

21ST CENTURY CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE: --- UNDER CONSTRUCTION



By Jill Blair and Malka Kopell

Prepared for the Forum for Community Solutions, The Aspen Institute
Spring 2015



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Forum for Community Solutions

About the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solution's mission is to support community collaboration — including collective impact — that enables communities to effectively address their most pressing challenges. The Forum works to accomplish this mission by pursuing four complementary strategies including: 1) building awareness by documenting and lifting up impactful strategies and stories of success; 2) mobilizing stakeholders through knowledge and network development; 3) removing barriers by advocating for effective policy; and 4) catalyzing investment by encouraging funder partnerships. The Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund is the first funding collaborative developed and led by The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions.

There is an opportunity to put a spotlight on community success stories, inspire others to act, and take collective impact to the next level. The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions seeks to serve as a platform for sharing best practices across community collaborations, and it will enlist more communities to pull together for community-wide progress while providing them with the tools, support, and resources necessary to achieve results.

www.aspencommunitysolutions.org

For all inquiries, please contact:

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 736-5800
Fax: (202) 467-0790

Copyright © 2015 by The Aspen Institute

The Aspen Institute
One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

Published in the United States of America in 2015 by The Aspen Institute

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
Publication Number: 15/03

21ST CENTURY CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE: --- UNDER CONSTRUCTION

By Jill Blair and Malka Kopell

Prepared for the Forum for Community Solutions, The Aspen Institute
Spring 2015



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Forum for Community Solutions

Contents

- Overview.....5
- De Tocqueville 2.0 — What Is Civic Infrastructure?7
- The Times in Which We Live.....9
- From Then to Now.....11
- Developing Principles and Elements of 21st Century Civic Infrastructure.....13
- The 21st Century Civic keystones.....15
 - Keystone #1: Engaging All Sectors15
 - Keystone #2: Enlisting All Voices17
 - Keystone #3: Building Vertical and Horizontal Thoroughfares.....18
- The Need for Intermediaries21
- Building Better.....23
- About the Authors.....25
- Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography27
- Appendix B: List of Individuals Consulted.....31

This paper proposes a set of keystones to underlie an intentional effort to build a civic infrastructure – an infrastructure strong enough to meet 21st century challenges and designed to serve all members of our 21st century society, especially those on the margins.

Overview

Our existing civic infrastructure was not designed with intention; it evolved over time in an ad hoc fashion and was built, in part, as a result of investments made over time, largely by philanthropy, but also by private and public sector entities. While philanthropy has helped to populate our current civic infrastructure with nonprofit organizations, the public sector has introduced civic infrastructure policies – from public hearings to citizen budget commissions, and the private sector has contributed to civic infrastructure as well by sponsoring everything from volunteer engagement programs to corporate social responsibility efforts.

The investments and contributions have created a set of institutions, organizations, policies and practices upon which society has come to rely to facilitate public engagement in what Alexis de Tocqueville described as “associational life.” This is civic infrastructure, and it is made up of civic platforms of interplay and participation that enable us to connect with one another and to discover, express, and act on our collective community and civic interests.

“Inequity is built into our current civic infrastructure.”

We are suggesting here that given the myriad ways in which the world has changed and the persistence of the problems our civic infrastructure is intended to address, there is a need not only to revisit that infrastructure but to consciously create an infrastructure capable of meeting the challenges of our times. Our existing civic infrastructure is, in some cases, failing to take advantage of opportunities, in terms of today’s technology, communications and access to information. In other cases, our current system is failing to meet the challenges it was intended to overcome. Some remnants of 20th century civic infrastructure are ineffective and others may be damaging or undermining or compromising our potential for positive social impact.

Purpose

As leading investors in public problem solving across all content and disciplines, we see philanthropy as the primary, but not the sole, audience for this paper. As problem-solving investors, philanthropy historically has been a source of support for many of the institutions and organizations that comprise our civic infrastructure. With that said, the concepts presented here are relevant to all individuals and organizations committed to building a better world — one in which fairness, justice, economic and educational opportunity prevail and where all people are engaged as stakeholders in civic and community life. We offer this concept of intentional civic infrastructure design to provoke broad interest and to spark participation in its further development and realization.

Approach

We set out to explore the nature of and to begin to frame the principles of an intentionally designed civic infrastructure. We conducted conversations with 18 individuals¹ and facilitated a number of small group discussions representing a range of philanthropic, nonprofit and private sector organizations. Many of those interviewed are quoted anonymously throughout this paper. We posed questions about designing a 21st century civic infrastructure in small groups gathered to discuss a range of issues, from democratic practice to place-based or neighborhood-based philanthropy. From these discussions and building on our original intention, we have gleaned what we believe are the keystone elements of a 21st century civic infrastructure wherein organizations and relationships are redefined according to what is both needed and possible given the times in which we live.

