the challenges faced in other schools. Moreover, were I a young parent with children in grade school, I may not grasp the hardships faced by senior citizens. On this note, Robert Goodin’s proposal, called “democratic deliberation within,” entails “site visits’ and other activities that will help citizens see for themselves ‘what life is like in the places and among the people [their] actions will affect’” (Talisse 129).

Beyond empathy and an awareness of the circumstances others face, public deliberation offers citizens the opportunity to present facts, such as statistics, that will inform collective decision-making. Under ideal deliberation, therefore presuming that citizens have no subversive aims, deliberative forums entail the collection of all relevant facts, figures, and reasons, as well as socioemotional contributions such as stories, to be assessed for both quantity and quality. In this light, decisions made following citizen deliberation will be more reasonable.

New technologies available online, such as collaborative commons platforms like Wikipedia, provide anyone with web access and basic computer skills the opportunity to access detailed information. While the Internet has made it easier for people to share ideas, there is not the same “fact-checking” filter on web resources that exists in the mainstream media. Particularly for those already inclined to think a certain way, there are enough ideological think tanks and highly motivated individuals to present the “facts” subjectively, according to preconceived notions about public policy. Prior to any concern about misinformation, though, it should be examined whether people are motivated enough to seek information in the first place and with what level of interest. Margolis and Resnick conclude that, “Information is no substitute for education and motivation” (22). However, in response to the argument that the public is not smart enough to participate in a deliberative democracy, Talisse holds that “public
nonparticipation and ignorance is due both to a lack of institutional sites of proper deliberation and to a prevalence of forums that promote vicious deliberation” (127). Thus, at least to him, the question to be framed is not whether citizens are capable of effectively deliberating, but how to design the deliberative institutions that will develop effective deliberators.

Many deliberative democrats view public reasoning as a way to foster social capital. Kymlicka explains that,

[T]he very fact people share the experience of deliberating in common provides a tangible bond that connects citizens and encourages greater mutual understanding and empathy. In a deliberative society, we would seek to change other people’s behaviour only through non-coercive discussion of their claims, rather than through manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, deception, or threats. (291)

Thus, apart from the resolution of actual political conflicts, the fact that people agree to deliberation is likely to posit certain benefits. While tempering the optimism of deliberative theorists, Mutz finds that prejudicial attitudes are reduced through intergroup contact (64). Furthermore, she maintains that the “intimacy of cross-cutting associations” and “awareness of rationales for oppositional views” can lead to “support for civil liberties of disliked groups” (67). While “hearing the other side” is by no means a cure-all, increased exposure to other groups is likely to promote tolerance. For the handicapped, as well as sexual and racial minorities, there may be reluctance to engage in discourse, but it can yield positive outcomes. As people are removed from homogeneous company, they discover ways in which they are similar to others while accepting the ways in which they fundamentally differ. Deliberation, then, has the potential to progress beyond the protection of individual rights within liberal democracies by instilling in citizens acceptance and support for the rights of others.

Deliberative democracy is also capable of fostering social capital through its perceived legitimacy. For those convinced of their viewpoint, the fact that a majority has ruled otherwise is
wholly unsatisfactory. In particular, “a marginalized minority group,” Kymlicka argues, “will accept the legitimacy of decisions that go against them, but only if they think their arguments and reasons have been given a fair hearing, and that others have taken seriously what they have to say” (291). While accepting that real world deliberations will be imperfect, they offer the best opportunity for the concerns of minorities to be addressed. The principle of free discourse insists that minorities are not merely allowed to offer their perspectives, but that they should be encouraged to do so.

Deliberative democracy also offers a renewed sense of civic virtue. The need for such a renewal is evidenced by the economic theory of democracy, which equates political parties to corporations and citizens to consumers whose votes are like profits. “To win elections, parties try to offer the most attractive candidates and the most popular programs. Citizens, following the analogy, are consumers whose votes the parties are trying to gain” (Dagger 105). This view treats individual preferences as fixed and leaves the government in a neutral position regarding what is good or bad. Ultimately, citizens will simply try to maximize their own utility, sometimes by avoiding politics altogether, while parties seek to design platforms that will win the most support. While this conception makes minimal demands on citizens, “there is no room… for the ethical, integrative, or educative dimensions of citizenship” (Ibid.). For deliberative democrats, the citizen as consumer is anathema. It is pure aggregation, and arguably at its worst.

Dagger proposes civic virtues that could have an important impact on political culture. These include the possession of autonomy, tolerance, fair play, trust, cooperation, reciprocity, a strong civic memory, and active political engagement (Dagger 196-197). By encouraging citizens to adopt these virtues, the public sphere can be rekindled and citizens will finally
exercise self-government. Importantly, though, deliberative forums can do a great deal to cultivate civic virtues. Even for those who leave much to be desired in these areas, public reasoning can develop critical thinking skills, expand knowledge, provide awareness of alternative views, and stimulate the moral imagination. In this regard, citizens need not be saints to enter into public discourse.

In consideration of the theoretical reasons that have emerged for civic discourse, deliberative forums ought to play a larger role in American democracy. As compared with pure aggregation, decisions that arrive out of consensus or at least following full and open discourse seem to have a higher moral value. At the very least, there are compelling reasons for asking citizens to justify their claims to one another and allowing minority viewpoints to be heard. Moreover, apart from irresolvable differences that will certainly arise, it is reasonable to expect that exposure to other perspectives at least ensures that public policy does not fail unnecessarily when common understanding and consensus was possible. Although deliberation can perhaps have negative outcomes like group polarization (Sunstein, 2007), for those who view preferences as intractable, the worst-case scenario is that deliberators wasted their time.

Additionally, though, the very act of engaging in deliberation, apart from the epistemic quality of the outcome and its moral value, may increase civic virtues and inspire further civic engagement in other areas. Presumably, if a citizen becomes involved in a deliberative forum on a particular issue, he or she is at least more likely to take a concerted interest in its implementation. Ideally, this would have a spillover effect into other areas of political life. Regarding civic virtues, the very process of deliberation forces participants to think critically and develop various skills, such as public speaking. Were deliberation to become institutionalized in
our political structure and a common element of our lives, as some deliberative democrats argue it should be, it could have the effect of producing smarter, more capable citizens.

Thus, there are many theoretical reasons for why deliberative democracy might be desirable. Also of importance, though, is considering what problems the theory can address. After all, if there is nothing wrong with the status quo, why promote an alternative vision of democracy? The particular problems a deliberative theorist identifies, moreover, help clarify his or her framework for judging when deliberation is successful and how it ought to be formally structured. For those issues involving individual citizens, theorists cite citizen apathy, a lack of civic virtues, and insufficient political knowledge as amenable to deliberation. Regarding communities, many deliberative democrats hope the theory can build social capital and foster collective mobilization once decisions are made. Others, however, may wish to address the domination of politics by parties, private interests, and elites, or give a greater political voice to unheard minorities. In any case, there are many reasons why one might favor discourse, but there are connections between the various theoretical frameworks proposed and the societal problems that theorists and practitioners hope to address via deliberative democracy.
Chapter 2: Forums and Deliberative Practice

Deliberation at the Local Level

Having outlined deliberative democracy as a theory, we go on to consider what deliberative forums should look like, what level they will work best at, how tied they should be to government, and what existing empirical research on deliberation says. I begin with the second question because it is my view that deliberative democracy is particularly well suited to political life within local communities. Accordingly, my hypothesis is that deliberative forums at the local level will produce better outcomes than those at the state or national level. Of course, this leaves open-ended the considerable differences between large cities and small towns. I will attempt to address this consideration later.

Local deliberation is uniquely situated to strengthen social capital, apart from whether it gets matters of policy right. “If [political] participation often occurs close to home, in neighborhood associations, town meetings, district elections, and the like, it should prove especially effective strengthening the bonds of community” (Dagger 197). While random samples at the national and state level to resolve public policy questions has been endorsed by many, such forums are unlikely to forge social capital among participants (although it is conceivable they would foster the civic virtue of political participation). At the local level, the shared circumstances faced by residents are more easily accessible. While substantive differences remain, hence the need for deliberation, the citizens of Richmond, Virginia are more likely to mutually understand one another and relate to a shared context than national deliberators from opposite ends of the country. In an ongoing deliberation at the level of a city, testing claims made by others is possible by simply going out into the community and observing the state of affairs.
for deliberative interaction” (Ibid.). This suggests the need for deepening the bonds that citizens have at more local levels of government and perhaps expanding the use of deliberative opinion polls nationwide to ensure that government policy responds to the results of reasoned discourse.

From a leadership perspective, local deliberation is more likely to incorporate and influence elected officials. As Fishkin pointed out, citizens’ perception of their relationship to leaders on larger scales is largely illusory. In a city, though, they can more easily demand that their mayor and city council respond to the outcome of their discussion. In many cases, elected officials can even be participants in or observers of citizen discourse. At the local level, civic organizations can be called upon to encourage their members to engage, as well. To the extent that social capital exists within society, it is primarily oriented at the local level within such organizations and they are therefore a resource for deliberative forums within cities and towns.

*Designs and Proposals*

Perhaps the most notable example of a deliberative institution, supported by many empirical studies, has been James Fishkin’s deliberative opinion poll. Deliberative opinion polls offer a compromise between the demands and dangers of direct democracy and the unresponsiveness and partisanship of representative democracies. Fishkin’s proposal brings together “politically equal participants,” reminding us of the importance of that liberal ideal, to serve “as a statistical microcosm of the society” (1991, p. 93). His proposal is compelling because it offers an answer to the following question: what would citizens decide if they had to engage with one another before casting their ballots? Acknowledging the drawbacks to aggregation that treats individual preferences as fixed, deliberative polling of this sort demands that citizens investigate issues more deeply and hear what their fellow citizens have to say before
making a final judgment. His work has demonstrated that people are willing to change their minds following participation in a deliberative forum.\(^1\) While I am skeptical of national deliberation, Fishkin’s model is among the best.

A proposal from John Gastil would create priority panels for congressional elections. According to his proposal, the Federal Election Commission would gather a random sample of four hundred citizens. Congressional party leaders would select important bills for consideration and present witnesses to the panel. Ultimately, the panel would select the ten most important pieces of legislation. They would then seek to write neutral summaries of the bills and the FEC would provide the official and unofficial (for candidates who have not formally voted) votes of each candidate on the selected issues to the public through detailed voter guides (Gastil, 2000).

This is an interesting kind of deliberation because it involves deciding what is important rather than good. This does, however, raise the question of whether citizens will actually refer to the guides and if they will be able to understand the proposals and the various positions on them.\(^2\) A more expansive proposal, also from Gastil, would create state level legislative panels. Their role would be to continue the work of priority panels. Following the selection of ten pieces of legislation by the priority panel, ten groups of fifty citizens within the legislative panel would debate the merits of each piece of legislation. Subsequently, each group would vote and record their rationale, with dissenting opinions reflected, as well. Then, candidates’ positions would be recorded and voter guides would be disseminated noting how often and when candidates agreed with the citizen panel (Ibid.). The guide would also include brief overviews of the citizens’ reasons for and against each measure, as well as the views of the candidates.\(^3\)

\(^1\) See http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/
\(^3\) An example of this can be found in Gastil, p. 152-153.
A third proposal would establish local advisory councils to review contentious legislation before a city council. An initial review panel of fifty citizens would decide if the matter deserves citizen deliberation or if it should be returned for a vote. If it moves forward, a second panel of fifty citizens would consider the legislation. Were two-thirds to decide for or against it following deliberation, their decision would be recorded and sent for a vote by city council. Otherwise, it would return for consideration by the city council as “undecided”. Finally, at election time, matters resolved either for or against by citizen panels would be listed in a voter guide along with the official and unofficial votes of all candidates (Ibid.). Together, these proposals would implement deliberative forums at multiple levels of government and should at least be more fully explored.

Others, such as Beetham (2005), have considered the use of similar panels under the heading of citizens’ juries. Held gives an overview of these proposals,

As in deliberative polls, deliberation is guided by expert witnesses and the testing of argument. The aim of citizens’ juries is for lay people to reach a consensus on the matter at hand, and for these findings to be fed into formal decision-making procedures.... [T]here is considerable evidence that governments... are interested in making use of them to help create an informed environment for public debate and political decision-making. (249)

In fact, Gordon Brown has experimented with this model in the UK, calling it a “new type of politics.”\footnote{See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/6980747.stm} He even claims that citizen juries changed his mind on cannabis and casinos. In any case, it would be informative to observe how these juries would function if given formal decision-making power. While for some this might be affording citizens’ juries too much power, we already do trust juries for deciding criminal cases that often involve life or death questions.

Robert Dahl, meanwhile, recommends a “‘minipopulace’ of a thousand citizens who would deliberate on a single policy issue for more than a year” (Fishkin, 1991, p. 97).
Interestingly, the group would never physically meet, but would stay connected and communicate electronically. The most interesting component of his proposal is the longevity of deliberation. It raises the question of how the course of deliberation might be different when given considerable time to review and assess a policy. Dahl’s proposal is particularly compelling given technological innovations that could easily facilitate the communication of his “minipopulace”. Today, a group of this variety could use any combination of asynchronous text, synchronous text, or VoIP. Even if the participants were never to meet, webcams and video conferences could be used for group deliberation sessions. The group could even publish a blog so that outsiders might track the course of their deliberation. Were they to comprise a random sample of citizens, Dahl’s proposal might create new experts on policies whose collective will would be more palatable to a public that often, and rightfully so, distrusts expert opinions.

Ackerman and Fishkin (2004) propose Deliberation Day as a national holiday that would serve as a fundamental institution of deliberative democracy. It could be used for both pre-election analysis of candidates and consideration of critical issues. A typical assembly would include roughly five hundred participants. To ensure broad participation, citizens would be compensated $150 for the day. The media would be called upon to report findings and present debates for citizen consideration. Ackerman and Fishkin maintain that this would encourage a deeper understanding of the dimensions of public policy, foster civic virtue, and develop a public-spirited citizenry.

Weeks (2000) analyzed four large-scale trials in three cities: Eugene, Oregon, Sacramento, California, and Fort Collins, Colorado. Each case dealt with balancing a budget. Public participation in all four trials was aimed to be broad, informed, and deliberative. Each dialogue was far from ideal, but included prolonged opportunities for participation and led to
greater legitimacy for legislative outcomes. Through questionnaires and workshops, citizens both expressed their preferences and engaged in creative tasks, such as trying to resolve the budget themselves. This generally influenced participants’ conception of citizenship and awareness of the challenges involved in balancing a budget. In turn, many who had formed a “no new tax” contingency wound up favoring millions of dollars worth of new taxes when they related such revenue with specific services (370).

Weeks’s study emphasizes the pragmatic nature of citizen deliberation and how expanding civic engagement can deepen and legitimize representative democracy. For legislators, the deliberative forums proved a valuable way to move beyond an impasse. For citizens, new information and explanations of technical language shifted their pre-deliberation preferences. This empowered city council to take bolder steps and politically risky actions, such as cutting modest amount of public safety funding (369). The only downside to citizen involvement on these budgetary issues was its expense given the scope and longevity of the discussions. I would argue, though, that given their response to this kind of civic discourse, citizens could accept incorporating the costs into the budget.

Grogan and Gusmano (2005) considered state-level deliberation on Medicaid in Connecticut across five criteria for evaluating deliberative structures: equality, inclusion, openness, publicity, and purpose and style. After interviewing participants, interesting findings emerged. One that particularly stands out is the ability of publicity to shape the type of deliberation that emerges. Grogan and Gusmano observed that high publicity led to a more educative discourse, effectively one in which participants simply learn about an issue, whereas low publicity led to instrumental reasoning on particular legislative or political measures to be taken (132). This suggests that as participation expands, there are challenges to progressing
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beyond merely educating those who attend. They also found support for open participation, even late in the deliberation, although greater benefits are realized by incorporating citizens earlier on in the process. Finally, deliberative practitioners should be cognizant of “the style and purpose of deliberation” because they determine “how and what topics are discussed and what the outcomes of a deliberation will be” (143). Apart from publicity, openness can also influence style and purpose, so the way that deliberation is structured should account for this. Openness is distinct from publicity and outreach because it refers to whether “every stage of the decisionmaking process is deliberative,” as opposed to when decisions have already been made and open discussion is a mere “token exercise” (131).

Gutmann and Thompson (1996) offer two revealing accounts of deliberation on health care. They are especially attuned to the ethical dimensions of discourse, particularly as such results differ from pure aggregation. In Oregon, an initial attempt to rank the treatments it would cover under its Medicaid program according to cost-benefit analysis produced an outcry over its moral implications (17). Subsequently, citizen deliberation influenced legislators to reconsider its rationing scheme and find more money for treatments that legislators could not justifiably leave unfunded. Additionally, the entire episode showed that the poor citizens who would actually receive the aid had been left out of the process (18). Beyond the general deliberative norm of inclusivity, the absence of the poor from this dialogue was particularly troublesome.

A second case involved the question of whether an HMO called DesertHealth should cover PUREPAP digital rescreening. Such a procedure would be costly and only provide an improvement of seven percent versus manual rescreening (145). Gutmann and Thompson suggest that DesertHealth was unlikely to have covered it. Regardless, the decision requires some resolution of the conflict between financial concerns, superior testing for cervical cancer,
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and the opportunity costs of covering this procedure versus something else. In this regard, medical experts are depended on to provide analysis on the likely medical outcome for someone who has cancer but does not receive a PUREPAP test. Moreover, information is needed about what other procedures could be considered to compare their benefits and costs to PUREPAP. Gutmann and Thompson endorse extensive reasoning and the inclusion of former patients to ensure that companies have a more difficult time being greedy at the expense of health care.

Jenssen (2008) studied budgetary processes in two municipalities in Norway. Her expectation was that “small and homogeneous democracies, like local communities, will favour reason-giving and arguing processes” (85). She cites as two possible reasons the decreased importance of political parties and distinctive feature of consensus characteristic of local political debates (Ibid.). Her findings indicated that meta-consensus on aims and procedural legitimacy better facilitated budgetary debate. Jenssen’s study highlights the importance of social and institutional context when deliberative theory is applied to particular communities. Since prior agreement on norms and identity was a feature of successful deliberation, this supports Dagger’s depiction of a strong civic memory as a positive trait and calls into question Rosenberg’s ideal of collaborative discourse. Perhaps, though, both points would prove unmerited in light of comprehensive research.

