

# Glossary of Terms

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**Accountability:** Citizens holding themselves, not just officials and institutions, responsible. The kind of accountability in which citizens participate in determining success rather than just receiving reports of what others have done will help to restore a sense of “ownership.”

**Choicework:** A shared moral struggle; conflict is among more than just between people, even within them; because of conflicting concerns people cannot always be certain which option best serves everyone's purposes. Choicework prompts people to examine what is most valuable to them, the most desirable ends and means of political action or “their deepest motives,” which are shared.

**Civic Learning:** Observing and reading about places where public life is strong or growing shows how similar communities are to good students. They are voracious learners, picking up everything they can from both their own experience and the experience of others. That seems to be how they maintain the vitality of their public life. We call this civic learning.

**Civil Society:** A society of citizens; civil society is the part of society that exists between individuals and families, on one hand, and governments and formal institutions, on the other. The civil or civilian sector can be seen in such things as informal associations and social networks. It is to the political environment what wetlands are to the natural environment --the place where public life --our life together --takes shape.

**Common Ground for Action:** A shared sense of direction and an awareness of the interdependence of purposes could be called “common ground for action,” to distinguish it from “common ground” or consensus. We have learned that making this distinction is important because many public conversations can produce a temporary sense of closeness for commonality that can obscure important differences.

**Community:** A set of relationships, ways of dealing with problems, the formal and informal organizations that connect people, and the norms that dictate citizens' obligations to others. Together all of these generate a certain feeling of connectedness, of belonging that is called a sense of community.

**Convenor:** A person or group of people in a community or a community organization who plans and coordinates local activities of a National Issues Forum including contacting the local newspaper, sending letters or fliers to potential participants, all in an effort to bring all voices or viewpoints to the forum.

**Deliberation:** The kind of reasoning and talking we do when a difficult decision has to be made, a great deal is at stake, and there are competing options or approaches we might take. It means to weigh possible actions carefully by examining what is most valuable to us.

**Deliberative Dialogue:** Deliberation or making choices is interwoven with another kind of talk that is used to make sense of the world. People try to find out what is going on around them and what it means. Some call this kind of talk “dialogue.” Although these two kinds of talk have different purposes --one is for meaning making and the other decision making --they are so closely linked that you might call the two together “deliberative dialogue.”

**Dialogue:** Conversation aimed at mutual understanding, not decision-making. While deliberation is for deciding, dialogue is very dependent on mutual understanding.

**Framing an Issue for Public Deliberation:** Framing issues --laying out the various options for dealing with a problem and identifying the points of conflict; framing issues in terms that reflect what the public considers most valuable rather than in the expert of technical terms in which issues are typically framed. Framing the issue is critical to knowing all of the perspectives of the issue or subject. In contrast to this, in politics, names and frameworks control who will become involved and what kinds of solutions will emerge. They also determine the amount of political will that can be generated to solve problems.

**Issue Book:** The continuing challenge for anyone, preparing an issue book to prompt deliberation is to identify the key facts, to put them in the context of the things that are valuable to people, and to come up with a guide that is comprehensive, fair to all perspectives, and clear about where the different approaches to a problem are in conflict. For 25 years NIF issue books have been prepared and published jointly by two nonpartisan research foundations, Kettering Foundation and Public Agenda Foundation.

**Making Choices Together:** Making choices together is that form of talking and reasoning called deliberation or deliberative dialogue. Making choices means weighing the consequences of various options much as people used to weigh gold on an old-fashioned scale in order to make the hard decisions deliberation entails. The purpose of making choices together is, in the final analysis, to be able to act together. Making choices together identifies the shared or interconnected purposes that join people as a public.

**Moderator:** In a forum, the moderator encourages people to engage one another. Effective moderators remain impartial so the group can consider all the options fairly. People won't take a forum seriously, won't invest themselves, if they believe the dialogue is biased or structured to reach a predetermined conclusion. More than twenty colleges, universities and national organizations are instructing NIF moderators through their own public policy institutes.

**Naming a Problem in Public Terms:** The name given a problem, in terms used to describe it, either indicate or fail to indicate how it connects with people's deeply held concerns. People do not become attached to a community unless they feel that what is most valuable to them is reflected in the issues the community considers most important. To name a problem in public terms is to identify these concerns. The name given a problem and who names it determines (a) what kind of response will emerge and (b) the number of people who will be available to solve the problem.

**National Issues Forums (NIF):** A network of locally controlled and financed forums that deal with problems common throughout the country. From their experience in these forums, citizens have learned a great deal about how deliberation differs from other forms of speech like debate and discussion. To prompt decision making, the forums often use issue books that identify three or four options or approaches to an issue (there are never just two polar alternatives).