We offer these keystones in a nascent stage, hoping to provoke deeper exploration and exposition. We are convinced that this moment calls for a close look at what is possible, and a closer look at steps we can take to get there.

Goals

It is time to conceive and construct, imagine and then create, a new civic infrastructure that enables full engagement in community and civic life. We must build it to be more robust and to achieve greater impact on the most vexing and troubling issues confronting our communities and the nation at large.

We intend this paper to be the basis for a series of organized conversations during which the keystones will be refined and made practical by examples and by trial and effort. We hope our colleagues in philanthropy and beyond will consider how to apply the keystones to their own portfolios and their ways of doing business in order to consciously cultivate better conditions for 21st century problem solving. As we apply these principles and our new expectations to practice, the nature of 21st century civic infrastructure should become clearer. We will build it as we go; we will recognize it as it manifests along the way. We know this approach may require reimagining, recreating and dismantling organizations and strategies to which we have become accustomed (and perhaps even committed), but that is the nature of building.

1 See Appendix B

De Tocqueville 2.0 – What Is Civic Infrastructure?

“Citizens who are individually powerless do not very clearly anticipate the strength which they may acquire by uniting together; it must be shown to them in order to be understood.”

— Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Book Two, Chapter VII

Like the bridges, tunnels, electricity, sewers, water systems and roads that comprise our physical infrastructure, enabling us to live more relational and economically vibrant lives, a well-constructed civic infrastructure likewise facilitates public problem solving through civic action and participation. If built with intention, civic infrastructure produces platforms on which a sense of shared responsibility can reside and grow; it enables us to communicate with one another more effectively; it helps to manage our differences; and it can help us to develop a shared understanding of what constitutes our common and public good. Civic infrastructure enables civic capacity — the “capacity to create and sustain smart collective action.”² In the absence of an intentional civic infrastructure designed to *broaden* participation and, particularly, to engage those on the *margins*, other interests will fill the vacuum. The absence of a robust civic infrastructure risks giving rise to a system that serves a more narrow and elite constituency where market and moneyed interests can replace the interests of a broader public purpose.³

“You can’t get a good social service system without civic engagement — and you will get a lot more than a good social service system with it.”

“Participation — in government, and in society — is itself a form of freedom. The highest type of self-determination is the ability to join with other people to shape the course of a common life. Democratic government is thus self-rule writ large...”

— Joshua D. Hawley, “America’s Epicurean Liberalism,” *National Affairs*, 2010

Suppose we begin with great intention to design a 21st century civic infrastructure — a system of organizations and relationships — with the explicit goal of maximizing public participation and

2 Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem-Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe* (MIT Press, 2008).

3 Archon Fung, “Continuous Institutional Innovation and the Pragmatic Conception of Democracy,” *Polity* 44, no. 4, (October 2012).

agency in service of better public problem-solving? By “public participation” we mean more than people being civically active; we aim to develop a system that embodies conscious inclusion — eliciting voices of all to cultivate and reinforce a stake in civil society. By agency we mean more than voice; we mean establishing opportunities for all to effect positive change in community life.

Suppose we set out to build this system to accomplish the goal of engaging millions more “Americans from all walks of life in taking action and making decisions on issues that matter?”⁴ Would we have better education systems? Better economic opportunities? More justice? Better housing? Better healthcare?

We think so.

Our premise is that increasing public participation and engagement is the most powerful method in our system of representative democracy to ignite a cycle of accountability that leads to policy-making that produces better social and political results.⁵

4 Quote from Archon Fung interview, November 19, 2014; Professor and Academic Dean, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

5 In 2013, Opportunity Nation commissioned an analysis of data collected from the Census Bureau and other government sources to understand the relationship between civic engagement and economic opportunity. The analysis revealed that engagement is a significant predictor of economic opportunity across states, and communities with higher rates of engagement and volunteering tend to have lower levels of income inequality.

The Times in Which We Live

The 21st century has ushered in profound and pervasive shifts in our social, political and economic relationships. As compared with the nation we once were and for which our civic infrastructure originally evolved, we operate at a far greater scale with far more diversity. We can communicate more rapidly, employ more means of media, transact business across multiple geographies, accept and trade multiple currencies –real and virtual, and more reliably engage the power of private enterprise in the pursuit of public good. The pace of action and transaction, of communications and innovation, is much faster than it once was.