Fung and Wright, along with contributions from other leading democratic theorists, consider four real case studies of “empowered participatory governance” (EPG). They considered neighborhood governance councils in Chicago, habitat conservation planning in multiple locations in the United States, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and Pachayat reforms in West Bengal and Kerala, India (5). These cases differ substantially, but each involves efforts to draw ordinary citizens into political problem-solving. According to
Cohen and Rogers, what they all demonstrate is “that ordinary people are capable of reducing the political role of untamed power and arbitrary preference and, through the exercise of their common reason, jointly solving collective problems” (240).

EPG encompasses three conditions: “problem-solving, participation, and deliberation” (Cohen and Rogers 241). Focusing on deliberation, Cohen and Rogers address common critiques of deliberative democracy in light of new evidence. The first involves a communicative dispute regarding unequally distributed rhetorical ability. In response to Bourdieu, they argue that the case studies challenge the idea that deliberation devolves into logocracy, or rule by the “rhetorically or laryngically gifted” (244). The cases from Porto Alegre, Chicago, West Bengal, and Kerala indicate higher or at least equal participation among disadvantaged populations, including poor and less-educated citizens. In Brazil and India, women’s participation was high, as well (245).

An important debate emerged between Jane Mansbridge on the one hand and Cohen and Rogers on the other related to the idea of self-interest. On Mansbridge’s account, self-interest is a vital element within deliberative structures. Expressing self-interest, even when seemingly base and material, can be a necessary first step toward transformative discourse, but is often precluded by forcing deliberators to frame everything in reference to the common good (182-183). For her, the initial stages of deliberation can lead to “forging commonality” (183) by directly accommodating self-interest. When all affected actors consider how a public policy involves their own and others’ interests, mutual understanding and self-awareness increase. Openness about how policies affect individuals is an important step toward collective choices that are just. In many cases, such as those involving distributive justice, the needs of certain individuals will ultimately be strong enough to warrant collective action to meet them. In other
words, especially when there is strong need, sometimes the common good can be defined as meeting a person or group’s self-interest, but this is suppressed by deliberative norms.

Cohen and Rogers dispute Mansbridge’s conception of self-interest. They argue, quite simply, that deliberation “admits [statements of self-interest] as ways to present information [original emphasis],” but “they do not qualify as justifications [original emphasis]” (247). Thus, deliberative norms do not rule out claims of self-interest, but they must be justified with compelling reasons. Good citizens will be open and forthright about such claims, and truthfully weigh them against the wants and needs of others. According to Cohen and Rogers, suppression of self-interest is a non-issue because subordinate groups are willing to present their interests and they are not received poorly within in the case studies (Ibid.). I would add to their consideration that self-interest is a justified claim to the extent that it is impartial and can be generalized. In other words, if I am unable to afford groceries, I ask for assistance not because I am special, but because within a just society all people should have sustenance. By taking this type of a Kantian approach to reasoning on self-interest, the manner in which self-interest can be justified becomes apparent. While such claims are still debatable, this provides a clearer outline as to how recognition of self-interest can reasonably proceed into civic discourse.

Finally, Cohen and Rogers consider the role of power in deliberation. Indeed, vast inequalities of power can have debilitating effects. Since power is largely rooted in economic resources and relationships, “[f]irms retaining a more or less costless ability to move investment elsewhere are not, for example, likely to accept the discipline of reasoned deliberation about labor standards, with workers as their deliberative equals” (249). As long as “exit options” (Ibid.) remain available, promoting a more egalitarian society is seriously limited. Cohen and Rogers note the importance of preconditions for pushing deliberation toward its ideal (Ibid.).
This realization, though, also suggests a challenge for local democracy. If justice is to emerge out of public discourse, participants need to commit themselves to their communities. This is hampered, however, by the presence of mega-corporations that play a role in the welfare of the communities, but are largely faceless.

For some deliberative democrats, discourse represents an opportunity for the weak and underrepresented to gain political voice. Such an account might proceed as follows: citizens would decide differently on matters of public policy if only they had to listen to the viewpoints of the less powerful and give reasons for their own convictions. “The assumption here is that insofar as power can be removed, individuals will engage one another in a more truly democratic deliberative fashion” (Rosenberg 131). From a moral standpoint, moreover, citizens owe each other reasons for why they feel as they do in terms acceptable to others, a concept known as reciprocity (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). To the contrary, aggregative democrats presume that citizens’ preferences are fixed and they concern themselves primarily with mechanisms for registering and interpreting the collective will of the public.

Cohen and Rogers appreciate the positive outcomes of the cases that were studied, but they are more attentive to the relevant differences between them. The Chicago case dealt largely with achieving “mutual gains” through “mutual coordination” (251), while Porto Alegre and Kerala dealt with economic redistribution and decentralization of power, important preconditions for institutionalized, legitimate deliberation. The Chicago case is straightforward then, because its success was beneficial for all. On the other hand, Porto Alegre and Kerala establish the important need for “a broader democratization of social power” (254). Cohen and Rogers also speculate, considering the fourth case, that uncertainty about how issues pertain to self-interest
has a pro-deliberation tendency since people will want to explore how they might be affected. In
turn, continued discussion can help build social capital and solidarity (252-253).

In one study, Rosenberg (2007) assembled two citizen groups of twelve each from
Laguna Beach, California to deliberate on the delivery of K-12 education in their community.
The study had an overrepresentation of females and college educated subjects, although the latter
was in line with the city as a whole. Each group met for seven sessions of two hours each and
there were two facilitators per group, three Ph.D. candidates and Rosenberg. The first meeting
was reserved for explaining the goals of the deliberation (“coming to consensus about
recommendations to be communicated to the School Board and principals” [143]), the next four
or five involved understanding the current curriculum and offering possible alternatives or
adjustments, while the last two focused on reaching a consensus. To assess the quality of
deliberation, he trained two coders to distinguish between his three discourse types, conventional
cooperative, and collaborative, and had them record the amount of time that the discourse fell
under each category after reviewing audio recordings.

Rosenberg found that deliberation among “educated, empowered adults,” did not procure
“rational, reasonable, or critically reflective” results (157). Only 14 minutes out of the 14 hours
of audio tape were recorded as cooperative, while the rest fell under conventional discourse.
Under Rosenberg’s theory, conventional discourse is marked by conformity to the status quo,
including social norms, roles, and hierarchies, and is unable to address the value conflicts
characteristic of multicultural societies (133-135). In the context of conventional discourse,
communicative rationality is inhibited by participants’ predefined conception of self and
community, as well as their inability to think critically abstracted from their particular
circumstances. Discourse of this variety confirms the critiques of rational and social choice theorists who discredit deliberative democracy as idealistic and dysfunctional in practice.

Conversely, both cooperative and collaborative discourse offer superior outcomes, as theorized by Rosenberg. Cooperative discourse is desirable insofar as it maintains the autonomy and equality of participants, central features of liberalism. It cannot, however, “address different ways in which meaning is constructed” or “differences in foundational assumptions and values” (152). Collaborative discourse echoes the communitarian conception of the individual as a “socially embedded actor” (Ibid.) who engages others to “construct the logics, meanings, and values that will determine what they can identify, understand, and value” (155). It is essentially a form of social reconstruction through which individuals come to realize their “limits and enhance their capacities” (156), as well as strengthen the interpersonal bonds that connect them. Within a collaborative discourse, participants come to realize why they feel the way they do and how social norms and relationships influence their perspectives.

It was not surprising to Mansbridge that Rosenberg was left dissatisfied by the results of his experiment. She points out that he “does not discuss the legitimacy of these deliberations, their decision rule, or their use of emotions” (256). Mansbridge contests that Rosenberg is too narrowly rational and that empathy and emotional skills play important roles in deliberation. Moreover, he is too quick to discredit “‘cooperative conventional’ interaction” that is “oriented by concerns of efficiency and tangible effects” (256). Moreover, politeness and mutual understanding of the task inhibited any sort of transformative discourse. Common sense seems to dictate that when meeting to discuss education policy we are unlikely to entirely reconstruct our social relationships, the foundations of our beliefs, or even deliberative norms.
Rosenberg acknowledges that “substantial intervention will be necessary in order to create the conditions that are likely to foster deliberations that are more cooperative or possibly collaborative and transformative” (158). Posing critical questions, either through a moderator or handouts, could potentially deepen deliberation in the way that Rosenberg envisions. To the extent that deliberation should challenge the status quo and even its own norms, meta-deliberation among citizens would be insightful. Additionally, Rosenberg’s analysis, as procedurally based, pays too little attention to whether the outcomes of his study were legitimate. We should also consider whether collaborative discourse is instrumentally good or intrinsically valuable. Rosenberg clearly sees it as the latter, but we must consider the relationship between “good” deliberation and optimal public policy outcomes.

Rosenberg also does not assess or comment on the nature of the consensus that was reached. While Mansbridge claims he does not provide the decision rule used, he does explicitly state that it was consensus. Thus, is there nothing to be said in favor of deliberation based on the fact that two groups of twelve came together and agreed on anything at all? Moreover, he does not consider alternative benefits to deliberation. Did the study foster civic virtues? Did anyone change his or her mind? What action steps, if any, were taken by participants to promote their recommendations and did they become more politically involved thereafter? While deliberation is only one form of civic engagement, it seems at least worth inquiring into whether deliberation has an effect on political behavior. Finally, Rosenberg’s study was focused on a particular issue, education, from which he hoped deliberators might reconstruct their lifeworld, to use a Habermasian term. Perhaps future practitioners should simply be more explicit and frame deliberations using the language that characterizes collaborative discourse, if that is the desired
outcome. In other words, if Rosenberg wants a higher-level discourse, why not ask people to talk about what a just society would look like rather than the stand-alone issue of education?

Weatherford and McDonnell (2007) considered three deliberative experiments in South Carolina aimed also at improving public education. They consider the success of these forums to have stemmed from “melding salient aspects of neighborhood associations and civic populism on the one hand with the normative canons of deliberative democracy on the other” (209). The forums focused on specific problems, but the participants were cognizant of “past community achievements and hopes for the school district as a whole” (Ibid.). While not formally tied to government, the perceived legitimacy of the forums led to implementation (Mansbridge 258). Weatherford and McDonnell base legitimacy on inclusivity, equality and a third criterion that is a form of rationality. According to Mansbridge, however, it is more loosely defined and accommodating than Rosenberg’s rational discourse (259).

The Internet

As a forum for deliberation, the Internet offers hope to many who have considered its implications. Observers often refer to the democratizing effects of the Internet. Unquestionably, cyberspace is wide-reaching, but it is even more powerful because it can bring people together in a way that is impossible or impractical in real life. Only with the advent of the Internet has the possibility for a forum of people from across the country and abroad, consisting of all relevant social categories, become plausible. For a deliberative democracy, this means that in a large society people from geographically distant locations might be able to share information and influence each other politically. Considering that there are now 300 million Americans living in a rather large country, deliberative democracy over the Internet holds the unique potential to
facilitate discussion for groups of citizens who are diverse in every conceivable way. As a method of national policy-making and issue discussion, which subsequently affects people from all fifty states, this prospect is encouraging.

On threaded discussion forums and chat rooms, average citizens can be involved in setting the “rules of order” and developing an appropriate design. Through incorporating many of the rules that Sydney Hook provides for deliberation, online communities can be conceived as safe areas for the open discussion of politics. Among those items, he notes, “... [N]o one is immune from criticism...,” everyone “has an intellectual responsibility to inform himself of the facts...,” and other concepts that boil down to respecting others while addressing arguments and evidence (Talisse 114). By allowing citizens to set some of these rules themselves, they are likely to hold themselves and others to such a standard and become more considerate deliberators both online and in person. Procedural feedback in message boards or via e-mail and widespread input on the creation of web-based forums will likely instill desirable behavioral norms and help citizens develop democratic skills.

Citizens are further empowered by their capacity to contribute to the “public commons” that exists in many web projects. While anyone so capable and in reach of computer access can start a blog or create a personal website to share collected data, personal information, or their “story”, there are many projects online that depend upon the contributions and interaction of a collective of individuals to develop a coherent product. Beth Noveck writes that:

Large-scale knowledge-sharing projects, such as the Wikipedia online encyclopedia, and volunteer software-programming initiatives, such as the Apache Webserver (which runs two-thirds of the websites in the world), demonstrate the inadequacy of our assumptions about expertise in the twenty-first century. Ordinary people, regardless of institutional affiliation or professional status, possess information—serious, expert, fact-based, scientific information—to enhance decision-making, information not otherwise available to isolated bureaucrats. (32)
Wikipedia is a great example of a “large-scale knowledge-sharing project” because it involves thousands of people working together to publish, edit, and deliberate on how individual encyclopedia entries should read. Everyone is welcome to contribute, but there are norms in place, a procedural structure, and rules that ensure everything runs smoothly.

With regard to actual governmental bodies, local democracy has much to gain from full utilization of the Internet’s potential. In consideration of the fact that municipal budgets are often stretched thin, the Internet has the potential to replace many of its activities with their virtual counterparts, most of which are either free or entail minimal cost. One primary way to save money is to replace traditional mailings with e-mail. This could be used for activities such as taxation, town newsletters, and, as previously cited, providing pertinent details about when and where in-town meetings are to be held. At its core, the Internet can be used to keep people more connected. Local government can use web-based methods for encouraging feedback from citizens on policy initiatives and presenting documents and reports for the public to see. Even more promising is the speed at which all of this can move. As opposed to “snail” mail, communication online tends to be instantaneous. If government has trained personnel prepared to handle concerns and suggestions, this means that citizens will see the fruits of deliberative democracy more quickly. However, the neediest citizens are also the least likely to have internet access and computer skills, so this raises the important question of fairness.

A great example of a local government using Internet technology to better engage its citizens comes from Phoenix, Arizona. The Phoenix at Your Fingertips program connects both citizens to citizens and citizens to government while creating computer workstations throughout the city for public use (Wilhelm 132). The project benefits from great user interface and has spawned a social networking offshoot called Electronic Village whereby “citizens can
participate in government, business, social, leisure, and community activities using various means of electronic communication” (Wilhelm 133). A separate program, Nueva Mara Villa of Los Angeles, CA, uses new technology to promote social justice. Under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the program created an initiative called the Campus of Learners in which public housing developments became centers for education in online technology and other valuable skills (Wilhelm 130). Apart from the traditional narrative of crime-infested housing projects, the Campus of Learners actually connects people with life-changing education in an area that is safe and conducive to such a pursuit.

De Cindio, Perboni, and Sonnante present a project funded by Italy’s Ministry for Innovation and Technology under its Agenda21 program in ten municipalities in the Lombardy region. Its aim was to establish websites that included information, community, and deliberation space. The information component contained links and other materials, the community component allowed for “civic dialogue, sharing civic intelligence, and petitioning,” while the deliberative space included “informed discussions, brainstorming, and polling citizens” (49). The sites became increasingly valuable, moreover, as more citizens posted and participated, and in turn, this led to more people becoming involved. In Brescia, the site had an especially lively discourse, primarily because of the willingness of a city councilor to participate, but his withdrawal around election time had a strong negative impact on use of the site (56).

A study done in South Korea by Rhee and Kim (2006) assessed political discussion efficacy following online deliberation. They created a website for citizen discussion regarding the 2004 Korean General election and sent out e-mail surveys thereafter. Rhee and Kim found that political discussion efficacy was enhanced by participants revealing social identity clues and receiving a higher grade from others via a reward system in the site’s design (24). While there
are vastly different starting grounds for individuals' sense of political discussion efficacy (23), discussing politics online seems to have a generally positive effect. Their study also found variation among moderation. Rhee and Kim hypothesize that "[a] more involved and focused discussion, facilitated by an aid of a moderator, may make the participants more prone to spot and to perceive opposing opinions and expressions" (26). They argue that this might lower political discussion efficacy, but it seems equally or more plausible that it will have a positive effect if citizens can overcome their fear of criticism. This point raises the question of whether discussion should aim to foster political self-confidence or push people to become more effective deliberators. Provided that criticism is constructive and offered without malice, I would argue in favor of the latter. This will ideally promote more reasonable discourse, cultivate civic virtues, and not avoidably push people out of the discussion.

One intriguing concept is the Online Deliberative Poll, based on a face-to-face-model designed by James Fishkin (Wright and Street 855). Fishkin explains,

> Provided that people were effectively motivated to continue their participation, a continuing online deliberation could take place periodically over weeks or even months. The result would be as if everyone were assigned membership in a panel of the sort we discussed from Inter-survey, but membership in the panel involved not only responses to questionnaires, but also serious on-going deliberation. (2000, p. 24)

This model differs from the original in that participants do not physically meet, but there are unique advantages to the online system. First, underprivileged participants were given free computers and Internet access. Given the inequalities of computer access, this is an important step to ensure that groups could be representative of the whole population. It also addressed the critique that, "Deliberative models probably require some element of face-to-face interaction to build trust and rapport among group members" (Walton 381).
As opposed to text-based, asynchronous communication models, the Online Deliberative Poll utilized "synchronous voice-based software" (Wright and Street 856). Researchers found that hearing each other speak and directly addressing each other allowed for better, more meaningful interaction, prevented disenfranchising less educated participants fearful of typing their responses, and provided an experience closer to real-life deliberative interaction (Ibid.). Moreover, because of a timer in the software's design, researchers could compare how citizens contributed with the amount of time they spent reading introductory arguments. "Most interestingly, face-to-face deliberation was found to be only slightly more effective than online deliberation in changing opinions" (Ibid.). Since a fundamental expectation of deliberation is that its participants will come to think differently about issues, this is particularly encouraging.

**Considering the Research**

Many deliberative democrats' empirical research is coupled by complaints about the lack of comprehensive studies within the field. Given a growing body of literature, it is important to take existing research into account when designing new experiments or considering theory. Additionally, no longer can reasonable practitioners honestly lament a lack of empirical work. While many questions remain to be explored, there is enough work in existence for theorists and practitioners to extend the conversation.