Concurrent with the changes in our systems of trade, technology and communications, our demographics are in transition as well. The United States' population, which was once mainly a biracial society with a large white majority and pronounced racial-identity divides, is now a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multicultural nation.⁶ Our population is growing at both ends of the age spectrum and we have a rising generation that is more diverse and complex in cultural and ethnic identity than any generation it follows.

These demographic changes bring new perspectives into focus and different expectations to the fore. In Don Tapscott's book, *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World* (2008)⁷, he calls the rising generation the "first global generation ever," and says it is "smarter, quicker and more tolerant of diversity than its predecessors."

"When democracy isn't healthy, you can't have social progress."

These are tectonic shifts in society, challenging the identities that once defined us (i.e., gender, geography, age, race, religion, and political party), and exposing the fissures that can divide us. We are experiencing growing tensions of race and income inequality that are bubbling fiercely to the surface of society, and we are witnessing an uncivil partisanship that has all but brought productive policy making to a halt.

"The past several decades have seen the most sustained rise in inequality since the 19th century ... it is appropriate to ask whether this trend is compatible with values rooted in our nation's history, among them the high value Americans have traditionally placed on equality of opportunity."

— Janet L. Yellen, chair of the Federal Reserve, October 2014

6 J. Laura Shrestha et al., *The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States* (Congressional Research Service, March 2011).

7 Tapscott, an authority on business strategy, with an emphasis on how information technology changes business, government and society, is the author of multiple books and articles. His work has been translated in 22 languages.

In this context of profound social transition and the presence and persistence of public problems, it makes sense to assess the nature and relevance of the problem-solving systems of the past and consciously create effective systems for the future.

From Then to Now

Our 20th century civic infrastructure developed in silos, from trade associations in the private sector to racial, ethnic and gender-specific social justice organizations in the nonprofit sector. Our human service industrial complex defined health and poverty challenges narrowly, and our philanthropic institutions developed program investment areas accordingly. We have worked in sector-specific ways, with government and philanthropy both providing resources but neither coordinating with one another; with nonprofits and government both providing services but not in mutually constructive or reinforcing ways. The private sector has developed corporate social responsibility portfolios, but has done so almost entirely isolated from the social responsibility efforts of government and philanthropy. In some cases different sectors have made assumptions about what they could expect from one another – distinguishing roles and responsibilities. The 20th century included assumptions about how philanthropy would incubate programs and government would scale them. The 21st century is ushering in social purpose ventures in the private sector, and social innovation funds in the public sector. This is a time when the distinctions between the sectors are dissolving – giving way to a sense of collective interest that transcends the more narrow role-specific notions of the past.

Whereas our 20th century civic infrastructure helped to define and distinguish our differences, our 21st century civic infrastructure must overcome them. The civic infrastructure of the future must be transcendent – crossing boundaries that historically have compromised our capacity to leverage our collective interests and our collective value. It should facilitate cooperation across sectors, systems and disciplines and enable robust levels of connectivity among people, institutions and organizations to leverage the powers we now have to solve the problems we still face.

Developing Principles and Elements of 21st Century Civic Infrastructure

The Community Matters Partnership, a project of the Orton Family Foundation, describes “civic infrastructure,” as “allowing people to solve their own community’s problems in partnership with government, businesses and community-based organizations.”

If the purpose of 21st century civic infrastructure is to maximize participation in public problem solving, and the method is transcendence, crossing boundaries and going beyond what we believe is possible — then, what principles should guide its design? What kinds of organizations and leaders will comprise this infrastructure? What qualities and capacities should they possess?

We based the following proposed keystones for a 21st century civic infrastructure on our review of the literature and on interviews and discussion groups with individuals representing nonprofits, public agencies, the private sector and philanthropy. We present these thoughts for further discovery, with the goal of creating a foundation upon which we can build a more certain structure.

The 21st Century Civic Keystones

Infrastructure is composed of multiple elements. It is not singular in substance or purpose. Infrastructure exists to create connections and to leverage capacities, creating a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts. It is a network of co-dependent systems that, by their collective and interdependent existence, produce exponential public benefit. We begin the process of designing 21st century civic infrastructure by defining its keystones and the values they express, as reference points for what this infrastructure should reflect and build on in content and contribution.

Keystone #1: Engaging All Sectors

We live in a time when many of the lines that have historically distinguished us are blurred. Boundaries and expectations that have distinguished private sector from public and nonprofit sector efforts are less clear. The emergence of “doing well by doing good” lines of business in the private sector and social impact bonds in government and nonprofits are key examples of blurring lines. There is growing recognition that the problems that plague our society affect us all, from income inequality to the education gap, and so the solutions rest with us all as well. We should not confine the construction of 21st century civic infrastructure to the organizations or leadership of a single sector. Rather, given the ingenuity, spirit, capacity and resources that exist across the public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, 21st century civic infrastructure should be built to include and provide a place at the table for all. This broadening of the base achieves two important objectives: first, it takes advantage of the skills and resources all sectors possess with respect to any public challenge; and, second, it engages the constituents of all sectors in the problem-solving enterprise.

In our conversations, we heard from a number of people that the challenge of engaging across sectors is one of understanding, trust and communication. Business doesn’t always have great confidence in government and may not understand nonprofits or philanthropy. Government doesn’t always understand or trust the motivations of business and may not have confidence

“We have to be inclusive and set a bigger table if we want to solve these problems. There should never be a conversation about addressing the needs of disengaged youth without the private sector employer in the room. Nonprofits may do job training but business hires.”

in nonprofits or an understanding of philanthropy. Nonprofits don't always understand or have confidence in government, may not trust business and may have a dependent and complicated relationship with philanthropy.

In other words, 21st century civic infrastructure should cultivate and benefit from quality connections across sectors that enable not just a collection of public problem-solving efforts but a collective effort to solve public problems. This approach will require each sector to build a much deeper understanding of the others — to appreciate the capacity each brings forward, the role each can play — to foster trust and to coalesce around a common conception of what constitutes the public good.

For Example...

When Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce, assumes public leadership on issues of education and healthcare, he sends a message to employees and other private sector leaders about the importance of engagement and the power of shared responsibility. When Howard Schultz announces that Starbucks “believes in the promise and pursuit of the American Dream,” and finances his workforce to complete a college education, he attaches himself to the core principles that de-

fine America — fairness and economic opportunity — and he provides a path for his employees to be a part of an America he admires. Both leaders, by their example, acknowledge the complexity of our lives; we are not defined only by our role in the workplace but by our greater ambitions of civic connection and contribution.

“We need to establish rules of engagement...”

“How do you control for business not taking over?”

Culturally, geographically, economically and socially we live multi-dimensional lives. We are not only parents, but also children; not only employees, but also students; not only churchgoers but also activists. Visionary leaders understand this. By

honoring the many ways we identify ourselves, great leaders enable us to bring more of ourselves forward and, by so doing, increase our commitment and civic attachment.

When we tested the notion that 21st century civic infrastructure is a collective enterprise that crosses the bounds of the private, public, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, we were met with some skepticism, in particular among nonprofits, as to the motivation of business in charitable work. Until we build greater understanding and have more practice crossing boundaries, we will need, as one respondent noted, “...to surrender the why people do what they do and instead focus on the what.” It will be in the uncovering of the intersection of interests, not necessarily motivations, that we are able to forge better relationships among and between sectors and disciplines.

With respect to reserving a place at the table for the public sector, we encountered among philanthropy and nonprofits more experience working with government than with business. But nonprofits and philanthropy expressed limited confidence in public sector competence and limited

understanding of how the public sector actually functions. It is far easier to speak of the power of cross-sectorial effort than it is to actualize it. We must be courageous, creative and curious if we are to understand the nature of each sector's experience, skills and resources and find value in one another's contributions.

Questions to Ask in Constructing 21st Century Civic Infrastructure

- Q. *When and why do we resist setting more places at the table for cross-sector participation?*
- Q. *When and why do those nonprofits and social entrepreneurs in whom we invest welcome public and private sector participation in their work?*
- Q. *What more do we need to learn and share to be better partners with others?*
- Q. *When can we, as public problem-solving investors, work across sectors – at what cost and with what possible benefit?*

Keystone #2: Enlisting All Voices

It isn't just that we now have the means to hear from those people our organizations and efforts are intended to represent, but we know the consequence of not doing so. When people are left out of the process by which decisions are made or by which their stations in life are meant to improve, we render a portion of society justifiably disaffected and discontented. We lose the benefit of their understanding and aspirations. When we bring more voices into public problem solving our solutions are better informed, and we build a broader and deeper stake in their success.⁸

We now have the ability, through social media and other technology, to not only hear from those on the margins but to shrink the margins themselves — to empower the voices of those who are long on odds and short on resources. Twenty-first century civic infrastructure should be *radically inclusive* — not about doing for others first, but about hearing from others so that they can do for themselves. It should be composed of organizations and efforts committed to and capable of both enlisting and listening to the voices of others.

“We need to get down and dirty about civic engagement, drive down to communities, to residents, to those who have and those who do not.”

“Why resident voice? Because nonprofits alone have not been able to solve these problems...”