An important consideration yet to be developed is whether deliberation should be formally tied to government or exist within a separate public sphere. I argue that civic dialogue should be an ongoing feature within contemporary society, most appropriately to be facilitated by civic associations that can provide a comfortable, neutral atmosphere for mutual exploration of meaning. Issues such as race and gender do not beget easy answers or solutions, but the
degree to which citizens listen to and respect one another is likely to influence the course of deliberation on other issues thereafter. Formal deliberation can also legitimately take place within civic associations, while again stressing neutrality to the extent that it is possible. Such deliberation should reflect common norms such as inclusivity, equality, and rationality so that its outcomes may be seen as legitimate. Given evidence that legitimacy enhances the willingness of government to adopt the recommendations of deliberative forums (Weatherford and McDonnell, 2007), successful deliberation is likely to lead to greater inclusivity (Walsh, 2007). While one vote rarely determines the outcome of an election or referendum, one voice can make a dynamic difference on the course of deliberation.

Meanwhile, I view formal opportunities for citizen engagement within government-sponsored forums as essential. In particular, Gastil’s institutional reforms at the national, state, and local level are appealing. They would maintain representative democracy, while expanding the influence of citizen deliberation and the ties between leaders and ordinary citizens. Citizens’ juries provide an interesting means toward fostering a more deliberative culture, and while there will inevitably be skeptics, there is already evidence that they can change leaders’ minds. In the example from the UK, though, citizens’ juries were merely used to inform politicians and they did not have formal authority. I argue that we have reached the point in deliberative theory to call for substantive political reform that grants policy-making power, perhaps on issues decided by elected representatives, directly to deliberative bodies composed of ordinary citizens.

While the decision rule, size, and structure of such forums would need to be adequately sketched out, in principle there is considerable evidence that they would be effective. I also think these should require mandatory participation in the same vein as Ackerman and Fishkin’s Deliberation Day and jury duty as it presently exists in the courts. Although a limitation on the
liberal ideal of autonomy, the very presence of autonomy within a democracy is only secure to the extent that citizens are collectively autonomous. Civic engagement of this type would ideally have the effect of promoting a sense of political efficacy and public-spiritedness.

Deliberative democrats should also consider in greater depth the role of the internet in modern society. A challenge, however, is keeping up with the speed of technological innovation when practitioners design empirical studies to be conducted over the web. In any case, citizens are spending a greater amount of time online. The internet provides remarkable resources for information and social networking, but many are concerned that more time devoted to it comes at the expense of real community. Ideally, local forums and sites will play an important role in highlighting the needs and concerns within cities and towns. Fluid discourse is also made possible by dialogue that takes place both over the web and in person.

Deliberative democracy at the local level is a vital force for addressing the erosion of community and civic virtues. A more deliberative culture will strengthen communal bonds, increase contact among citizens, and effect change in politics. Forums for citizen deliberation should exist as both empowered institutions of government and within a separate public sphere to continue civic dialogue and discourse. A separate public sphere is also uniquely situated to confront government when it acts outside the interests of the public. Overall, expanding opportunities for deliberation offers the promise of a more just society in which people respectfully engage one another as equals. However, it faces many impediments, such as staggering social inequality and the power dynamics of the real world. Rosenberg’s collection poses the question, “Can the People Govern?”. Existing empirical research suggests yes, depending of course on how desirable procedures and outcomes are conceptualized. A more compelling question, however, is this: Will the people govern?
Chapter 3: An Experiment in Local Deliberation

Introduction to the Experiment Design

My initial research objective was to examine the differences between online versus in-person deliberation. The research plan was to assemble a small group of between 20 and 30 individuals to attend an in-person forum at the University of Richmond and then continue the discussion online using the Moodle platform. Moodle is a course management system designed for education, but useful for accommodating citizen deliberation. Accordingly, the online component of the deliberation includes thread-based message boards, a group e-mail function, and the ability to post links and various media. At the in-person forum, participants would receive a brief information packet with newspaper articles and relevant reports. Both components of the deliberation would focus on the following question: given the recent election of Mayor Dwight Jones, what should be the priorities of his administration from the standpoint of the nonprofit sector?

In order to assemble a group, I utilized a local nonprofit networking tool called Connect Richmond, run by former Jepson School of Leadership Studies professor Nancy Stutts. Using their listserv, I sent out a message to all of their users inviting them to take part in the discussion. In addition, Sue Robinson-Sain of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies and Amy Howard of Leadership Metro Richmond sent out e-mails to acquaintances and colleagues in the local nonprofit community. Collectively, these efforts resulted in 23 individuals signing up for the discussion. Initially, I planned to limit multiple participants who work on the same issue or in the same organization, but this did not become a problem.

The discussion was scheduled to last for four hours, from noon until four o’clock, on December 5, 2008, at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. The participants were invited to
arrive early since we were providing lunch, but we hoped to start the discussion promptly at noon with everyone having already eaten. I also foresaw the half hour before noon as a possible networking block. From a research standpoint, I felt that socialization before the event would yield positive benefits in terms of increased comfort at the start of the discussion and greater participation.

The desks were arranged in a square format so that everyone would be able to see each other. The discussion would begin with everyone together for two hours and then they would separate into breakout groups to be determined based on the number of attendees and the content of their discussion for 45 minutes. There would then be a final session of roughly one hour or the remaining allotment of time to reflect on the breakout sessions, reconsider and develop ideas previously raised, and discuss possible action steps following the forum. The sessions that included the entire group would be moderated by Dr. Thad Williamson, the advisor to this thesis, while one breakout group would be moderated by him and the other by me. A digital voice recorder would be used to capture the forum’s proceedings and I would record notes by hand to compare with the recording and resolve instances in which one’s speech might be unintelligible.

Once a transcript of the forum was prepared, I would use the Discourse Quality Index (DQI) developed by Steenbergen, et al. (2003) to assess each individual speech, defined as a statement of two sentences or more. Effectively, I would analyze each individual speech and give it a code, if applicable, for each of the seven categories. The DQI is based on participation, justification, respect, and constructive politics. Justification breaks down into two categories: how complete a speaker’s conclusions are and the quality of their content. Respect is broken
down into three subcategories: empathy, respect for demands, and respect for counterarguments.

The following is a full explanation of the DQI5:

Coding Categories

Participation

This refers to a speaker’s ability to participate freely in a debate. We use two codes for participation:

(0) Interruption of a speaker
(1) Normal participation is possible

The first code is reserved for situations in which a speaker explicitly states that he/she is disturbed by an interruption and for situations in which the interruption occurs through a formal decision. This does not include situations in which speakers are interrupted because their speaking time is up.

Level of justification

This refers to the nature of the justification of demands. Here we judge to what extent a speech gives complete justifications for demands. The completeness of the justifications is judged in terms of the inferences that are made. There are four levels of justification:

(0) No justification: A speaker only says that X should or should not be done, but no reason is given.
(1) Inferior justification: Here a reason Y is given as to why X should or should not be done, but no linkage is made between X and Y — the inference is incomplete. This code also applies if a conclusion is merely supported with illustrations.
(2) Qualified justification: A linkage is made as to why one should expect that X contributes to or detracts from Y. A single such complete inference already qualifies for code 2.
(3) Sophisticated justification: Here at least two complete justifications are given, either two complete justifications for the same demand or complete justifications for two different demands.

We should point out that the completeness of a justification does not depend on whether it is explicit. Implicit inferences can qualify as complete inferences. However, it must be beyond a reasonable doubt for the coder that the meaning of the implicit linkage is well understood by all the participants in the debate.

Content of justifications

This coding category captures whether appeals are made in terms of narrow group interests, in terms of the common good, or in terms of both. We employ four codes:

5 This explanation is drawn from Steenbergen et al. (2003).
Explicit statement concerning group interests: If one or more groups or constituencies are mentioned in a speech, then a code of 0 is assigned.

Neutral statement: There are no explicit references to constituency/group interests or to the common good.

Explicit statement of the common good in utilitarian terms: There is an explicit mention of the common good and this is conceived in utilitarian terms, that is, with reference to the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’ (Mill, 1998).

Explicit statement of the common good in terms of the difference principle: There is an explicit mention of the common good and this is conceived in terms of the difference principle, that is, with reference to helping the least advantaged in a society (Rawls, 1971).

Note that codes (0), (2a), and (2b) are not mutually exclusive. In many cases, one will find references to group interests as well as the common good, and a speech is coded for all of these. The balance in such appeals is often of particular interest, since it suggests the relative emphasis that is placed on the common good vs more narrowly defined interests.

Respect

The DQI contains three indicators of respect. First, there is respect for the groups that are to be helped through particular policies. Here we use three different codes:

No respect: This code is reserved for speeches in which there are only negative statements about the groups.

Implicit respect: We use this code if there are no explicitly negative statements, but neither are there explicit positive statements.

Explicit respect: This code is assigned if there is at least one explicitly positive statement about the groups, regardless of the presence of negative statements.

The next indicator is respect toward the demands of others. This indicator uses the same codes as the group respect indicator. However, respect toward demands is not always coded. This occurs when there is only one demand on the agenda and the speaker supports it. In this case, we assume that the speaker respects the demand and we do not explicitly code respect.

Our final indicator of respect concerns counterarguments. This type of respect is coded only if there are counterarguments on the table or if a speaker anticipates such arguments. If there are multiple counterarguments, then the indicator serves as a summary judgment of the respect toward all these arguments. We employ four codes to measure respect toward counterarguments:

Counterarguments ignored: There are counterarguments but the speaker ignores these.

Counterarguments included but degraded: This code applies when a speaker acknowledges a counterargument, but then explicitly degrades it by making a negative statement about it or the individuals and groups that propose the argument. A single negative statement is sufficient to assign code 1, unless the speech also contains positive statements about a counterargument (in which case a code of 3 applies). If neutral statements accompany a negative statement (and there are no positive statements), a code of 1 also applies.
(2) Counterarguments included — neutral: We use this code if a counterargument is acknowledged and if there are no explicit negative or positive statements about it.
(3) Counterarguments included and valued: This code applies if the counterargument is acknowledged and is explicitly valued. We assign this code even if there are also negative statements.

Constructive politics

Our final indicator concerns consensus building, or what we call constructive politics. We capture this via three codes:

(0) Positional politics: Speakers sit on their positions. There is no attempt at compromise, reconciliation, or consensus building.
(1) Alternative proposal: A speaker makes a mediating proposal that does not fit the current agenda but belongs to another agenda. In such cases, the proposal is really not relevant for the current debate, although it may be taken up in a different debate.
(2) Mediating proposal: A speaker makes a mediating proposal that fits the current agenda.

Guiding Questions

1. Will the Internet be used to deepen and extend the conversation?
2. Will deliberation among nonprofit leaders be oriented toward the common good?
3. What will be the content of the discussion?
4. Will people change their mind?
5. Will the deliberation have an effect on civic virtues?
6. What will be the outcome of the deliberation?

One of the most important guiding questions guiding this experiment was whether and how the Internet might be used to deepen and extend the conversation. A perceived benefit to holding an initial in-person forum was that participants would forge relationships and gain mutual trust so that they would feel more comfortable in an online dialogue. In theory, previous face-to-face interaction might solve for the negative effects of impersonal, anonymous discourse that normally takes place over the web. To the contrary, there are unique qualities of online deliberation that might make it attractive to the participants. First, they can engage one another online without leaving their home or office. Additionally, online discourse provides a running transcript of what has been said. This can help participants avoid confusion, recall previous
comments, and better organize their thoughts. It is also easier to have transparency online since published comments can easily be made available to the greater community. Regarding information resources, participants benefit from access to particular studies and data that might be presented and fact-checked during their discussion. Some of the negative traits of asynchronous online dialogue, however, are the lack of immediate response from others and the need for participants to have computer skills.

Another interesting component of this experiment is that it focuses on the nonprofit community. A second guiding question, then, is how might citizen deliberation among people in nonprofits differ from deliberation among the general public at large? Since nonprofits generally work specifically toward some conception of the common good, it might be expected that their discussion would score higher on the DQI since it favors references to the common good over narrow group interests. To the contrary, the addition of corporate leaders and those in business whose primary goal is turning a profit would not be as expected to score as high. To the extent that the nonprofit community addresses and is sympathetic to human needs, it would be anticipated that they would generally show greater respect to one another. I also hypothesize that their discourse is more likely to contain elements of collaborative discourse as described by Rosenberg (2007). Areas where particular organizations’ interests might conflict, however, will be of great interest. In other words, I am cognizant of possible tensions between a conception of the common good and a particular nonprofit organization’s interests.

The third guiding question is the following: what will participants actually say? As someone who was new to Richmond in 2005, I am still learning about the city and the concerns of its citizens. Therefore, I am curious about the actual substance of the discussion apart from more academic inquiries into its deliberative quality. I am also interested in whether the
discussion will focus more on the nonprofit community or on the needs of the city and to what degree participants will try to link the two. The fourth question is what will be the deliberative quality of the event according to the DQI? While it is not a perfect or uncontroversial index, it includes many important elements of discourse that contribute to overall quality.

Furthermore, will citizens’ preconceived notions of what the new mayor should prioritize change and will participants rate the discussion as having had a positive effect on civic virtues? The first aspect of this question will be ascertained by surveys taken before and after the discussion. The effect of the forum on civic virtues will be taken from questions included in the post-deliberation survey. Finally, what will be the outcome of deliberation? Will citizens recruit more people to join the dialogue? Will they present their findings online or in a published document? Perhaps they might even schedule a meeting with the mayor. Whether or not the participants take the experience and turn it into something more has important implications for deliberative democracy. My hope is that they will be proactive and take ownership of the group, but that remains to be seen and would certainly have many challenges. Namely, they are all very busy people with their own organizations to run or be a part of, so would they ultimately find that continuing this work will be worthwhile?

Overview of the Experiment

Unfortunately, only 10 of the original 23 who had signed up attended the forum and one of those individuals was a late arrival. Of the 10, there four white females, three black females, two white men, and one black man. We later learned that there were other events scheduled for that day of interest to the nonprofit community with which we were competing. Most of the participants arrived close to noon, so there was minimal time for networking prior to the
discussion. As was intended, the participants were split into two groups to discuss separate subtopics. The first group discussed the idea of a nonprofit advocate in the mayoral administration, while the second group considered how nonprofits could collaborate better and become more unified.

After the nonprofit forum, only eight people signed up for the online discussion and they merely left introductory comments. To try to attract more people, I sent out a follow-up e-mail to the Connect Richmond listserv, but this proved unsuccessful. Therefore, the online discussion component of the experiment failed. Months later, I sent out a follow-up survey to everyone who signed up for the in-person forum and asked them a few questions, including one regarding the online forum. I will consider the three responses I received later and what they suggest for online deliberation. Furthermore, I will consider whether citizens in Richmond actively use web resources for political discussion. This will help contextualize the results of this experiment.

The first part of the discussion was reserved for introductions and for all participants to provide a brief account of their view of the city's challenges. Human needs, including poverty, homelessness, and family issues, were strongly reflected. In addition, there were concerns about leadership in Richmond, recent conflicts among area leaders, crime, and the status of nonprofits. They also determined that many of Richmond's problems would require a regional focus and new partnerships among regional actors. Moreover, with respect to the non-profit community, the current economic circumstances are extremely unfavorable and will not only create new needs, but also require organizations to do more with fewer resources. New partnerships and seeking out block grants were seen as possible strategies to overcome this challenge.

The second part of the discussion involved breakout discussion groups. There were two groups formed and they talked for roughly 40 minutes. The first group addressed ways that the
nonprofit community could gain representation in the mayoral administration, while the second group talked about how to form a more unified, cohesive community of nonprofit leaders. Finally, there was a half hour wrap-up session for concluding thoughts and remarks. Notably, people seemed to get tired by this point, which cut the discussion a bit short. Future practitioners should consider the physiological demands of discourse and plan accordingly. It is important to find a balance so that the discussion is neither too shallow nor overly taxing.

**DQI Analysis**

The first DQI criterion, participation, only applies if a speaker expresses displeasure at having been disturbed or if the interruption occurs through a formal decision, not a case in which one’s predetermined speaking time runs out. At all times during the deliberation, normal participation was possible, meaning neither of these occurred. While interruptions occurred, they were primarily to clarify something a speaker was unsure about it or to add information another participant deemed relevant. Examples of this included the discussion of the 211 hotline run by the United Way and the Richmond Regional Action Plan. In both of these cases, the initial speaker had information about something, but was unsure of certain details. Thus, in these cases, interruption was desired inasmuch as participants held incomplete information and hoped that others would help them fill in the details.

Additionally, the discussion was informal and time limits and other speaking rules went undefined. Thus, there were no instances in which a speaker’s time ran out, although, according to the DQI, this does not constitute an interruption of normal participation anyway. Since normal participation was possible at all times, the forum meets the DQI’s standard for

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6 This is significant because Rosenberg (2007) found that participants typically tired after an hour and a half during his study.
participation. In fact, all of the interruptions that occurred were received in either a neutral or positive way.

The quality of discourse was high in the area of level of justification, with a median value for all speeches of two. This indicates that the middle value of all speeches was one in which a qualified justification was made. A qualified justification corresponds to a speech in which “a linkage is made as to why one should expect that X contributes to or detracts from Y.” While this may include other incomplete justifications, at least one clear linkage exists. A qualified justification is only bested by a sophisticated justification, one in “which at least two complete justifications are given, either two complete justifications for the same demand or complete justifications for two different demands.” Throughout the discourse, 88.5 percent of all speeches were at the level of either qualified or sophisticated justification.

An example of a qualified justification from the forum is:

Ti: You know, I find that there is just so much chatter amongst the nonprofits. How could you know what’s going on? Everybody wants to get in touch with these players, but I think it would certainly be beneficial to all of us to work together and have a database. It would help to add other layers of education so that people know what’s going on.

Here, Ti provides a complete justification for why having a database for all of the Richmond area nonprofits would be valuable. Given “chatter” among nonprofits, a database would serve as a resource so that, at the very least, people could learn what services and nonprofits exist in the Richmond area. Note that there is also an incomplete justification when Ti claims that it would “be beneficial for us to work together.” She does not clarify whether she implies broad collaboration or working together exclusively on the database, nor does she provide reasons for why either would be desirable.

This may be compared with an example of sophisticated justification:

7 The names of participants have been coded to protect their privacy. Each participant has a two-letter code name.
Bo: One of the problems related to the schools is, you can't just expel everybody and the schools are a reflection of the communities. It's not just a bad school; it's not just bad leadership. Some of these schools have wonderful leadership. It's high concentrations of poverty, it's not having jobs, you know, all those things build up. You can't just solve one issue. So, if the mayor wanted to take a look at the bigger picture of how can we leverage the resources that we do have, resources like the United Way that have a regional focus, like even U of R leadership, maybe we could put our heads together and address some of these issues. So there needs to be strong leadership that is regional, not just city. Not just city...

In the midst of a discussion regarding the challenges facing schools, Bo makes a sophisticated justification for approaching problems in a holistic manner in collaboration with multiple partners. He argues that schools are not just a reflection of the financial resources or leadership that they possess, but rather a reflection of other community issues. Bo cites poverty and jobs as playing a role on the quality of education in a community. Moreover, given the unique position of Richmond in comparison to cities in other states that are embedded in regions, he calls for regional leadership to address the issue of education and other social problems.

The content of justification category is used to differentiate between appeals to narrow group interest versus those that appeal to the common good. However, it is possible that some appeals to group interest will be phrased in terms of the common good. In fact, this occurred twice during the forum. As a note, the DQI accommodates appeals to the common good made in either utilitarian terms, the greatest good for the greatest number, or Rawls's conception of the difference principle, helping the least well off in society. One challenge to coding responses was deciding whether certain references to disadvantaged populations qualified as an appeal to the common good in terms of the difference principle. I decided to take a conservative approach, but it is a reasonable viewpoint that discussing the needs of children in bad schools and families

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8 An example was, Bo: ... In the City of Richmond, 63% of all children are born to single parents. So, I think that any place that has such a high concentration of single parenting, the absence of fathers, not only as providers, but as caretakers and partners, et cetera, you're going to have concentrations of poverty.
seeking low-income housing automatically qualifies as reference to the difference principle.

Effectively, I required some reference to the fact that a particular segment of the population being discussed was either in extreme destitution or the least well off. I did, however, code references to the homeless as appeals to the difference principle.

In this category, given the nature of the discourse, references to the nonprofit community and its interests were coded as one. This choice was made because of the nature of the deliberation and the framing of questions posed to participants. The code of zero was used exclusively for appeals to the direct interests of the nonprofit organization a speaker represented or other groups. The latter only occurred when Hi and Pa considered public policy vis-à-vis a growing Hispanic population.

Most of the statements made were neutral with respect to narrow group interests and the common good. Based on the course of the deliberation, this seems to be due to the fact that a significant portion of the discussion centered on ways the nonprofit community could work more closely together and gain greater influence in the city. Out of 60 statements coded, eight included a conception of the common good. Six of those made reference to the least well off, whereas two did so in utilitarian terms. In the two cases in which a participant referenced his or her organization’s interest in terms of the common good, one pertained to fatherlessness, while the other pertained to the homeless. An appeal to the common good in utilitarian terms occurred when Ma talked about the City of Richmond making progress:

Ma: ...So what I put very first on my list is regional cooperation. Because I don’t think that the City of Richmond is going to be able to make progress, real progress, unless there is a real connection and cooperation between all these different entities that make up the metropolitan Richmond area.
I coded this as a reference to the common good in utilitarian terms because she referred to the prospects of the City of Richmond making “real progress,” indicating that regional cooperation among many actors is a necessary precondition to bettering the city as a whole.

In all but one case, the statements made included either implicit or explicit respect of the groups to be helped by proposals. The following was the one statement that I coded as exclusively negative about a group:

Ma: ...I mean, this is the general public, not the people in the nonprofit world, but... and I was just sitting wondering what do these people do with their lives? Do they not read? Do they not volunteer? [laughter] How could they not know that there are nonprofits out there doing this kind of work? So of course I went back and said, “We have got to be advocates for ourselves!”

Here, Ma is talking about a program she participated in that included visits by the general public to nonprofit agencies and other locations. She was surprised after observing that people did not know about services being offered by the nonprofit community. Since several in attendance had admitted not knowing all of the local nonprofits, her assessment was too harsh in my view.

The next criterion is respect for the demands of others. All but one of the statements coded, out of 49 total, displayed either implicit or explicit respect. Implicit respect is coded when there are neither positive nor negative statements, while explicit respect is contingent upon the presence of positive statements, regardless of any negative ones. The explicit respect code was troubling to me for two reasons. The first is that it seems unable to accommodate irony and other rhetorical devices. In other words, how should a statement that is positive at face value but meant to undermine a demand be treated? The second problem I have with this code is that it fails to acknowledge that in some instances statements might be so outlandish or unmerited that a positive statement in response would be undesirable. During the discourse, none of these
problems arose, however, so I did not need to resolve any such conflicts they would imply for coding. Of the speeches that were coded, 34.7 percent were coded as explicit respect.

A problem that remained, though, was dealing with straw man arguments and statements that that failed to account for the complexity and full implications of proposals. An, addressing a proposal to create an online database of nonprofits, said the following:

An: One thing on that, I really, I kind of... feel at times that the only way to reach people is to actually go out and find them. I helped register people to vote for the election, and we would go out, and learn that people had no way of actually going to vote. You find that there are just huge amounts of destitution in Richmond. And you really can’t see it sometimes. It’s so underrepresented, it’s so under the radar. They don’t have computer access! They’re not going to get to a database, you have to do everything for them.

Interestingly, her statement was coded as an appeal to the common good in terms of the difference principle, an example of no respect toward a demand, and an example of a counterargument included but degraded. She criticized the proposal on the grounds that the needy could not access it, but failed to account for how such a database might be useful to the nonprofit community, a point previously made, and why it excluded other possible ways of disseminating information to prospective clients of nonprofit services.

As noted, that was a case coded under the respect for counterarguments category, but it was actually only one of three. A general shortcoming of the deliberation was the rarity with which speakers imagined the objections and alternative conceptions that others might have, particularly those outside the nonprofit community, as well as possible limitations to their proposals. When challenges to proposals were presented, it was almost always abstract and nondescript. The other two cases were assigned code three, counterarguments included and valued. Both of those comments, by Hi and Ti, addressed the problem of how to find a nonprofit advocate who would be unbiased and represent all nonprofits.
For the final category, constructive politics, there were 20 mediating proposals and two cases of positional politics. The former signifies that a speaker has made a proposal that fits the current agenda and accounts for the statements made by others, while the latter indicates that a speaker sits on her position. The following are two mediating proposals made by Je within a single speech:

Je: ... I think we should look at large projects that would benefit the Richmond community. Like block grants that would bring together multiple organizations. I saw that where I was living in Alaska and it really helped unify organizations and, looking forward, it gave them the power to say, "Look, we are a force to be reckoned with. And we secured millions of dollars." It also brought together not only nonprofits but also some government agencies. ...And secondly, I think sending something out with the phonebooks is a good idea, but I think with new technology a great way to do that would be an online database. So housing, or a foodbank, or whatever, anything that you've heard, this would be where people could go who have needs and they could look at all the agencies in one place. In addition, with National Student Partnerships, we have clients that come to us and we help them fulfill their needs. So that would be good way for us to go on and refer other nonprofit agencies to us. And I think that would also help break down the fragmentation between agencies and build partnerships.

Both of these were relevant to the agenda because they pertained to unifying the nonprofit community and better serving the clients of nonprofits, respectively. Moreover, they were specific proposals that benefitted from complete justification.

An example of positional politics is the following statement by An:

An: There's not any organization with the time and the resources to put all of this together and manage something of this extent. And that's where I think an advocacy person could potentially have that as their responsibility. And I also think it would help to make the government aware of how big the nonprofit sector is. It's huge! But I think they just think of nonprofits as this nice thing that is out there, but that we ask for money. We don't contribute money to the economy. And that's not the case at all.
Having already proposed a nonprofit advocate within the mayor's administration, she returned to it during the discussion on whether or not any sort of new database should be created. Hi and Ti's responses to the proposal both came after this, but it was of note that she did not foresee their objections and any possible downsides to a nonprofit advocate within the mayoral administration. In any case, positional politics represented only 8.7 percent of the cases coded under positional politics.

Preferences Before and After Deliberation

An important component of deliberation is that some people will come to change their mind. In this deliberation, participants considered what was important for the mayor to address, not necessarily how particular problems were to be addressed. This is an important distinction, as Gastil (2000) has discussed the differences between deliberation on what is important versus what is good. Table 1 shows participants' preferences before deliberation and Table 2 shows participants preferences following deliberation. After Table 1, there is a copy of the pre-deliberation survey. After Table 2, there is a copy of the post-deliberation survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Deliberation Preferences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime / Safety</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing / Low-Income Housing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Relationship among City Government Officials</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development / Identity</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Cooperation &amp; Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance Budget Without Sacrificing Critical Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Divisions (Historical, Social, Racial)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Services Needs</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop Downtown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Events 1
Collaboration to Obtain Large-Scale Grants 1
Green Initiatives 1
Smart City Planning 1
Involve Smaller Grassroots Nonprofits 1
Desegregation of Broad Street 1
Tougher Regulations on James River Pollution 1
Roads 1
Infrastructure 1
Business Development 1
Health / Wellness 1
Fatherlessness 1

What would you say should be the top five priorities of the new mayoral administration?
1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________
5. __________________________

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Deliberation Preferences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Cooperation &amp; Leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime / Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Services &amp; Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roles of Business and Nonprofits Delineated and Valued</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a Community Vision</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatherlessness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts / Drama</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure for Good Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afterschool Programs</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Streamlining Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid Gov't Redundancy with Nonprofit Services</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Vision</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the discussion, what would you say should be the top five priorities of the new mayoral administration?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Deliberation seems to have had little effect on the importance of education, since it was listed most frequently in pre-deliberation surveys and tied for first on the post-deliberation surveys. However, one of the seven participants who completed a survey did add it following the discussion, so perhaps this is a rather significant development. Given the small size of the group, that shift reflects a 14.3 percent change in the number of people who see education as a priority. Naturally, this could not be generalized to the larger population, but for at least one person, deliberation had a clear impact in this respect.

Another shift took place with regional cooperation and leadership. As an important note, in one post-deliberation survey response a participant wrote “Efficient and Effective Leadership” and I chose to categorize this with regional cooperation and leadership. Thus, leadership under this category is not exclusively regional, although this only applied to one response. However, all other responses referred either to “Regional Leadership” or “Regional Cooperation”, while another that I chose to include in this category was “Regionalism”. I placed “Regional Vision” in its own category in order to maintain the idea of developing a community or regional vision distinct from political leadership and cooperation. In any case, the discussion seemed to increase
the salience of a regional approach to addressing Richmond’s problems, with a shift from two to five people considering regional cooperation and leadership as a priority.

Also of interest, those considering housing to be an important issue dropped from three to two following deliberation. This was only somewhat surprising, because, while it was mentioned during the dialogue, housing was not a primary focus and was often mentioned in a negative context, such as the construction of expensive high-rise apartments in downtown Richmond. Of those that stayed the same, transportation was of interest. Notably, however, in the post-deliberation survey the word “regional” was added, further evidence of the salience of regionalism following the discussion. Crime and safety concerns also remained the same. While participants touched on these issues, no proposals were offered outside of after-school programs to avoid gang violence and other delinquency and paying greater attention to the needs of the Hispanic community.

Since so much of the discussion focused on ways to strengthen and unify the nonprofit community, it was surprising that more responses did not tie directly into nonprofit functions or call on the mayor to listen to them. However, one participant wrote “Working with non-profits to tackle these” below her post-deliberation survey as a kind of overarching goal for the mayor to address. Four out of seven participants, though, did not reference the nonprofit community explicitly in their post-deliberation survey.

One question I had was how effective appeals to group interest would be. In particular, I was curious whether anyone would add fatherlessness or homelessness as priorities. Two individuals whose organizations each work on one of those issues made an appeal to them during the deliberation. However, no one added fatherlessness in their post-deliberation survey and not even the participant herself claimed homelessness as a top priority. Were someone to have
added either, it would have been evidence that an appeal to one’s own group interests can be effective. Since individuals introduced themselves and their organization, including its aims, before the discussion, they would have known that these were appeals to a speaker’s group interests so long as they paid attention.

Several preferences fell out in the post-deliberation surveys. Of those, green initiatives, James River pollution, and seeking large-scale grants stand out. The first two seem to have fallen out because of not being addressed during the discussion. This may be due to the course it took and the questions posed, but the fact that they were not discussed seems likely to have made at least an immediate impact. It would be interesting to know if shifts away from those types of issues would be long-term or if participants would recall them after the discussion and reaffirm their importance. That seeking large-scale grants was not reflected on more surveys rather than none was surprising since a significant portion of the discussion was spent considering specific opportunities and possible partnerships.

Civic Virtues and Participant Feedback

The post-deliberation survey included 10 statements for participants to respond to meant to gauge satisfaction with the event, whether it encouraged the cultivation of civic virtues, and confidence in deliberation. As in the previous section, seven participants responded. The participants were instructed to respond by circling a number from one to five, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. A copy of this part of the survey is below.

Please respond to the following statements using the five-point scale below. Circle the number that corresponds to your response.
1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Feel Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

Participating in the discussion was a worthwhile experience.
Other participants forced me to think critically about my ideas and opinions.

1 2 3 4 5

I respect the other participants.

1 2 3 4 5

I trust the other participants.

1 2 3 4 5

It would be great to continue this discussion and take some kind of action.

1 2 3 4 5

Hearing other people’s views made me feel empathetic.

1 2 3 4 5

Other participants valued my contribution to the discussion.

1 2 3 4 5

Most participants justified their claims with facts and reasons.

1 2 3 4 5

Today’s discussion was mentally stimulating.

1 2 3 4 5

Deliberation on public policy issues will yield positive results.

1 2 3 4 5

On statement one, whether participation was worthwhile, all but one participant chose Agree or Strongly Agree. Of those that chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 42.9 percent chose the latter. The person who did not respond in the affirmative chose Feel Neutral. These results are comforting, but not surprising. Most of those in attendance did express gratitude that I had organized the event and made explicitly positive statements regarding it.

On statement two, regarding critical thinking, 100 percent of the participants agreed that other participants made them think about their ideas and opinions. This is important because improving critical thinking skills can be a valuable product of engaging in civic discourse. Of those who answered affirmatively, two chose Strongly Agree, while five selected Agree.

Statement three asked whether they respected the other participants. Respect is widely regarded as a fundamental condition for good discourse (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). Therefore, it is notable that, again, 100 percent answered Agree or Strongly Agree and 57.1 percent chose Strongly Agree. While nothing from the deliberation suggested disrespectfulness,
it was plausible that given only knowing each other for a few hours many would have chosen Feel Neutral. It is possible, though, that a sense of camaraderie in running or working for a nonprofit contributed to respect in a positive way.

Trust played out differently. Graph 1 shows the distribution of responses on this statement.

As the graph shows, two participants felt neutral, two agreed, and three strongly agreed. This is important because it highlights the difference between respect and trust. While the deliberators had a high level of mutual respect, trust may require more time or deeper bonds.

Statement five was meant to have them consider whether they wish to continue the discussion and, ultimately, take some kind of action. When discourse is not tied to formal decision-making channels, come further steps will be necessary even if it is a legitimate deliberation and generates good policy ideas. The exact wording of the question was, “It would be great to continue this discussion and take some kind of action.” This may have been
problematic because of the word great. A better phrasing might have been simply “I want to continue this discussion and take some kind of action.” This would have been less loaded since the response options are already arranged according to the strength of the participants’ agreement. In any case, one participant responded Feel Neutral while the other six split evenly between Strongly Agree and Agree.

Statement six asked participants if they felt empathetic after hearing other people’s views. Empathy is a valuable trait for deliberation because it implies a willingness to see a situation from someone else’s perspective. Stubborn, myopic participants can preclude the bridging of differences and the forging of compromise. In this type of a deliberation, empathy can mean understanding a participant’s views with which one disagrees or is unfamiliar and a sense of identification with a group included in a speaker’s statement. Comparatively, empathy scored rather low, with six participants marking Agree and one Feel Neutral. This may be because the discussion did not include the truly needy, but rather their advocates. The presence of a teenager from a struggling school or laid off worker, for example, might have increased empathy.

Moreover, since the discussion never formally assumed the tone of a choice between X, Y, or Z, empathy toward the advocate of choices and those who would be affected by them was precluded. Were the participants to have been forced to choose, either through unanimous consensus or a majoritarian design, empathy would have gone up in all likelihood. A serious limitation of the study was that there was no attempt at a group choice. Effectively, they discussed relevant and peripheral issues and then voted individually on what they thought the priorities of the mayor should be. Participants were only held accountable to their views to the extent that they stated them during the discourse. Presuming they value their preferences,
however, and wish for others to adopt them as well, it would only be logical to state them during the forum so that others might change their mind.

Statement seven, whether they thought other deliberators valued their contribution, had six out of seven respondents agree or strongly agree. The other individual selected Feel Neutral. 28.6 percent chose Strongly Agree. This measure is insightful because it indicates whether deliberators perceived that they were appreciated. If they felt that they were not, it is unlikely that they would be interested in further deliberation and at some point during the discussion would probably have stopped caring. Responses to this statement also collectively indicate the degree of “fellow feeling” that was present.

Statement eight was the following: “Most participants justified their claims with facts and reasons.” This is important because it measures their perception of the deliberative quality of the discussion. Low scores on this measure would be worrisome because it would indicate that participants did not feel that others justified their claims. It would be useful in any case to compare this measure to the level of justification. In this forum, the level of justification was high, as 88.5 percent of statements had either complete or sophisticated justifications. On this statement, 71.4 percent chose Agree or Strongly Agree. Another participant was neutral and the last chose Disagree. Surprisingly, this was the only Disagree or Strongly Disagree for all participants on all IO statements.

My interpretation of this was that perhaps she was dissatisfied by the facts that were given, as only one participant ever cited a statistic. However, without an Internet connection, outside materials, or a great memory, it is not likely that participants will be able to offer statistics or the results of studies. Thus, much of what might be considered a fact is based on a certain shared understanding of the dynamics within the Richmond community. In any case,
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participants did give reasons for their views most of the time, but that does not necessarily imply that they were good or valid. Therefore, a second possible interpretation was that this participant did not like the reasons and facts others gave and chose to give a low response. In any case, this individual also responded Feel Neutral to six of 10 questions, by far the most, so it is possible that she simply had a bad experience. This is evidenced by her response of Feel Neutral to statement one. Below is Graph 2, pertaining to statement eight.