⁸ Peter Levine, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Note: The text discusses how YouthBuild USA, Everyday Democracy and the Industrial Areas Foundation engage all citizens, including low-income teenagers-to address community problems.

For Example...

When the Engagement Lab at Boston's Emerson College develops a technology by which citizens can assume a character in a video game in order to experience the effect of a proposed city park, they provide the public with an experience that informs their opinions and cultivates a civic stake in the policy outcome.

When the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Zilber Family Foundation, and Milwaukee-based Northwestern Mutual were seeking to increase their community impact, they decided to bypass nonprofits and go directly to the residents themselves. Community Connections awards funds to groups of residents working together across 21 neighborhoods on issues they identify as high priority. This cross-sector investment strategy gives voice to resident concerns and encourages resident engagement.

Twenty-first century civic infrastructure should incorporate the expectation of resident and constituent voice and agency. The organizations and efforts that comprise 21st century civic infrastructure should be mindful in meeting these expectations in their programs, policies and practice.

Questions To Ask in Constructing 21st Century Civic Infrastructure

- Q. Who qualifies as on the margins in the work we support, and how are we hearing their voices?*
- Q. When are the voices of people, of citizens, of residents incorporated in strategy, execution and evaluation, and how?*
- Q. Who are our constituents, and how do we authentically engage them?*

Keystone #3: Building Vertical and Horizontal Thoroughfares

We now have the communications and technology capacity to share information and learning in real time. Twenty-first century civic infrastructure should be designed to take advantage of that capacity and employ technology in ways that enable the transfer of knowledge, experience, practice and policy vertically and horizontally. For instance, many public problems exist only as ideas at the national level, but at the community level they become much more concrete. Twenty-first century civic organizations and efforts should incorporate an information and practice exchange capacity between and across different levels.

Local programs should inform one another and also inform the generation of relevant national policy. Knowledge and activity that is produced at the national level should have a means of moving down to enable local efforts to benefit. Twenty-first century civic infrastructure should be composed of organizations committed to and capable of sharing across like-minded efforts by identifying themselves as part of an eco-system that creates coordinated collective effort rather than one that promotes the myth of sole-source solution strategies.

For Example...

When living wage policy proposals echo from one community to the next, the proposals benefit substantively and strategically. The quality of the proposals is made better from site to site, and the advocacy efforts become more effective overall. Twenty-first century civic infrastructure will be stronger than its predecessor because it will be designed to enable information, experience and strategy to move and improve faster, quicker and cheaper than ever before, facilitating the easier adoption and transfer of efforts that have already been proven to work.

When the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (PUC) adopts a Community Benefits Policy that generates new sources of community improvement support in the form of volunteer hours, in-kind contributions and financial donations from contractors working with the PUC, it is stymied to find roadways for rapid policy transfer. The Commission recognizes the importance of building that capacity so that other Public Utility Commissions don't need to struggle through the same questions they have already addressed. Our 21st century civic infrastructure should support the easy exchange of experience and knowledge — reducing the time we spend reinventing solutions to problems we have already solved.

“We need to bridge the gaps between what we know at the federal level and what we’re doing at the local level. We need to change the incentives so we don’t encourage isolated efforts.”

Questions To Ask in Constructing 21st Century Civic Infrastructure

- Q. To what extent are we communicating with others in our fields of practice and to what end (e.g., learning from, sharing with, and doing with)?*
- Q. To what extent should and do those in whom we invest seek to contribute and influence public policy?*
- Q. What are we sharing with and learning from others and how are we putting that learning into practice?*

The Need for Intermediaries

The process of conscious construction of a 21st century civic infrastructure will take time and attention. It is not the work of a three-year investment cycle, nor is it something that will happen without commitment. It must be an evolutionary process — we must commit the time to assessing and refining our current approaches and organizations as well as our current practices and expectations. We must have burning patience in its pursuit, a willingness to question our comfort with how things have been, and a readiness to try something new. There are many gaps we must fill and new ways we must work.

In the past we have relied upon intermediary organizations to serve a bridging role — creating greater overall capacity by connecting the capacities of single agents of social change. Intermediaries have helped to create new aptitudes and have provided platforms for shared endeavor.

We are now beginning to see early expressions of 21st century civic intermediaries; one example is embedded within the concept of “collective impact” in the form of a “backbone organization”. A backbone organization builds connections, marshals resources, enables community engagement and shares knowledge. Other specific national efforts serving to bridge sectors in creative ways include The Civity Initiative, which focuses on strengthening one-on-one relationships among civic leaders across sectors and social divides; the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which works with federal, state and local public agencies as well as with private sector organizations, foundations and community members; and the National Center for Service and Innovative Leadership, which trains leaders across sectors to address pressing problems, offers convening support, and serves as a networking agent with other like-minded endeavors.