![Graph 2: Statement Eight](image)

Statement eight: Most participants justified their claims with facts and reasons.

Statement nine asked if participants found the discussion to be mentally stimulating. This question served two purposes. One, it served as a control on question two and tested how participants would respond to a similar question. Perplexingly, the same deliberator who responded Disagree to statement eight responded Feel Neutral to statement nine, but had marked Strongly Agree for statement two. The notion that she strongly agreed that participants forced her to think critically, but that the discussion was not mentally stimulating appears to be a clear contradiction. This raises the question of whether she took the survey seriously and whether small semantic choices make a big difference. Two other participants chose Agree for statement
two, but Strongly Agree for statement nine. In any case, six out of seven chose either Strongly Agree or Agree for statement nine.

Statement ten asked whether participants believed in deliberation. The statement was, “Deliberation on public policy issues will yield positive results.” 71.4 percent of respondents chose Strongly Agree and the other two chose Agree. This is important because belief that deliberation will have a positive outcome is correlated with willingness to participate (Walsh, 2007). The fact that the respondents responded affirmatively suggests that they will pursue future options to participate in civic discourse.

The Internet

The online discussion was ultimately a failure. While eight people signed up, no dialogue or participation beyond introductory remarks took place. This was disappointing since multiple in-person forum attendees said that they hoped to continue the discussion online. In fact, one woman said that the forum helped her decide to commit to joining the online discussion. However, given low turnout for the in-person forum, this may have detracted from recruitment for the online discussion. Perhaps people needed the in-person connection to be inspired to continue in the dialogue. Had significant number joined, the online discussion may have then seemed worthwhile to others, as well, and could have spread via word of mouth.

To gauge the reasons why the online discussion failed, I sent a follow-up survey to everyone who signed up for the original forum. The first respondent, Bo, indicated that he has not participated in any forums since ours. He feels that a major challenge for sustained deliberation is time management. In his view, successful deliberation will be on high priority topics and get results or action. Bo felt that it was good for us to have the dialogue, but that we did not have the right people there. This speaks to the limitations of a small deliberative group,
particularly one meant to reflect the perspective of a wide community. Additionally, he said that he only discusses politics individually and never online.

Je has been working on in person task force to help previously incarcerated felons find employment. Regarding the challenges to online deliberation, she wrote

When the discussion is online, people do not seem to participate as much because it is harder to be held accountable. When you know that there is a specific meeting scheduled (in person, or even on the phone), you know that you have to be prepared by the time that the meeting starts. When you are holding [a] fluid conversation online you can always find a way to put it off to another day.

This relates to a particular challenge of online communication. For many, asynchronous dialogue is unsatisfying because feedback from others is not immediate. Moreover, in a busy or relatively quiet forum, a response may never come as it either gets lost in the shuffle or there are simply too few people participating.

A third respondent did not attend the forum, but responded that she does not use online communication for political discussion. She writes, “I do not use blogs or online message Boards... perhaps age is a factor but [I] prefer face to face or phone to phone. Color me not new age communication savvy.” This corresponds to findings from Cook, Carpini, and Jacobs (2007), who argue that there is a significant age gap in using online resources for political conversation.

Two important problems then that have emerged are age gaps in using computer-mediated communication and dissatisfaction with online versus in-person dialogue. This suggests, albeit loosely, that there are significant challenges to promoting online deliberation, particularly for those who are used to strategic thinking, action plans, boards, and task forces that all tend to meet in person at predefined times. For whatever reason, chat rooms seem to be going
out of style, but they suggest at least a moderate improvement if the criticism cited by Je is accurate for more people.

To consider this in a broader perspective, I looked at two websites that have forums for political and non-political discussion. The two sites are talkrva.com and richmondcitywatch.com. In reviewing multiple threads on both sites, there were common problems. First, many threads often had a gap of a month or more between messages. Moreover, sorting the messages by date posted across threads, most of the posting that takes place is done by only a few individuals, most commonly the site operator(s) and moderators. This suggests that there is limited payoff to participation in these forums. Aside from the rarity of quick responses to messages, the topics that were discussed tended to deal with peripheral issues such as gossip about politicians and the like. I also considered Church Hill People’s News. This site provides news of neighborhood and city interest and has a user-friendly format. While there are recent comments listed on the right side of the site, there are no forums for open political discourse. This is problematic from a deliberative standpoint, and is common with many newspapers’ websites, as well.

For online deliberation to be possible, a greater effort will be needed to recruit more people and have a dialogue with good responses posted in a timely fashion. Neither of these sites fulfill that requirement. Other potential deliberative arenas are blogs and comment sections for newspaper articles, but this seems to severely limit the scope and nature of the discourse. Based on the Italian study, one solution might be to get elected officials to participate. Were Mayor Dwight Jones to announce an online forum for open discussion that he would participate in, there would probably be few challenges in gaining interest from the public.
On the Experiment

The experiment conducted was unique because it was focused on a particular portion of the population that is likely to focus on the common good given the nature of their work. Deliberation within different niches – the business world, in schools, in government – is likely to yield distinct outcomes, but it would be interesting to see the effects of testing deliberative designs for particular “minipublics” (Fung, 2007) comprised of certain groups. In particular, how might corporate executives and small business leaders debate the question of what should be the priorities of the mayoral administration? It would be insightful to consider the differences between such a dialogue and one that is exclusive to nonprofit leaders. While power dynamics were discussed during the in-person forum, I suspect that the business world would address their relationship to the city in a manner that is far more power-oriented.

Regardless, it was a limited experiment in many ways. First, the number of participants was rather low. Moreover, as only inclusive of nonprofit leaders, it does not approximate a representative sample in the slightest and, as the participants acknowledged, there were many within the nonprofit community absent, as well. In any case, experiments that have been done have ranged from a dozen to over a thousand participants, so there is an opportunity for a theorist to compare and describe the differences that emerge between large-scale and small-scale deliberation in the future. I hope that greater guidance on what is an ideal number, or at least the pros and cons of different sized groups, will come out in future research.

This forum was also original in that it asked nonprofit leaders to deliberate about what was important, but not necessarily good. Thus, while different approaches to education might be advocated by each participant, most acknowledged it as a top priority. Accordingly, the course of the discussion was remarkably civil. There were no angry disagreements, and as represented
in the DQI, normal participation was always possible. Perhaps the nature of this discussion precluded disagreement and conflict. This might be so for two reasons. The first would be the lack of a decision rule. Had there been a call for consensus on the most important priorities, perhaps the tone would have become more given to conflict. The second factor could have been that debating about what is important rather than good is simply less contentious. It would certainly be interesting to have a group decide what is important and then deliberate on the action steps to be taken to see if it leads to debate that is more contentious.

Since there were also no appeals to naked self-interest, there might be an interesting finding here. Perhaps a conflict-oriented approach to political discussion is not always needed. While deliberative democracy seems to imply at least some conflicts that are to be resolved, the experiment does seem to more closely fit a kind of “cooperative reasoning”. This may be useful to the nonprofit community since their work can overlap and they depend on good relationships with one another to ensure that clients with multiple needs are served properly. Additionally, once part of the discussion turned toward uniting the nonprofit community, any kind of major dissension was probably prevented. Thus, a question that arises is whether nonprofit discourse will tend to be civil, or if perhaps instead discourse can become path-dependent. In other words, having heard multiple participants make a demand for nonprofit unity, were they influenced to avoid disagreement with other deliberators? If this is so, it suggests a problem for deliberative democracy. If the course of discussion affects the outcome, the epistemic quality of deliberation is called into question. Even more troubling, participants may be limited by what has already been said and by their desire for positive social recognition, particularly when the deliberators are all part of the same sub-community.
Apart from the lack of conflict, the discussion did approximate Rosenberg’s (2007) concept of collaborative discourse multiple times. Participants expressed a willingness to reconsider the social relationships that exist within the Richmond community and were not constrained by considerations of power. They were also very willing to address the interconnectedness of social problems and imagine the plurality of ways in which certain characteristics of society contribute to social problems. The acknowledgment that social problems cannot be addressed in isolation was a compelling trend that emerged during the discussion.

The theme of regionalism was also of interest. In fact, it appears to be the most significant shift that occurred throughout the day. I argue that this occurred via the following cognitive process:

1. Deliberators state social problems within the City of Richmond.
2. The social problems discussed are seen as interconnected.
3. The challenges to addressing these problems are great.
4. Richmond cannot solve these problems with its own internal resources and it uniquely suffers from a lack of regional integration.
5. Regional cooperation and leadership are needed to address Richmond’s social problems.

Once people started considering social problems that should be of interest to Mayor Jones, they realized that there is a cyclical nature behind them. Poverty leads to bad schools, which leads to crime, which leads to incarceration, is one example. Thus, when they thought about how to fix schools, they realized that an inversion of new funds alone would not solve the problem. To their credit, participants came to take holistic framework of Richmond’s needs.

Upon realizing that Richmond will probably be unable to address these matters internally, two ideas emerged. The first was to apply for large-scale grants that would bring various actors together and address major issues. The second was to consider regional cooperation. Although,
as one participant noted, Richmond needs to heal a lot of the in-fighting that has taken place, it will never make real progress until a regional approach is adopted. At the very least, the surrounding counties and their institutions and leaders need to be engaged in a conversation about the future of the metropolitan Richmond area.

There were, however, challenges to fostering a sustained dialogue that became apparent. One, the experiment suffered from the lack of a critical mass of people. In the future, practitioners should be aware that many people will sign up, but not ultimately attend. Had the discussion been well-attended, the likelihood that leaders would have emerged to create future forums or take action would have increased. Better attendance would have also indicated to participants that there is a better chance that their efforts will result in real action being taken.

As a deliberation exclusive to the nonprofit community, there was a lack of recognized leaders. Had government officials been a part of the discussion, recruiting deliberators would have been much easier. For those wary of deliberative democracy, the presence of elected officials and those with greater power would make participation more attractive. This suggests a leadership challenge to deliberation, however, and would seem to undercut the idea of all participants as political equals.

The experiment also suffered from a lack of resources. Proper deliberation is supposed to be heterogeneous and this pertained only to the nonprofit community. In the future, I would like to recreate this type of an experiment with a true random sample of community members. It would be interesting as well, however, to have different groups, such as business leaders, debate the same issue to compare conceptions of social justice and political prioritization. Additionally, I think it is useful to plan as Rosenberg (2007) did and schedule multiple deliberations before the first one even begins rather than leaving future forums open-ended. As far as recruiting subjects
goes, I also think there might be possible benefits to compensating deliberators, especially to broaden participation to those lower on the socioeconomic scale.

Another approach might be to persuade a mayoral administration to truly empower a citizen deliberation by investing it with the formal authority to decide on some issue. Were a mayor to concede such deference to ordinary citizens, at least the defense that participation will not make a difference could be removed. This would contribute to recruiting participants.

Regardless, there was a lack of initiative demonstrated by those in attendance and it is important to think about why. One problem was ambiguity of purpose and outcome. It was not explicitly clear whether there would be one or multiple deliberations and who would lead whatever action was to be taken. This is a compelling question that provides an opportunity for both the political science and leadership studies communities to collaborate and find answers.

It is also unclear whether deliberation should be ongoing and institutionalized, or simply form to focus on particular issues. Moreover, should deliberation exist within a separate public sphere or become formally embedded government institutions? I hope that creative and open-minded officials will experiment with ideas like Gastil’s local advisory council. In any case, further experimentation is the only path to understanding the effects of where deliberation is housed and whether it is a government institution.

Another interesting finding was that the participant who rated the lowest on the questionnaire was also the person who arrived late. While it is hard to confidently draw a conclusion from that, it does suggest that time spent deliberating and positive feedback on deliberation are correlated. If this is true, ongoing deliberation may be conducive to fostering empathy, respect, trust, and satisfaction with participation.

The most positive results from the experiment were the awareness that Richmond’s problems require a regional focus and the two concrete proposals that were discussed. The first was to ask the mayor for a nonprofit advocate in his administration and the second was to create a database of all nonprofits either online or in book form. Each proposal indicates that communicative rationality can be a creative process. In this respect, deliberation may have additional usefulness as an exploratory process of considering what is possible, as opposed to merely deciding up or down on particular issues.

As a final consideration of the experiment, I return to the six guiding questions previously proposed and provide a response to each one:

1. Will the Internet be used to deepen and extend the conversation?
2. Will deliberation among nonprofit leaders be oriented toward the common good?
3. What will be the content of the discussion?
4. Will people change their mind?
5. Will the deliberation have an effect on civic virtues?
6. What will be the outcome of the deliberation?

1. No, the online dialogue never took off and this may indicate an unwillingness or lack of desire to use computer-mediated communication.
2. Yes, generally speaking, they were concerned about the least well off and the future of the city as a whole. However, they also referred to the bargaining position of the nonprofit community and its power in the city. It is debatable whether this is an undesirable appeal to self-interest or a beneficial approach since their organizations have social justice aims.
3. The following issues came up the most frequently during the dialogue: education, regionalism, unifying the nonprofit community, seeking a nonprofit advocate in the mayoral administration, and applying for large-scale grants.
4. Yes, there was a shift through which they recognized the importance of regionalism as a strategy to address Richmond’s needs and problems.
5. Yes, according to the questionnaires, deliberation appears to have a positive effect on civic virtues, but this should not be overstated given the small scale of this experiment.
6. Unfortunately, no substantive action was taken by the group following the forum.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

Since the development of deliberative democracy, many things have *not* happened. There has been no significant citizen-driven effort for deliberative institutions or forums. There has also been no great shift in the political structure of the United States to accommodate civic discourse. There is no Deliberation Day. There are no citizens’ juries in the United States. There are no priority panels or state legislative panels, as proposed by Gastil. There has also been no action taken by the participants in my experiment.

All of these facts suggest important realities. First, there appears to be a fundamental leadership challenge to deliberative democracy. While a vital premise to the theory is the equality of participants, there appears to be a need for leaders to plan forums and take charge of organizing collective action. How should this happen? First off, it is important that the divide between academia and the real world be bridged. If forums for deliberation depend upon curious academics, not very much should be expected to come out of them. In my view, for deliberation to be successful, it should begin with a spirited individual (or small group) who is willing to take the lead in creating deliberative forums. Cook, Capini, and Jacobs (2007) found that many who had never participated in civic discourse had never been asked, but should we also consider why none of them considered putting their own forum together?

There does seem to be a collective action problem associated with deliberative democracy. Even if there is desire to deliberate on public policy, why should any single individual come to the conclusion that he or she is the one to take charge and do the work needed to make it happen? It is easy for those interested in political life from an academic standpoint to wonder why citizens do not do more. However, after planning a forum and talking to participants, it is clear that people are extremely busy already with their professional lives and
the many interests they have outside of their career. For those who have not studied deliberative
democracy, there may be a serious lack of motivation to participate in one of its forums.

Furthermore, deliberative democracy seems to be hostile to leadership in some respects.
Since many view discourse as a way of overcoming hierarchy and power, what would it mean
for the theory if action still depends upon leaders and not all deliberators have the requisite skill
or drive to fulfill such a role? For me, deliberation and leadership are not necessarily hostile.
While perhaps only certain individuals will create forums, recruit participants, and take action on
the ideas offered, their role and leadership should always be redeemable within discursive
forums. In other words, for the two to not be at odds, leaders must see themselves as fulfilling
the will that emerges from discussion. From a leadership studies perspective, this concept is
known as servant leadership. Ideally, passionate individuals will only take charge because of
their commitment to deliberation, not out of some desire for self-aggrandizement, but other
participants must always be aware of the possibility of an overbearing, self-interested leader.

There is also a paradox that seems to make deliberation difficult to get off the ground, but
potentially powerful once it gets started. On the one hand, results drive participation. People do
not want to get involved with an “experiment” in deliberation; they want to actually make a
difference. Since their time is valuable and scarce, people have to make snap judgments about
whether civic discourse is worth it. If a deliberation has achieved something or seems likely to
make an impact, people will probably want to join. Conversely, though, to be legitimate and
successful, deliberations must have a large, representative sample of citizens. At least in the
beginning stage, then, both results and participation seem to paradoxically depend on each other.
This suggests that deliberative forums should either be ongoing or begin by identifying the
outcome or goals of deliberation.
The problem of ambiguity of roles and leadership does remain, however, and it presented itself clearly in my study. While the quality of discourse was high and several proposals emerged, nothing ultimately happened. For deliberative democracy to move forward, it must account for leadership in carrying out whatever the group decides, as well as ensuring that forums are created in the first place. It is also important that the term leadership be stripped of any inherently negative or hostile connotations, especially with regard to theoretical approaches to deliberative democracy that stress equality and oppose narrow self-interest.

The leadership challenge is also different in forums embedded in government versus those that are not. Non-governmental forums are likely to arise from civic associations and this presents the risk that they will be biased in framing the topics to be addressed. However, civic associations are fundamental to fostering social capital at the local level, so they should be encouraged to take an active role in facilitating public discourse and mobilizing action thereafter. On the other hand, though, citizens can demand that representatives hold open, government-sponsored forums and follow through on what is decided. In fact, a theoretical approach to deliberation that is rooted in leadership studies may envision elected representatives as the individuals who simply coordinate deliberative forums and implement the outcomes.

As it stands, there is a growing body of empirical work and proposals for structural reform. As laboratories for democracy, practitioners in local communities and local government itself can tinker with what has emerged from deliberative democrats and find new ways to engage citizens in discussions about their future. It is vital, however, that they remain cognizant of the constraints on citizen participation and the need for good leadership, regardless of the context of a given discourse.
Session One

Mod: Thanks for coming everybody and welcome to the University of Richmond and the Jepson School of Leadership studies. I’m Thad Williamson and I’m the supervisor. And I’m just here to moderate this discussion, which hopefully means I won’t have to say very much at all. We want to hear what you have to say. This is being done by Tony DeRosa, he’s a senior here, and he’s doing a thesis. He is interested in deliberative democracy, which is the idea that public policy should be formulated not just by who has the most money or the most power, but by who can give the best reasons for what the right thing is to do. So he’s interested in studying how communities can discuss their policies together and try to forge verbal solutions. And, with that in mind, with the recent election and the change in the political landscape, now would be a good time to get nonprofit leaders together to discuss what the priorities should be for the next mayor and the city council. The goal is to get a conversation started and the outcome remains to be seen. It could be that there are twelve people in the room with all different ideas, or there may be enough common ground to propose something to the mayor. So, what would be the initial purpose of today would be to start the conversation and we’d try to keep the conversation going in other forums after today. So, let’s go around the room and you can say who you are and what organization you’re with.

[Each participant states his or her name and explains the nonprofit organization that he or she works with.]

Mod: Thank you again for taking the time out of your schedules to come here. Please take two or three minutes each and lay out what you would like to see happen in the city. You can be as general or as specific as you want, but what would really be your hopes and aspirations for what would happen in the city over the next few years.

Je: I just moved here, so I may be way off, but this is what I’ve observed. I think that first and foremost there is a strong opportunity for tourism in Richmond. I know that some people are afraid of seeing the city grow, but I think that tourism is a way to bring more people into the city without making it permanent. But one of the barriers that I see to that... I just moved from Anchorage and I felt that the people there had a sense of who they are and what they have to market and what their identity is within that niche. And I think that that’s really lacking in Richmond. As far as working with the nonprofits, I’ve noticed that there are so many nonprofits out there and there are so many resources, but there is no central intake. One model I like where central intake has worked well is with homelessness. They noticed that homeless people would be at shelters, but have to go to journey to different locations to receive services throughout the day. But central intake took everything and put it in one place, as well as provided information, which made it a lot easier. I am wondering if there are other ways to provide services in this way, with partnerships between nonprofits, the government sector, and the private sector. Anyway, those are my initial thoughts.
Ma: I think you’re right on. [Je laughs] I don’t believe that the city has a direction that a strategic plan might cover. Because of that, there are so many competing sources, and ideas, and energies, and demands, that you can’t really take, umm..., if something fits or not, and I don’t just mean the city, I mean the region. So what I put very first on my list is regional cooperation. Because I don’t think that the City of Richmond is going to be able to make progress, real progress, unless there is a real connection and cooperation between all these different entities that make up the metropolitan Richmond area. It has always been a struggle. It will continue to be a struggle, but [pause and sigh] I don’t think that we’re going to go anywhere until that issue is adequately and somehow dealt with. The fact that they bring, that they pay, someone like Jim Crupi who gives us information, this roadmap of sorts, but the leadership changed and no one seems to want to think about or take up those issues. It’s a sad statement of the leadership, the lack of leadership, that we have.

Bo: I think that regional cooperation and the lack of leadership are probably the most important things to tackle. But it’s no small task when we have multiple jurisdictions and huge distrust between the jurisdictions and the same thing with nonprofits. There is just a lack of cooperation. And it’s more in the last five years than previously, but there are other huge issues. So I guess a personal issue for the mayor would be fatherlessness. In the City of Richmond, 63% of all children are born to single parents. So, I think that any place that has such a high concentration of single parenting, the absence of fathers, not only as providers, but as caretakers and partners, et cetera, you’re going to have concentrations of poverty.

Pa: I would agree with the strong lack of leadership and strategic direction. And I think the other piece that concerns me is in terms of development that is going on and how it’s not connected to the people who are the most vulnerable, with the most needs. And I think in our current economic situation it’s going to be incumbent upon agencies like ourselves to work more collaboratively together, to share resources in ways we haven’t before. In terms of the city, it kind of needs to heal itself in terms of all the infighting that’s going on between the city and the state, the city agencies, the city council, the mayor before we can work with some of these regional entities.

Ti: I would like to see more attention given to affordable housing. I think there is room for significant room for improvement and it’s connected to economic development. It is important for families and it helps when folks want to do things around where they live and in their neighborhood.

Mi: Well, I’m here mainly just to learn from you, but I have been looking at this at the national level and what nonprofits are trying to do particularly with this current economic crisis and the leadership transition. The mayors in cities can be either advocates or liaisons between local nonprofits and the significant funding sources at the federal and state level. Mayors can either be very good or very bad advocates depending on how much they take that role seriously. So looking at how the mayor is an advocate is something that the nonprofits can do. Particularly with changes around funding, faith-based funding, and leadership changes, the nonprofit community should consider the role of the mayor as an advocate. Another possibility would be
the creation of an advisory council to the mayor composed of nonprofit leaders to make sure that he stays connected.

An: I have an interesting perspective because over the last week I’ve been attending a lot of similar kinds of forums and there’s been some things that have really stood out to me as major problems. The Richmond Cultural Plan is something that I have followed, and what we basically did was outline things like the Valentine Museum, the Segal Arts Center, I don’t know all of them... We put together with Philip Morris and Capital One a plan to get people to come in and assess the cultural future of Richmond. The first problem I have with that is that it is another example of us bringing in people from other states to come in and tell us what’s wrong with our city when we have people perfectly capable of doing the same thing within our city. And it would keep money within our economy. I also think that that presents Richmond as very insecure. We’re not able to make our own decisions and put forth our own initiatives, that we need people from out of state telling us how to get better. I just find that insulting. But, part of this plan that they did, and I don’t know how much money they are paying for it, but I assume it’s a lot, their data mining or how they collected their data, was not very representative of the city. They had 2,800 responses, but the 23220 zip code they had 18 responses and 2,000 responses from Hanover County. And that was really troubling to me. And last night there was annual Richmond Development forum and two things stuck out to me. There were many expensive plans for downtown development, but they had only one project for mixed income housing. It was kind of just more of what we have, Tobacco Row and the Canal Walk. The people who actually live in Richmond are underrepresented. Also, I thought it was troubling that there were two representatives to talk about the ballpark in Shockhoe Bottom. They talked about the project and showed where the ballpark would be on a map. And it’s a $450 million project and they were talking about surrounding the park with multi-use facilities, but I just don’t think that that’s what we need to be focusing our money on.

Vh: One of the things that has come up in Virginia Housing and Development is hoping to recreate partnerships and collaborations to help bring things together again. We’ve met several times with different groups, different entities at different places. But it seems that until we pull ourselves together and come up with a unified force and impact... there probably will not be a lot done in terms of having an impact on the city as nonprofits. So we’re looking to increase the viability and visibility of nonprofits. They’ve played a prominent impact on the city at one time, and we’d like to see them return to that. And I’m thinking more of the nonprofits that have an effect on people’s lives every day. Now don’t quote me, I’m not knocking it so much, but arts, music, drama, and athletics, those things are good. But we need to take care of people’s everyday needs and we want to create partnerships that help us do that.

Hi: I may have misunderstood the assignment... I didn’t apply it to the nonprofit sector so much, but thought about the city as a resident. And one problem I see is the roads. And if you want to attract tourists, you don’t want them to bounce around in potholes, going around with bumps. Our sidewalks are the same way. We need to address infrastructure. There are some things that have been underground for 100 years, or at least 75, and they haven’t done nothing to them. One day on Broad St. I was waiting for a bus, and I looked at a hole where you could see all the way down into the sewer. It was getting dark, so I couldn’t see real well, but that’s a scary thought... You could ending up coming back in your vehicle and wind up underneath the
city. The other things that are concern to me, even if we’re no longer one of the top five murder capitals in the world, we still have a great deal of crime. If tourists and nonprofits are going to survive in this community, we have to look at violence. It eats a lot of the money in the community. In the Richmond community alone last year, there were 13,600 domestic calls and that costs a lot of money since they usually dispatch two officers in two separate cars. And there are a lot of related situations where fathers aren’t home because of protective orders or violence issues. The kids may end up on the street in gangs. And also the risk of substance abuse is there.

Mod: What I’ve heard you say is that there are a number of issues. One is the issue of human needs. The second regard cultural and identity issues. Who are we as a city? Who is shaping our culture? The third is cooperation, and cooperation across the region, and between city government. The fourth is infrastructure and crime. And last, and I think I’ll start with this since a number of you touched upon it, is how much status or influence do nonprofits really have any way as compared with the folks that Andrea talked about meeting with last night. It seems to me, and this is my opinion, that it’s useful to consider this one before the other questions. So, what can nonprofits do to have more of a voice and be more effective in bringing some of these needs to the public’s attention?

Ma: I’ve been involved in the nonprofit community since I lived here in college and I believe that we are currently in a position, more so than before, to contribute, to have a voice, to be partners. There is no awareness at the local level, at the state level, at the national level about what nonprofits... what their economic is and how fewer and fewer services are being bestowed upon nonprofits to take care of. We have a workforce. And I think we’re on a mission to make our voices heard. The Community Foundation has begun a program called the Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence, and under that partnership there are four components. There is an information, knowledge component called the Connect network, a nonprofit training and professional development component called Nonprofit Learning Point, there’s a volunteer piece that’s called Hands On Greater Richmond, and then there is a consulting component with no specific name but designed to work with senior leadership. So there has been this recognition, if you will, that perhaps if we joined all of these groups together and had a partnership, we could become a formidable force to be reckoned with. So there is that very fundamental organization that will grow and I’m hoping that everyone will get involved. [Responding to Mi] In some cities and states, of course, there are these nonprofit advisors to city officials. And I don’t think we advocate for ourselves as well as we could, and that would be a good place to start.

An: I would really love to see some of these databases that are starting to compile nonprofits in the local area produce some sort of publication that goes out with the phonebooks and lists basically all the services, all the nonprofits in the area. And it would be good for people who don’t have access to a computer so that they can still find access to the services they need. You know, the other night, I was driving around and the intersection had all green lights. And, I’ve never called the police before, so I went home, and... It’s impossible to find the police in the phone book! It really took me twenty minutes to look up the Richmond Police in the phone book. [laughing] I was looking all over, and finally I found it under government services. And I should be able as a nonprofit advocate at the government level to have a clear understanding of what’s out there, and who people are advocating for. There are greater amounts of needs to be met.
Hi: I agree with that, and I think that there are a lot of nonprofits that have started and that people don’t really recognize. I know I’ve been in the nonprofit business for nearly 10 years and I still have people that say to me, “Oh, what a good thing! You know, we really need your services...” It’s an everyday occurrence. And people call me all the time and ask, “Do you know someone that can help with a domestic violence situation and doesn’t have anybody to help?” or I get people that say, “My child is having an emotional problem...” I mean, there’s just not that public awareness of the resources and I’m not even sure that there’s even awareness among nonprofits. Things also catch me off guard, you find out something that has been around for 35 years.

Vh: Telling that story is really important. I know it happens, we employ a lot of people and we don’t see a lot of those needs advertised. The other thing that bothers me with this whole issue is when we are starting and stopping with certain people’s needs. If people need something, things should continue. Sometimes we have to search for people, or organizations are at capacity. But we have people waiting in the wings, waiting for somebody to get hired in this position at the Chamber of Commerce or other leadership in Richmond. Or whatever they’re doing...

Hi: So, you mean continuity of care?

Vh: Yes...

Hi: Which is so important, there shouldn’t be a wait because I left.

Vh: City of this size, state capital, I just don’t think they should have to.

Ma: I had an interesting this past spring, or summer, whenever it was, I participated in the Greater Richmond Challenge with the Chamber. I guess there were close to 200 people. They identified five important issues, we divided everyone up, and we each gave a presentation. So we went out for a day and a half to nonprofits and different places, doing different work, at schools, whatever, and we came back after a day and a half to report on what we saw. We said what we thought could happen and should happen. And anyone who was in that room who worked for a nonprofit was blown away by when people got up and said what they think and what they thought should happen. No one knew, to your point [points to Hi], no one knew that all of these agencies worked on affordable housing. No one knew that all of these agencies worked on transportation. [Vh agrees] I mean, this is the general public, not the people in the nonprofit world, but..., and I was just sitting wondering what do these people do with their lives? Do they not read? Do they not volunteer? [laughter] How could they not know that there are nonprofits out there doing this kind of work? So of course I went back and said, “We have got to be advocates for ourselves!”

Je: I have something to say, actually a few things. I think we should look at large projects that would benefit the Richmond community. Like block grants that would bring together multiple organizations. I saw that where I was living in Alaska and it really helped unify organizations and, looking forward, it gave them the power to say, “Look, we are a force to be reckoned with. And we secured millions of dollars.” It also brought together not only nonprofits but also some government agencies. So I think that’s one thing. I don’t know if it exists in Richmond, but it
would help the problem of all the nonprofits being extremely fragmented. And secondly, I think sending something out with the phonebooks is a good idea, but I think with new technology a great way to do that would be an online database. So housing, or a foodbank, or whatever, anything that you’ve heard, this would be where people could go who have needs and they could look at all the agencies in one place. In addition, with National Student Partnerships, we have clients that come to us and we help them fulfill their needs. So that would be good way for us to go on and refer other nonprofit agencies to us. And I think that would also help break down the fragmentation between agencies and build partnerships.

An: One thing on that, I really, I kind of... feel at times that the only way to reach people is to actually go out and find them. I helped register people to vote for the election, and we would go out, and learn that people had no way of actually going to vote. You find that there are just huge amounts of destitution in Richmond. And you really can’t see it sometimes. It’s so underrepresented, it’s so under the radar. They don’t have computer access! They’re not going to get to a database, you have to do everything for them.

Mi: On this issue of advocating for nonprofits, there was a study that someone did on the economic impact of the nonprofit sector. And it was a very powerful statement on the economic impact of the nonprofit sector – jobs, revenue to the city, tax revenue, and things that would otherwise have to pay for. I know there was a Virginia-wide study broken down by cities, and that could be very powerful. Another thing is I haven’t lived here long enough to know the status of the United Way, but, this sort of centralized referral service is already being used in some places. There’s a centralized hotline that the United Way manages which is used to refer people to service providers.

Ma: It’s 211.

Mi: Oh really? OK. Yeah.

Ma: And that’s good for human services, but not for everything. But there are some rules about which kind of organizations can be referred. You have to meet this whole series of qualifications.

Ti: You know, I find that there is just so much chatter amongst the nonprofits. How could you know what’s going on? Everybody wants to get in touch with these players, but I think it would certainly be beneficial to all of us to work together and have a database. It would help to add other layers of education so that people know what’s going on.

An: There’s not any organization with the time and the resources to put all of this together and manage something of this extent. And that’s where I think an advocacy person could potentially have that as their responsibility. And I also think it would help to make the government aware of how big the nonprofit sector is. It’s huge! But I think they just think of nonprofits as this nice thing that is out there, but that we ask for money. We don’t contribute money to the economy. And that’s not the case at all.
Vh: Some thoughts I have. I think the opportunity is larger than we can imagine right now. The incoming mayor has roots in the nonprofit world. He’s done some things on housing development on the Hull Street side. I think if at some point if we present something unified, that looks collaborative, something that looks like a partnership, he will listen and it will make a difference. I think it would be real important to take advantage of that opportunity right now.

[Mod asks Je to clarify grant she previously referred to. Short exchange between Mod, Je, and Ma takes place.]

Ma: This would be a good idea to have groups of nonprofits to have a conversation about what opportunities are at there. Perhaps a plant would like to do something green and this would create job opportunities. One of the things that we can talk about are Kellogg Foundation grants worth between three and four million dollars, through which we would collaborate with the city. Something like that might be an opportunity.

Ti: Well, you know, so many businesses are going out of business or cutting back, they’ll have to partner with other organizations. The money’s not there anyway.

An: One of the things I’m working on is a community center that is not a city-owned community center. I am hopeful that this will happen, but we’re still working on it. But, it sort of like, takes holistic approaches to major projects. So, it includes things like childcare and adult education. Stuff like that would be a huge deal if we accomplished it.

Ma: Would this be a similar model to the Neighborhood Resource Center in Greater Fulton Hill?

An: I haven’t been there yet, but I’m going to contact her.

Mod: I’m thinking we should turn the discussion toward another question – human needs. What can nonprofits do and what can the public do to understand? We just saw Circuit City go bankrupt, and people are being thrown into poverty… often with children. What can be done to call attention to what’s being done?

An: You know, I keep going back to this idea of a nonprofit advocate. We should make a recommendation to the mayor that he have a nonprofit advocate as part of his core cabinet would be huge for all the nonprofits in the area. Of course, it would have to actually work…

Hi: It seems like we go, to me, in Richmond, through cause du jour. This administration likes this so they’re going to focus in and build this part of the community as well as the nonprofits. So I think if we’re going to propose somebody being an advocate for the nonprofits, I think that they need to be truly an advocate for all nonprofits, and not just for one cause. There’s one, I know I’m just a bit off topic, there’s another problem that no one has brought up, and it’s maybe because I live in the Southside of Richmond, we have a huge, growing Hispanic population. And, if the projections are correct, we have about 20 years until they actually outnumber us. And, I don’t think that the city has been able to do a whole lot to help Hispanic families in our community. There are a lot of legal issues related to that; there’s also a lot of crime perpetrated
in those areas. And I have a Hispanic therapist, so they’re knocking on my door for services, but it becomes more inclusive, you need translators. I don’t think we’re prepared for that.

Pa: On that note, I live in the Southside as well and I think the City of Richmond has an office there...

Hi: Yes, I know Tanya. I think I know pretty much all of the people, but the problem is you got three people in an office and six or seven thousand that we know of. And we don’t ever get an accurate count, because many are so afraid to have anything to do with government.

Pa: Absolutely, absolutely. But, my point was, I think that the establishment of that office will be significant. I haven’t seen some other counties... because Henrico is facing the same thing, I haven’t seen them be so proactive about it. But I think that one of the things I give credit for to Tanya and her staff is they’re very proactive and very amenable to forming relationships and collaborations with other folks. Because, they have some resources, they have some things to offer the Latino community, but they realize that they can’t do it alone so they are very amenable to those kinds of collaborations and partnerships. But, I don’t think that it’s just a Richmond issue, it’s a larger issue. Not just the Hispanic population and Latino population, but our changing community and how we embrace those changes, is something that we’re not attending to in a concerted way.

Bo: One of the things that will keep Richmond... Or a small piece of a larger puzzle is to keep Richmond as a good place to live, is, people say things like, if you want to live in Richmond you can’t have kids. And, you know, that’s a huge challenge. And I don’t know how with non-regional government how that can be solved.