Intermediaries, in general, and place-based intermediaries, in particular, are important to civic infrastructure because they sustain efforts, build relationships, generate knowledge and maintain accountability. Place-based intermediaries can provide a stable and more permanent resource in

“We need intermediaries to help us bridge the 20th to the 21st century. We need translation and facilitation skills to forge better communication and connectivity between residents and government as well as among business, government and the independent sector. We need shared capacity to move information between neighborhood and nation. We need to learn how to enlist and listen to residents and to one another and to reach the margins.”

problem-solving efforts by their ability to endure and adapt to the leadership changes in government, business, philanthropy and nonprofits that may occur during the course of any collective endeavor.

Though these examples are promising, there is much work yet to be done and a considerable need for re-engineering intermediaries of the past. Our 21st century intermediaries need to accommodate and even to welcome new players, including business, government, individuals of wealth, nonprofits and social entrepreneurs. They must learn and speak the languages of these and more constituents and provide meaningful translations that enable those possessing different perspectives and experiences to find shared insight. The 21st century intermediary must provide a platform for the cultivation of common commitment, trusting relationships and collective enterprise, serving as a consequential connector across profound differences in interest, motivation, skills and resources.

Building Better

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.”

— Preamble, United States Constitution

When the founding fathers introduced the United States Constitution and its preamble, their purpose was to begin the transition from the Articles of Confederation, which recognized the power and sovereignty of the States, to the power of the collective and the sovereign identity of the nation as a whole. The power of the United States that is expressed in the US Constitution is not the sum of the power of the States. It is the power of the people across the States who identify both with the part and the whole. The conscious construction of 21st century civic infrastructure is an opportunity for us to build according to the same value – the value of collective enterprise – an effort that recognizes how much better we are when we work together, when all voices matter and when we support one another through the exchange of wisdom and experience across our differences and in light of our common goals. Like the ambition of our forefathers, 21st century civic infrastructure is a quest to “form a more perfect union,” a union that is strong, inclusive, economically stable and just. To face and overcome the challenges of modern times; it will be necessary to consciously create a capable and robust 21st century civic infrastructure.

The three keystones necessary for the creation of that infrastructure are (1) engaging all sectors; (2) enlisting all voices; and (3) building vertical and horizontal thoroughfares for information and practice exchange. While not every grant, grantee, philanthropic practice or philanthropic institution will embody all three keystones, the infrastructure we construct in its entirety and with consciousness should comprise all three and should reflect the values of inclusivity and cooperation.⁹

Once created, 21st century civic infrastructure should help us cultivate shared beliefs, including a set of common expectations and obligations. It should enable us to build our core capacities as a nation that continues to aspire to fairness, equity and opportunity.

The opportunity of this moment lies not in the availability of new tools and changing demographics, but in our willingness to employ them. We must have the courage to challenge how we have done things in the past, the curiosity to learn what we don't yet know, and the wisdom to act on both.

9 Andy Williamson and Martin Sande, *From Arrogance to Intimacy: A Handbook for Active Democracies*, 2014.

About the Authors

Jill Blair is a consultant to nonprofits and philanthropy. She works on issues of strategy, organizational health, leadership and team development. Passionate about democratic practice and civic engagement, she was the founder of two philanthropic affinity groups — Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service and PACE (Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement). Before going solo in 2007, Blair was the co-founder and principal of Informing Change, a Berkeley-based consulting group working in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector.

jblair@jillblairconsulting.com

Malka Kopell is a long-time leader in the civic engagement field. In 1990, she founded Community Focus, a nonprofit that develops and supports cross-sector collaborations in California. In 2014, she and Palma Strand co-founded The Civity Initiative, a national effort to strengthen relationships in civic networks to facilitate community problem-solving. Kopell served as a program officer at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in the areas of conflict resolution, community problem-solving, and governance reform, and she was the first managing director of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at Stanford University.

malka.kopell@sbcglobal.net

Appendix A:

Annotated Bibliography for More Information on the Subject

Arnsberger, Paul, Melissa Ludlum, Margaret Riley, and Mark Stanton. "A History of the Tax Exempt Sector: An SOI Perspective," *Statistics of Income Bulletin* (Winter 2008).

"The origins of the tax exempt sector predate the formation of the republic. Without an established governmental framework, the early settlers formed charitable and other voluntary associations such as hospitals, fire departments and orphanages to address social issues. These institutions continued to thrive in the United States for centuries. In 1831, during his visit to the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville observed these associations and distinguished between them those that were primarily public-serving and those that were primarily member-service."