An: I have been working with a few of the schools on the Northside and it’s really bad. Chandler Middle School has got to be the saddest place in the world. And it’s a school! And we wonder why these kids are having a hard time. These schools are terrible. I wouldn’t be able to learn like that. And talking to their principal, they don’t know what to do either because they’ve lost their accreditation and so they can’t get funding. But they can’t pull their test scores up so they can get funding. So they’re just in this downward spiral. I mean, there really needs to be a huge intervention. I don’t know how to do something like that, but it’s really bad. And I mean, even going between the two schools, we have a partner that works with middle schools and they have been talking with Chandler, MLK, and Binford which are the three around the Jackson Ward area, where they’re based out of. Even between those three schools, there is huge disparity. MLK is much bigger, it has a lot more facilities, while in Chandler there are virtually no offices whatsoever. And then there’s Binford, which pulls from the Fan, and it’s a privileged school. I don’t know what the answer to this is, but it’s a big problem.

Ti: Personally, it doesn’t matter what’s going on in the City of Richmond if I can’t raise a family there [An laughs]. So, if we’re talking about revitalization, you have to get down to that root...

An: I guess there’s this group thing that goes on where, somebody say we need a cultural plan, let’s hire a consultant. And so they hire a consultant to come in, so the consultant says we need
to this, and so [in high pitched, silly voice] everybody says we need to do this. So people say, we need living downtown. And then everybody and their uncle builds high rises downtown.

Ti: [First part, roughly 10 seconds, is unintelligible] ...Clearly fancy housing downtown doesn’t eliminate all these issues.

Mi: If I read the Mayor’s platform right during the campaign, education was primary among the things he wants to do. There’s clean up government and fix the schools, right? These were the real priorities. And so we should think about nonprofits’ influence on the mayor, at least in terms of revenue. In other words, these are your priorities, here is how the nonprofit sector can help you reach those goals.

An: There’s also, one of the things that I’ve been excited about, has anyone heard about the Harlem Children’s Zone? It’s sort of an all-inclusive school located in Harlem and the founder is a guy named Geoffrey Canada. And Obama during the campaign put forward, the idea that he wants... Since the Harlem Children’s Zone has been so successful, they have like a 90% success rate and they take their students from birth to graduation and put them in college.

Mi: So like a cradle to college program?

An: Yeah, and right now they have taken in 10,000 kids in Harlem. Yeah, it’s a big thing, and you should take a look at their success rate. It’s phenomenal. But, Obama had put forward this idea that thy would start 20 charter, pilot, I guess, programs across the United States. And I personally want to really lobby for Richmond to be one of those cities, because we really, really need it. And I think we’re reasonably equipped to deal with something like that.

Mod: I think it’s good to see nonprofits coming forward. But education is going to be extremely difficult to solve with our internal resources. I think there’s a lot to be cleaned up. So I think it’s important to look for some of the external resources that Andrea is talking about. [Unintelligible for 15 seconds]

An: Which makes it so surprising to me that anybody is even discussing a stadium in Shockhoe Bottom. There are huge systemic problems in the City of Richmond, so it seems like a problem of priorities.

Bo: One of the problems related to the schools is, you can’t just expel everybody and the schools are a reflection of the communities. It’s not just a bad school; it’s not just bad leadership. Some of these schools have wonderful leadership. It’s high concentrations of poverty, it’s not having jobs, you know, all those things build up. You can’t just solve one issue. So, if the mayor wanted to take a look at the bigger picture of how can we leverage the resources that we do have, resources like the United Way that have a regional focus, like even U of R, leadership, maybe we could put our heads together and address some of these issues. So there needs to be strong leadership that is regional, not just city. Not just city...

Ma: It occurred to me... It’s a complex set of issues and just throwing money at it will often not fix things. Like, if you gave every single person who’s homeless a house, that doesn’t
necessarily mean that that’s a good thing. You need to address all those issues that brought people there in the first place. Whether it’s lack of education, lack of job training, minimal health benefits, substance abuse issues, violence, or whatever the case is... You know, it’s this pot stew on the table, and taking one part out or putting one part in will not make it taste like you want it to.

Mod: What about crime I guess? Let’s follow up on that. Is it just not our role and hope the police do a good job? Or, how can nonprofits contribute to this issue? Is it education?

Ma: Prevention, prevention, prevention.

Vh: Yeah, intervention [laughs].

Mod: OK, how?

Ma: It’s the nonprofits, we provide the prevention. We’re just trying to figure out what to do with this person who’s now broken... What could we have done as a community to help this person in the first place?

Bo: One of the things that is happening is... in working with a community foundation, their funding has gone down. The Republicans have taken away all of the money from intervention related to that. Their pulling money from intervention and, so, you know, this is precisely the time we need to be investing more in prevention.

Pa: Well, I think that this is such a struggle. I just know that from the intervention side, earlier this year, has been an increase in substance abuse. But what to do about prevention? I’m kind of a stepchild in my organization. Substance abuse, you never get enough funding for prevention, and it’s even more of a struggle to recognize the value of prevention. So, a pay now or pay later proposition [Vh agrees]. But, prevention helps to save from expenditures down the road. My colleagues this year have been working on getting legislators to commit to the prevention side, rather than the intervention side. One thing, I want to go back and say a couple of things. One, going back to schools, I’ve had the opportunity to sit on a number of boards this year looking at Richmond schools and how the quality of schools is connected to that question of community issues. I think that it is a mechanism that nonprofits can really play a role in, because the whole focus of that is to bring together nonprofits in the context of looking at all of those integrated issues that impact the schools and give the schools their quality of education. You know, how we can bring those resources to bear to impact the kids in the school system. So I think, nonprofits being involved in those issues is a mechanism to improve education. Because schools recognize that kids aren’t learning because there is substance abuse in the family, they’re not being fed properly at home. They come to school early. They have a parent who’s struggling with a mental illness, a single parent who has multiple jobs and they don’t have the supervision and resources to provide what their children need, and they’re very eager to have nonprofits trying to meet some of those needs.

An: I think something that I’ve, I guess, had trouble with, is for the 2007 Youth Media Assessment one of the things that they found was really lacking was afterschool programs. And
afterschool programs are huge for crime prevention because they keep occupied during hours where there is often no parental supervision. And my personal take is that the visual arts is very helpful in preventing gangs, and gang-related activity, because it gives kids a way to express their individualism and have solidarity in a group in a way that is positive, obviously, rather than negative. But, I’m not sure where we can go...

[Brief indiscernible remarks and laughter by An and Pa]

Pa: Going back to schools and community, and the relationship between the two, in Henrico we did a youth needs assessment in 2006 and it was the hardest thing to get Henrico schools to do that. I think in the City of Richmond there has not been one of those. It goes back to our advocacy in terms of nonprofits to help people understand the need for those types of assessments and the value of identifying first hand what are the issues and the magnitude of the issues and then have a concerted discussion about what are the resources we need to bring to bear to address the problem. I think, many times, we look at it in a very fragmented way. It’s like an elephant; I see the trunk, you see the tail, and in our view that’s the most important part. But we’re not looking at the picture holistically, and so, to emphasize the need for valid data to substantiate what we do and how we go about it is important.

[Pa and An have a brief side chat]

An: If we need to identify specific youth needs, we should do it ourselves. We don’t need to get someone from Raleigh to assess our schools; we have people in Richmond.

[Er, a late arrival, enters the room and introduces herself. Mod briefs her on the discussion and the primary question.]

Er: Yeah, I have a little list over here. For me, the critical thing for the next mayor is good governance. I’m probably the only person who likes public administration in its purest form. There is a lot to be said for building really good infrastructure in the city government. And I think that has a lot to do with really good programs, management, and people. And then using the people there allows for the creativity to innovate. Local government is one of the only places where people have freedom, where citizens can make a real, direct impact on people’s lives. And I think that building a really solid, good government infrastructure would address a lot of the strains that nonprofits feel about how we come up with a standard plan for what goes on next in terms of taking the city forward. And, of course, that’s in addition to human services and economic development, but good governance will be critical.

Mod: Well, what about economic development? Maybe we could talk about that. What role should nonprofits be playing in economic development issues? A lot of times people think it’s the mayor’s job to take care of the economy and everybody sits back and watches. And the nonprofits job is something else. Is that acceptable?

[Several respond no. Ma says something unintelligible followed by laughter.]
Ma: It’s not one element that is going to solve it. It wasn’t one element that created it. It has to be those relationships, partnerships, and collaborations. You have to be working together toward the same goal. [In an exaggerated voice] And I don’t think we all really know what that goal is. And there is no sense of what that goal is. And we can talk about how dysfunctional the mayor’s relationship with City Council was this last term. There was no direction. I’ve got mine, and I’ve got mine, and I’ve got mine, and the one with the hardest head wins. And so I think it has to be a collaboration. I can’t see nonprofits going out and endorsing someone standing out on the street. I can’t endorse that. So what can I do to help support the fact that it creates problems in the region and the city? What can I do as a nonprofit? OK, I can, provide services for people so they don’t have to stand on the street. I can bring the community to awareness that if you don’t give money to people on the street then perhaps they’ll go, oh, this isn’t being very successful, I should try something else. So there are roles I can play that address pieces of the problem.

Ti: And in terms of that impact study that we were talking about earlier, about nonprofits and their role, I think it is very relevant as the Chamber thinks about economic development that we tell them that nonprofits have a stake in building community. And it’s important that we have outreach to get our foot in the door to talk about how much of an influence we have.

An: This is related to the community center that I was talking about before that we’re working on. We have a parent organization and then our advisory council and I think possibly one way we could involve the nonprofit community in these governance issues is to say we have our advocate and that’s the person who keeps track of everybody, what their missions are. And then we have an advisory council that is made up of a variety of nonprofits that participate in these discussions so we aren’t getting one-sides discussions, so we really represent the breadth of services that are being offered.

Ti: Just playing Devil’s Advocate for a second, I think it would be great to have someone in a position like that, that function, for the nonprofits, but how do you, speaking to your point earlier [to Hi], necessarily prevent it from still being slanted? You know, we all have our biases, we all have our passions, and that kind of thing. So to bring that in that world, talking about how much money and resources are allocated, here we go again in so much chatter. I would be interested in hearing how you would make it truly fair.

An: Yeah, I think maybe taking someone from the nonprofit consulting group that you’re talking about [to Ma], you know, that’s within that Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence that has a consulting arm, maybe that would be someone who’s had experience in the nonprofit sector but isn’t currently… I don’t know, but someone like that who would work for the sector as a whole, not just everyone in this room.

Ma: There is a group that was supposed to come together… What was it called? Regional… What was it called? Robert Gray was supposed to head it. It was supposed to be corporate folks, governmental folks, and nonprofit folks.

An: The Richmond Regional Action Plan?
Ma: Yeah! And, of course, that has not happened and the excuse is all this leadership has changed. And, to some extent, there is some validity to that, but again, we need leadership. Someone can say this is important enough, this is our vision, and we need to take it and run with it. But again, it is about leadership. This is the way it needs to happen is for all folks to be at the table. Not just corporate Richmond, we all need to be at the table.

Mod: One of the questions we heard initially was... we got a lot of people unemployed or underemployed, or in a bad job, so what exactly is the connection between that reality and the corporate development that every mayor historically comes in and talks about? Is there a connection? Should nonprofits be punting? And I don’t think nonprofits have to provide these jobs directly, but maybe pushing government to do something about it? But, I’m just curious to hear your reactions. But it seems that the standard thing to talk about with economic development doesn’t necessarily do much for the people who are the most needy. And it seems like nonprofits should have something to say.

Er: I know I was shaking my head vigorously one way or the other. I didn’t mean to say anything about should nonprofits be providing services. I mean, if you’re going to see it as an example of how nonprofits decide to start providing services, because there are plenty of opportunities that fit in very well with mainstream services, is homeless services. I mean, we have to run schools, we have to run a website. We have people who are so terribly needy, there are no other services to address them. You have parallel systems for other services, meanwhile you have to hold fundraisers and find other resources. In my opinion, it’s a fairness question. I mean, those people should be served by mainstream services and yet they depend on public sector services, which are not as well developed. In some ways, it’s almost unfair that we depend on nonprofits to do things that government does, but doesn’t do well for certain populations. And I still feel like there’s a lot of power in it for us if we call that out and put pressure on, to, address those needs. There are always people who will need certain services, and that’s completely fine. [The next part is unintelligible. According to my notes, she briefly discusses the viability of contractual relationships between government and the nonprofit sector]

An: I mean, is it a worthwhile argument to present to the incoming administration, I mean historically Capital One, Philip Morris, Circuit City, VCU run the town, and let us present to you the nonprofit sector in Richmond which actually contributes how many millions of dollars to our local economy. So, we’ve been quiet enough, but now we want you to recognize that we are a substantial force in this community and we are not taking this whole “all the corporations and big schools” bias anymore.

Hi: I think there’s an inherent problem in what you just said. We don’t know how much we contribute. We know probably what we contribute in our own nonprofit. If we had some way of saying that the nonprofits in our community contribute $10 billion a year, or $10 million a year, then that gives us leverage.

[Bo remarks that there was a report in a newspaper recently. Hi questions whether that study reflected all nonprofits. There are scattered comments regarding this issue.]

Hi: I was not contacted for this, so...
Ma: Well, there’s an inherent problem in identifying who are nonprofits. And I don’t mean who are these little organizations... Churches contribute a tremendous amount to the services we’ve talked about and they are not going to be tracked as nonprofits. And then, unless you complete a 990, then that organization isn’t going to be tracked as a nonprofit. There has to be some sort of delineation. OK, this is the group that we’re going to report on, because we know we can’t do this, and if we say, this is it, and we have a number to give, then we can say, this is the number that we can give you for sure, but in addition to that, there’s this, and this, and this that contribute just as much. But there are ways to make those kinds of economic development assumptions, what kind of impact you have. You know, you don’t have to have every person in the United States vote to know that 80% of the people go with Clinton, so you can poll.

An: Is that the right way to go about getting leverage with the government or is that not helping anything?

Vh: What do you mean?

An: Well, we contribute “x” amount, and so we deserve this amount of representation and we want it now. [laughter]

Ma: You can’t have taxation without representation! [laughter]

Vh: That’s right. But I’m thinking also, years ago, I did a different kind of nonprofit work, we worked in job training. There was an economic impact. We looked at tax revenue. It’s a significant number, and it’s increasing, so I think we need those kinds of numbers.

[Mod explains division of two breakout sessions. Participants take a ten-minute break and then divide into the two groups. One group discusses governmental integration, while the second discusses greater collaboration among nonprofits. Only the second group is recorded, so I will provide the audio transcript for that dialogue preceded by the notes taken for the first group by a Jepson colleague. I leave them unedited. Additionally, Mod moderates the first group and I moderate the second group. I am referred to as Mod2.]

Breakout Session 1

Liason for Nonprofit Community Discussion Group
Q: How do you make sure person works for all groups?
Q: What would liaison look like in practice?
Henrico County
-liasion to connect with NP groups, outside of social services.
Q: Does city have someone in that role?
- -Big Players have all decision power and they didn’t come.
- -Big Players have more public presence; not sure NPs are actually doing work for public.
Smaller NPs/organizations bring better community benefits
-Disagreement: Representatives didn’t know about the other NPs and sectors.
- Liaison needs credibility of being involved in multiple organizations from different sectors (and different sized groups).
- Ask mayor for task force. One person from each department to represent different portions of the community.
- Collaborations are not happening between big and small groups, especially within the arts community. Big groups are getting funding.
- Role of liaison
- Get more funding
- Coordinate government and NP efforts when appropriate.
- Someone who has access to the mayor (institutionalized presence).
- Best Practices, unified point of view.
- Government and NPs need to work together in order to get funding from government or other foundations.
- Make sure mayor’s office knows about resources NPs provide. Don’t make more of the same.
- Recognition that this should or could have happened in Wilder’s administration, but never got off the ground.
- Collaborate between counties and city NPs. This is specifically in regard to Henrico Mental Health facilities.
- Regional cooperation and a desire to do things regionally.
- Report on what goes on on the ground (in the city); example is homelessness.
  - Know both good and bad things.
- Research other types of NP/Government relationships
  - Baltimore, Charleston, Charlotte, Nashville
    - How is Richmond unique?
  - Combining resources more realistic in this economic climate.
Q: What would greater government integration look like?
- It would involve multiple actors
- Capacity Building Org. (Community Foundation)
- Might be willing to finance staff person; research what other cities have done
  - Unrealistic to seek paid staff position; maybe added part of current staff member’s job
- Advisory Board volunteer → work toward paid position
Q: Who is going to take the info to the mayor?
- UR, Community Foundation, etc.
  - Need to figure this out before making recommendation
- Unpaid Advisory Council: Who are they? Who leads it? How many people? Terms?
- Present group is representative of organizations in Richmond.
- SCS philanthropy wing does training.
- Proposal to have meeting with organizational “bucket” → propose number of names for advisory council
- Don’t want advisory council to end up lobbying for own organizations.
- Difference between advocating for NP sector and individual organizations within NPs
  Q: Which do you want?
- NPs as unified group is a more powerful voice.
- Could be too caught up in picking right people for a balance across sectors.
- Someone who knows the city and its needs
What are the links between the types of organizations so it can be coordinated way to move the city forward.
- Unbiased leader in NP sector
- Community Foundation: broad-based, unlike United Way
- Liaison group should go to City council meetings
Q: What are the next steps?
- Get more people involved in the discussion
- Research what other cities have done.
- Connect Richmond to broaden what they are doing
- Research funding opportunities
- Research problems/needs in the community.
- Online site: way to build consensus. Response from more community members builds legitimacy.
Q: How do we draw people to the website meeting? More collaborative, attractive to NP leaders.

Breakout Session 2

Mod2: So we’re talking, our topic, is getting the non-profit community organized. We’ve talked a lot today about that and about some of the challenges facing it. There have been issues brought up about people not necessarily knowing where to go, who to call. People have brought out that citizens and other groups don’t know the whole wealth of resources and all the nonprofits that are in existence even. So I guess there are two things. What are the perceived benefits of a cohesive unit? And then, how do we organize the nonprofit community? Effectively, it’s the why and the how.

Pa: I wanted to add something that I heard that I think is central to this issue. Persons who need our respective services don’t know what’s out there, but I also heard folks in this room say that we as service providers don’t know what’s out there. So it’s hard for us as facilitators and educators for the general public if we don’t know what the lay of the land in terms of resources ourselves. And so I think that’s the starting place, I think. And, then, as we recognize and begin to form relationships with each other, we’ll be in a better position to help people get their needs met.