Dawicki, Colleen, "Civic Infrastructure in Gateway Cities," *MassBenchmarks* (2013).

A comparative survey of 20 Gateway Cities in Massachusetts that focuses on civic infrastructure defined as the people, organizations, municipalities, and networks that promote the healthy functioning and mobilization of the community.

De Souza Briggs, Xavier. *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe*. MIT Press, 2008.

"Complexity, division, mistrust, and "process paralysis" can thwart leaders and others when they tackle local challenges. In *Democracy as Problem Solving*, Xavier de Souza Briggs shows how civic capacity — the capacity to create and sustain smart collective action — can be developed and used. In an era of sharp debate over the conditions under which democracy can develop while broadening participation and building community, Briggs argues that understanding and building civic capacity is crucial for strengthening governance and changing the state of the world in the process. Briggs examines efforts in six cities, in the United States, Brazil, India, and South Africa that face the millennial challenges of rapid urban growth, economic restructuring, and investing in the next generation. These challenges demand the engagement of government, business, and nongovernmental sectors. And the keys to progress include the ability to combine learning and bargaining continuously, forge multiple forms of accountability, and find ways to leverage the capacity of the grassroots and what Briggs terms the "grasstops," regardless of who initiates change or who participates over time. Civic capacity, Briggs shows, can — and must — be developed "even in places that lack traditions of cooperative civic action."

Edmonson, Jeff, and Nancy Zimpher. The New Civic Infrastructure: The 'How to' of Collective Impact and Getting a Better Social Return on Investment," *Community Investments* (Summer 2012).

The key to improving student outcomes at the population level is not a program, but a process. The new civic infrastructure, informed by the concepts embodied in "collective impact," enables society to make that change possible.

The First Generation of the 21st Century: An Introduction to the Pluralist Generation. Magid Generational Strategies, 2014 <http://magid.com/sites/default/files/pdf/MagidPluralistGenerationWhitepaper.pdf>

This report describes America becoming more ethnically diverse and considers the following questions: How will the rise of the public, crowd-sourced voice affect the way we view the media? How will it influence our politics and our political leadership — our modes of communication? How will the change in business practices that correspond with the shifting demographics play out in the long-run — the disappearance of brick and mortar stores and retail replaced by online shopping? What about public education — funding and delivery?

Fukuyama, Francis. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. Francis, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014.

"All political systems are liable to decay..." when their institutions fail to evolve in light of shifting times and changing public needs. "The fact that a system once was a successful and stable democracy does not mean that it will remain so in perpetuity..." According to Fukuyama, the American system has grown weaker and less efficient. He attributes its decline to income inequality and the influence of money in the political process — the ability of wealthy elites to manipulate the system in their personal rather than the public's interest. He also speaks about the prevalence of "unrepresentative" factions — "collectively unrepresentative of the public as a whole..." These trends have the effect of eroding public trust and lead to a continuous decline in state performance on behalf of the public's interest (a vicious cycle).

Fung, Archon. "Continuous Institutional Innovation and the Pragmatic Conception of Democracy," *Polity* 44, no. 4 (2012).

In every society, Fung argues, the "reality of collective decision making falls far short of the democratic ideal," particularly when advantaged individuals and interests are able to entrench their power and to disenfranchise others. To avoid the democratic sclerosis that can occur when such power dynamics manifest, Fung calls for continuous democratic innovation, which includes infrastructure and practices.

Hampton, Keith, et al. "Social Media and the 'Spiral of Science.'" Pew Research Center, August 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/>

It has long been clear in the research community that people's willingness to discuss political issues depends on their access to news and on the social climate for discussion. This study explores people's willingness to share their opinions on and offline about an important political issue.

Howell, Kathryn, *Growing Up and Aging in Place: Generational Demographics in the Washington DC Region* (George Mason University School of Public Policy; Center for Regional Analysis, Arlington, VA, April 2014).

This paper provides the context for 21st century civic infrastructure, talking about the unique demands that will be placed on community services and development, housing and worker retraining, workforce development and other poverty alleviation and organizing efforts), because of the upcoming convergence of an explosive Baby Boom generation along with Millennials and Generation Xers.

Knight Foundation. *Soul of the Community Report*. 2010

"Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation launched the Knight Soul of the Community project in 2008 with these questions in mind. After interviewing close to 43,000 people in 26 communities over three years, the study has found that three main qualities attach people to place: social offerings, such as entertainment venues and places to meet, openness (how welcoming a place is) and the area's aesthetics (its physical beauty and green spaces)."

Leighninger, Matt. *Infogagement: Citizenship and Democracy in the Age of Connection*. Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, September 2014.

Through interviews with journalists, technologists and those involved in civic and public engagement, Leighninger examines the relationship between information and engagement.

Leighninger, Matt. *The Next Form of Democracy: How Expert Rule Is Giving Way to Shared Governance ... and Why Politics Will Never Be the Same*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006.

Leighninger argues that the relationship between citizens and government is undergoing a shift. More than ever before, citizens are educated, skeptical, and capable of bringing the decision-making process to a sudden halt. Public officials and other leaders are tired of confrontation and desperate for resources. To address persistent challenges such as education, race relations, crime prevention, land use planning, and economic development, communities have been forced to find new ways for people and public servants to work together.

Levine, Peter. *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Levine offers a theory of active citizenship, a diagnosis of its decline, and a critique of our political institutions. He argues that people have the power to change their communities through deliberative civic action and uses YouthBuild USA, Everyday Democracy, and the Industrial Areas Foundation as examples of groups that invite all citizens, including traditionally such marginalized people as low-income teenagers, to address community problems.

Liu, Eric, and Nicholas Hanauer. *Gardens of Democracy: A New American Story of Citizenship, the Economy, and the Role of Government*. Sasquatch Books, 2011.

Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer want to change the way Americans think about politics, and they do it here with a new metaphor to describe how governance should work. The book argues that Americans politics can be improved if we can agree that the country is like a garden and therefore needs to be tended and cared for.

Pennington, H., J. Blair, and C. Geraghty. "A Nation in Transition – E Pluribus Unum" (unpublished, 2013).

This paper argues for the need to develop new narratives that accommodate changing demographics. The authors call for more inclusive leadership development programs that are intergenerational and multi-ethnic; a more integrative approach to policy and service delivery that breaks down the silos between services to support people where they are; regional planning that transcends fixed jurisdictional lines; philanthropy that supports dialogue; and relationship-building that transcends boundaries.

Ragsdale, Diane. "The Arts in a Civic World Upside Down" (Aug. 24, 2014).

<http://www.artsjournal.com/jumper/2014/08/the-arts-in-a-civic-world-upside-down/>

Smith, Aaron. *Civic Engagement in the Digital Age* (Pew Research Center, April 25, 2013).

This study examines online and offline political engagement and pays special attention to the role of social networking sites in people's political activities.

Warner, ME; Dunn, D., et al., *Overview: Planning Across Generations; Planning for Multigenerational Communities*. Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University, April 2013.

The nation's population is growing at both ends of the spectrum. Cities dealing with expanding youth population, in particular in communities where there is high immigration, require a new planning approach with implications for design, program and practices.

Williamson, Andy, and Martin Sande. *From Arrogance to Intimacy: A Handbook for Active Democracies*, 2014.

This book speaks to how we can make our democracies ready for everyone by being open, sharing and collaborative. It's about taking democracy on a journey from arrogant and controlling to intimate and co-creating.

Appendix B:

List of Individuals Consulted

Gwyn Barley, director of Community Partnerships and Grants, The Colorado Trust, Denver, CO

David Bley, director, Pacific Northwest Initiative, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, WA.

Lyz Crane, deputy director, ArtPlace America, Brooklyn, NY.

John Esterle, co-executive director, The Whitman Institute, San Francisco, CA.

Frank Farrow, director, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, DC.

Jim Ferris, director, The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, University of Southern California Price School of Public Policy, Los Angeles, CA.

Shane Harris, vice president, Prudential Foundation, Newark, NJ.

Bill Koll, director of Communities, Robert R. McCormick Foundation, Chicago, IL.

Matt Leighninger, executive director, Deliberative Democracy Consortium, Toronto, Canada.

Diana Morris, director of Open Places Initiative, Open Society Foundations, Baltimore, MD.

R.J. Naugle, program officer of Onward Veterans, Schultz Family Foundation, Seattle, WA.

Avani Patel, local portfolio director, Peery Foundation, Palo Alto, CA.

Dan Petegorsky, senior fellow, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Portland, OR.

Geeta Pradhan, associate vice president for Programs, The Boston Foundation, Boston, MA.

Robert Putnam, Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University, Boston, MA.

Scot Spencer, associate director of Advocacy and Influence, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.

Sterling Speirn, president, Stupski Foundation, San Francisco, CA.

Blair Taylor, chief community officer, Starbucks Corporation, Seattle, WA.



THE ASPEN) INSTITUTE

Forum for Community Solutions