Mod2: Yes, so it sounds like networking and getting to know what’s out there should be a top priority...

Je: Well, that’s why when I said that database thing... I know, obviously, someone who doesn’t have a house is not going to access an online website. But, at National Student Partnerships I know I’m on my computer six hours a day. So that’s a way for us as providers to go on and figure it out. Our clients come in for hour-long sessions and it’s very frustrating for them and us when 20 minutes is spent looking something up. And I know from talking with central intake that they also have the eligibility requirements which would save people time. It helps save the client time, too.
Er: We’re talking about databases and where do people go... 211. That’s supposed to be the go-to place in our community. Like you dial 911, if you need something in our community, you call 211.

Hi: It also can be an issue though of people who don’t have cell phones...

Er: Yeah, but before we get to that part of the question, people have to trust giving their information over to 211. 211 has a staff that does nothing but figure out the eligibility, how much money is available, you know... We do all of that. I can speak to how well that’s done, but that’s what they’re supposed to do. They get funded for that. And I think it has been a little difficult on the nonprofit side to tell people to call 211. 211 gets our information, we have to trust them to screen through the callers and refer them to us. Call 211, call 211. There are centralized resources in our community despite our hesitations of their being able to address all situations. And that’s why we should put pressure on them to do more. But that infrastructure, that framework is there, so it’s not like we need to create a different database or another sort of set of rules.

Pa: We should use the resources that we already have and put pressure on them in terms of how well its implemented or executed, where are the gaps and limitations, those things. But I agree with you, there are some things in place that we could do better.

Mod2: So what would be some of the benefits of a more cohesive nonprofit community?

Hi: A lot of nonprofit groups deal with indigent, multi-need individuals. And I can’t do everything for a family that comes to me because of family violence. The husband may be out of the home, or the significant either. And the children may be devastated because they’re no longer together. You have all these multi-layer problems. So if we network you are able to provide a much clearer focus for what we’re doing, but also continuity with other nonprofits. So, we have clients go to homeless shelters if we need that, or job counseling, whatever the needs are...

Pa: I think if we can serve people more holistically rather than in a fragmented way... because each of us has our own passion and purpose. More often than not that deals with one dimension of the problem, but not all the dimensions of a problem. I think if we’re more a coalition and working together and communicating together, then we can deal with those problems more holistically and have a better prognosis for the individual and the family then just dealing with a little piece of the problem, and then something is off kilter over here, and that may exacerbate the situation again.

Hi: And as you mentioned, it’s more cost effective. If someone else is doing homeless care, why should I do homeless care? [Pa says “yes.”] I’m just repeating the services already available, and realistically one of the bigger issues is it’s at the base of one of our abilities to get funding. Who do you collaborate with? Who’s your support people? If you have somebody who’s sick, where do you send them?
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Je: I feel like there is a lot of repetition in nonprofits. I’m not going to name names, but when I started in September, so this has nothing to do with you, but we found one that looked like a great partnership and they said in the past they had gone to that organization and they said that we were taking clients away from them and so they didn’t want to work with us. Which, was, to me just...

Pa: Yeah, territorialism...

Je: Right, and we’re supposed to be helping people. You’re a nonprofit, you’re not there to put yourself first usually.

Mod2: So can it get too competitive in the nonprofit community? Maybe the organization takes attention away from the aim of the organization?

Hi: There are finite dollars in many cases and if you don’t serve a certain number of people you might not keep your funding. Unless you go to a high roller and say you’re here for the greater good of the clientele, and we do our best, there are agencies that have been here for so long that they’re kind of going through the steps, but not really thinking about the clients.

Er: I know there are discussions about how to end homelessness in ten years, but there’s another side of the discussion which I think is very valid is what do you do about organizations who do not fit into the plan? If we all want to collaborate, someone does have to say, your agency may go out of business because we decide it’s not a priority. How do we find another need you can work? How do we help a case manager who’s been there for 10 years find another job? Sometimes because we think about the people we serve, we forget that the people who work for us have a stake too. And no one wants to fire staff because you’re going to lose staff. So there needs to be a discussion about what to do about organizations that are going to suffer because of collaboration and what do about that.

Pa: What I was thinking was, somewhat related to your comment Erika, is there is a lot of redundancy and a lot of nonprofits doing the same thing. But we need not be competitive about that. When you look at it more comprehensively, if there’s three organizations dealing with homelessness, there’s some dimension of that problem that they each may have expertise in. Because no one of them is going to be able to do it all. So if we think of it more from a complimentary standpoint rather than a competitive one, that’s an advantage and that’s a way for us to work together more collaboratively and meet more of the need that’s there.

Je: Even what she was saying, how do you prepare the organization who may be redundant? So, it’s stepping back and saying how can we transform this specific niche of that need. And figure out what those specific needs are through some of these redundant organizations.

Hi: We keep saying that there’s redundancy, but we really don’t have any pencil and paper proof. If you go into one agency, they may look different and treat people differently. For instance, what the Y does and what I do. We both provide counseling, but we’re not doing the same kinds of things. And, it seems to me that we need to have, and we all pay a fee and are registered through the State Agricultural and Consumer Affairs Commission upstate, right? It seems to me
that anyone who raises money has to be registered and pay a fee, or it’s a $5,000 fine per intake of money.

Je: So we could find all the nonprofits that way?

Hi: I’m thinking that would give us a database of all the nonprofits in the metropolitan area. There’s a mission statement included for all of them. So if you’re mission statement is this, this, and this, it would give us an opportunity to say, OK, the person who does the same as I do in the East End, is there a way that we can become more involved or merge or whatever? I don’t think we know.

Er: See, VANO is already doing that type of work. So it might be a matter of strengthening them. I think they’re the ones who did the study on the value of the nonprofit community, maybe in connection with Connect Richmond, but they’re the ones who led it. VANO is almost like the state-level professional organization. VANO is supposed to be our equivalent of that, so I’m thinking it might a partnership with VANO for them to tell us based on client populations... And it can be tricky when you start putting people in groups, but you may be able to work with them to get some data.

Hi: Well, I’m just trying to think of a place where we should have a database where people can be. You have to be incorporated...

Er: But people poll that kind of stuff. It’s almost like taking an extra step out of it. The Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence can say, can use your information as a trade association to break it down this way?

Hi: Yes, extra work is not worth it. We don’t want to do that, but we keep making at least what I’m hearing there’s repetition. I’m not picking on anybody, I speak in generalities also. But, we do that, we talk about you know how much value we have, but we don’t. We don’t have any documentation to present, and this organization may have documented a whole lot of folks. There are thousands of others that need to be polled. We need to get more scientific and less emotional about what we’re doing.

Mod: One of the initial challenges is, then, is you have to know who are all the players. Another question, though, is different ways of communicating in the nonprofit community. What type of resources are available and how should people communicate?

Hi: I guess Connect Richmond. It has been one of the most useful resources for me. It does not have everybody, though. I know that because they didn’t have me for a while and they weren’t visible.

Er: I know this is what the other group is doing, but that’s what I think a mayor’s office could do. It doesn’t have to be expensive or like Connect Richmond... It could be hey, people in the city are trying to do good. Maybe we need to look for leaders to publicize this stuff for free. Everyone in a corporate organization is probably on a board, and so we need to ask if they’re on Connect Richmond. Do they know about Connect Richmond? I think that would help us a lot.
People could use key people in the community to spread the message. Here are the key nonprofits, here is what they need, this is where you should go if you want to be a part of it. And some won’t want to be a part of it, but that’s OK.

Hi: I have a thought about the database. If we could get all the nonprofits listed, at least before, and I hate to kill trees and making publications that get thrown away annually and are getting bigger every year, we could get Connect Richmond involved and they could manage that. In other words, they could register their nonprofit through that and they could key in on looking for all the services in one area through intake.

Er: Another thing is using wiki technology. With Wikipedia, you put entries in for things you’re interested in. If there was a general, here’s wiki technology, I put such and such an agency, I say what we do, what are our hours of operation and it’s almost like taking it... And I think that’s a limitation of databases on paper or organizations that don’t know how to manage it. I think that’s why organizations are reluctant to do that. But if you have wiki technology, you write your own story the way and people can see it, that’s a great use of technology. And people can do it at real time. And clients could find it. It completely breaks it down, it democratizes the information so it’s not all up to one person to update you. And I’m not saying that’s what happens...

Hi: And the other thing is, if people have a central location, good people many times start organizations because they see a need and they don’t know how to fill it. So then they can scan through their interest area to see if there are other resources in the community, and if so, no need to do that.

Je: We wiki technology on our national site NSPedia. It’s a way for us to communicate with one another and we have tons of resources on that. I think it would be easy to do that for the Richmond community. Another thing I have to say is that obviously funding is huge. And between VCU, University of Richmond, Virginia Union, we have a wealth of resources with these students who are technologically savvy to save money and you can get these kids to do internships or get credit and make this database... or, I feel like it’s something we’re missing out on as nonprofits. I graduated in ’07 and I was always looking for things to add to my résumé.

Mod2: How could the nonprofit community better use the college students in the area and would that do anything to unify or strengthen the nonprofit community?

Je: I know one thing, you [to Hi] were saying that you’re always in need of translators. But, there’s always red tape with that and a lot of confidential information, but I think for little things like that...

Hi: Well, there’s other things. I think, for instance, in domestic violence, at Christmas time and Thanksgiving, there’s usually a peak where people get in trouble, I’ve learned in the last five years that if there’s a Christmas party where they get food and gifts there’s only been one incident of violence. There’s events like that. I was out getting groceries before this, and those types of things can be done by students, giving me more hours to focus on clients and families. And the resources in the community, it takes some time to orient them, but if they’re good-
working students, like the Bonner scholars, they can take off and do all kinds of things. My first website was built by VCU students. And they don’t mind doing paperwork. You all [to Mod2] are used to doing paperwork. [laughter] You don’t mind doing those things because that’s your comfort zone right now. Sitting down and doing hours of paperwork is not mine. But those are the kinds of things that expand your resources because it lets the professional person go back and do in the organization what they intended to do.

Er: Maybe there’s a way to use students, I mean, in terms of this network technology. I would really like to know how students would like to work on nonprofits? There are always students who want to jump in and do a 15 hour project, while other students might want to do like a five-hour task like getting groceries. I don’t know if we always know how to get in touch with students, and how the students figure out what they’re interested in and what they’re not interested in. You know, if you’re the 15 hour or the five hour person, I want to know up front. But I think there are better ways to reach students. And I don’t know how many students are on Connect Richmond. Maybe some of them are just really tapped into their universities, but we’d love to know how to find you.

Pa: Speaking from my hat, in terms of adjunct professor at VCU, I think they’re always looking for new placements. Most of the universities have a commitment to the community to work with public nonprofits, as well as private nonprofits. I think there are a lot of opportunities there if you contact the department head and the bonus to the kids, to the young people, is they get a grade. And they are very tech-savvy. So, depending on what the need is, the course they’re taking, the level of involvement, you can work out something with them to meet the needs of your organization. And it’s not just the grade, they learn some intrinsic value of working in the community and giving back, you know. And also there’s a tradeoff for us in terms of learning some skills that they bring, because we need to get more tech-savvy. So, I think there’s really a win-win situation there. But it’s very easy to tap into, just go to...

Je: But let’s say I wanted to send out an e-mail blast when we were doing Project Homeless Connect, how do we get students to say we need 500 volunteers and we’ll tell you exactly what to do?

Je: One thing I found, if you can bring in a few, and they stand in front of their class for five minutes and say, hey, we’re doing Project Homeless Connect, let me write the date on the board for you to write in your planner or just show up.

Pa: I’ve done that in my social justice class. You know, we need bodies. The kids, I keep calling them kids, young people, are the biggest recruiters of their peers. And it doesn’t have to be a long-term commitment. It could be just one activity.

Je: Yeah, I’m focusing on VCU right now. We’re working with the Bonner program, and UR is great, but we have only a few interns right now from VCU and we’re thinking there’s so much more potential.

Pa: We’ve had a couple of students from U of R, but more from VCU and some from Virginia Union and some from J. Sarge. But they’re an underutilized resource for sure.
Hi: Can you tell me [to Mod2], what are we defining as the metropolitan area? Are we looking all the way to Hanover County, Charlottesville? You know, where is the metropolitan area? Because of distance learning, I have a student from ODU who is doing 27 hours a week. And I'm going, my gosh. 27 hours a week! That's almost a whole time body. And she has a lot of technical experience. So do we define that as part of the metropolitan area?

Mod2: I certainly don't want to be the one to say, but I think that's an important question. If your getting benefits from far reaching communities, you take that. You appreciate that. There's obviously no downside to getting contributions from a student at ODU using online resources... We only have a few minutes left, so I wanted to give everyone an opportunity to speak about what we discussed and add any final remarks.

Hi: One of the things, I think we need a more scientific approach to gathering data. We need in some way a way to facilitate relationships. There's only nine or 10 of us here today. If there was some way to have an event twice a year where everyone gets together, you talk to each other, you find out what that group does or doesn't do. We are little islands out there to ourselves, and we need a bridge. I also think we need more of a social opportunity, like a cocktail party.

Je: I think that in each individual organization we need to take it upon ourselves to really make sure that we're not getting lost within our little cage. You know, you probably have 75 hours to do in a 40 hour week, and so, putting time in this assignment and making ourselves reliable...

Er: I think a forum where we can all get together is useful. I think also though one of the things we talk about sometimes is we have service providers who always want to be engaged with us, and we have some who are less. I think it's important there's a place for everyone to get together, so it is sort of an option, but there are some nonprofits who like being left alone. They like being left by themselves. And they don't want to draw attention, it's worth it for them to stay under the radar.

Hi: That's why I think you need to do it at a cocktail party rather than do it in a forum for six hours and talk about this. You go, oh God, more work. [laughter]

Er: I think it has to be physical. I know you have virtual sites, but one of the limitations for Connect, you can't put just anything on it. If I have an event announcement, it has to go on the events page, but people only look at the listserv. I hope we have local forums.

Pa: Just to give more focus, I think, going back to those organizations that have similar focus and missions, if they were provided the opportunity to talk more with each other in a complementary manner, to avoid looking at it from a competitive stance. That would really strengthen things. The more, potentially, the more focused and targeted, the more you might get more interest and people talking together. But inviting me to do something with the whole sea of nonprofits, I don't know if I'd have as much sustained interest because that would be for me too overwhelming. So I think there needs to be both. For those folks who have a particular focus to
be able to provide some kind of forum to compare notes, how can we address this problem, this is something I don’t know...

[The first group enters and the participants move to their original seats.]

Session Two

[The Jepson colleague who took notes for the first group provides a summary of their discussion. I provide a summary of group two’s discussion]

Ma: There’s a group of us that has tried several times to get VANO to be the collecting group for nonprofits at the state level. And they have absolutely no interest. They’ve said that. And I don’t think there are any similar resources with an interest. And also, I thought about a funding opportunity called New Voices. What it’s about is inviting nonprofits and universities where you are creating an opportunity for communication. Perhaps a radio station that could be developed. Or perhaps a TV station. Perhaps an online community. There are going to be seven of these national grants. There’s $29,000 to help establish something like this. You were talking about the limitations of Connect Richmond, and this might be an opportunity. So, if someone wanted to take this and run with it rather quickly...

Bo: I was thinking that Connect Richmond and the Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence can be the linking arm. They’re already doing that in a few specific ways. I really want to connect it to the field and get interest in the community as a whole.

Er: I think we were trying to say that maybe it’s important to have a conversation with Connect. When you run a listserv, you have to cosign on what is being sent out. But maybe we need an open forum for people to sort of put things out and it doesn’t necessarily reflect on the brand of Connect Richmond. [Next part is unintelligible for roughly ten seconds.]

Mod: Thank you. Regardless, there is a City Council. So maybe we can go through those means. Before you leave, could we go around and talk about what we should do next, or what are the next steps in order to move this conversation?

Vh: We need to pull more people in.

[Mod and Vh go back and forth briefly.]

Ma: I guess that Tony created this online forum. There are outcomes that we want to see, and that’s where I think the online portion comes into play. That can engage the broader community. Today, it was extremely hard to come, and I almost couldn’t come because this is a busy time of year. But for people to have their say through the online site, that could take us to a place where we have 10, 22, or 122 people who are saying that we do need to address these issues.

Bo: I don’t know what will draw people to the website, to do that. There has to be some motivation or a draw. There has to be the potential to collaborate and create new relationships. [Vh agrees]
Ma: These five, or four men, who ran for mayor held community forums. Maybe that’s something that could encourage people to be involved, to address some of these topics. If people are truly interested, they’ll go to those and get involved. I wouldn’t be interested in doing something online if I hadn’t come to the conversation today.

Mod: I think that people will definitely be more interested if they think that something might happen that has significance. Would it be useful to develop a platform and present it?

Er: I think it is useful if you put things in a newsletter or in an e-mail blast.

Ma: Usually in these kinds of strategic thinking discussions all of these things come out, and then you try to prioritize it. You know, you say, here are the action steps that we discussed, and based upon what you see here, what would be your priority on the next steps. Then, it becomes clear what you need to do.

Bo: It might be useful to send out a survey to nonprofits. That way they could have a voice to speak to the mayor, which everyone wants to do. This could also be connected to the forums that the Times Dispatch posts.

Mod: What about, should someone compose an account of this meeting and send it around?

Er: I think you have to be transparent, but you have to have caution because that has been the trap of great ideas in some ways in Richmond. I think, sometimes, we put things on the table, and then someone says, well, let’s ask for more great ideas, but if I just think if you’ve got good ideas, you have to start working. I’m not saying shut it down from other people, but I think if your ideas are good enough, people will get involved and then say, well, add these two ideas to that list. I worry that sometimes talking more about it is where the good ideas often die. And I think you have good ideas here, so go for it!

[Ma thanks me for putting the event together.]

Mod: What is one thing you’ve learned today?

Je: For me, I’m new to the community, and this has helped me figure out the nonprofit world.

Hi: I think that it revalidates that we are... there are so many of us that are islands outside of our clientele. And I think it’s so important that we connect.

[Vh says something unintelligible. Mod thanks participants for attending.]
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