**Politics as Usual:** Another name for conventional politics --special interest groups, lobbying, voting. In politics as usual, communities try to address major problems by breaking the problem down to a manageable form, finding a plausible solution, delegating responsibility to an accountable institution, getting busy with visible activity and selling the public on what the leadership has decided is best.

**Power:** Particular people and institutions are thought to have the power or authority to act, while others are seen as powerless. That leads to the widely shared belief that those without power must be empowered by the powerful. The power given by others is not real power; no one can really empower someone else because true power, the ability to act effectively, grows out of each person's unique experiences and talents. This traditional concept of power is bound to leave a great many people feeling powerless --or in need of being empowered by someone else (which raises the question of who really has the power).

Another way of thinking about power is to take into account the potential in people's innate capacities to do public work, which is amplified through their ability to band together.

**Public:** A diverse body of people who have joined to try to promote the well being of the community as a whole.

**Public Acting:** Public acting is a habit of ongoing cooperation among a large and diverse body of citizens who work both with one another and with governments. Public acting differs structurally from governmental or institutional action, where there is usually just one action --a program is created or a law is passed. Institutional efforts are uniform, linear and usually coordinated by some administrative agency. Public acting, on the other hand, consists of a repeating collection of lateral efforts. They are not linear, being at one point and ending at another. Public acting produces a form of capital --social or public rather than financial --communities can draw on when they need to keep on acting.

**Public Agenda:** A foundation that Daniel Yankelovich and Cyrus Vance founded to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues and to help the nations' leaders better understand the public's point of view. Its in-depth research on how average citizens think about public policy forms the basis for its extensive citizen education work. Its citizen education materials, used by the National Issues Forums and media outlets across the country, have won praise for their credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision-makers across the political spectrum.

**Public Capital:** Public capital consists of relationships formed during the course of working together, norms of relating and the memory of a particular way of solving a problem. The more public acting there is, the more public capital is generated.

**Public Choice:** The choices that people make about the purposes and direction of their communities. They are the decisions we make about what is most valuable to us as a public. Whether made formally and consciously or informally, these policy choices shape the character of the community in a way nothing else does. A community is the product of its choices, intentional or not.

**Public Judgment:** Forms when people arrive at shared and reflective views, which are more mature, or fully developed, than opinion. People move from popular opinion to public judgment, and the shift is a "long journey."

**Public Policy Institutes (PPI):** More than 35 institutions --from the University of California at Davis to Gulf Coast Community College to Purdue University and community-based groups -- have established public policy institutes or centers to promote a stronger democracy. They are preparing citizens to lead forums on the critical issues facing every community in the country -- drug abuse, welfare, affirmative action, economic development. Participants come from civic organizations and neighborhood associations, leadership and literacy programs, churches and synagogues, as well as high school and college campuses.

**Public Politics:** Kettering research suggests that public politics is deeply rooted in everyday life and personal experience. Public politics is not confined to organized evenings of learned discussion on world affairs. Its origin is in the ordinary conversation of Americans --at lunch counters, on the bus ride back home, over the kitchen table --conversations that flow into more formal public forums and town meetings. Public politics is not a special kind of politics found in heroic citizens initiatives; it is simply politics at its most basic. Public politics begins in people's efforts to solve the problems that invade their lives and dim their future.

**Public Space:** For public life to flourish there must be space, that is, events and meetings, where people can join to talk about and organize action on common problems, spaces where citizens do their work. There must be institutions and associations willing to organize those gathered.

**Public Will:** The willingness or commitment of citizens to work on a problem until they have it under control. Will is essential in attacking those systemic “we-can’t-seem-to-get-rid-of-them” problems that grow out of a lack of community and then further destroy community. “Public Will” has staying power; it is not just the superficial enthusiasm of popular support. Public will grows out of joining existing self-interests rather than replacing them with one “general will,” and the amount of public will available in a community seems to be a function of the degree to which people do or do not claim responsibility for what happens to them.

**Solution Wars:** Pressure to find the “right solution” can lock a community into a never-ending battle between proponents of various plans. Those who rush to solutions often say that “everybody knows what the problem is.” Communities have been known to spend their energy debating which of a number of predetermined solutions is best, little aware that there is no agreement on the nature of the problem. To end or prevent solution wars, Kettering studies suggest that civic organizations raise questions that prompt people to step back to identify what it is they really want before talking about specific solutions.

**Transaction Costs:** Economists would say that public acting is efficient in that its transaction costs are low. Transaction costs are those expenses associated with human interactions. In an economy, they are the cost of getting people to work together. Obviously, the lower the expense of giving orders, settling disputes, and the like, the more productive the economy will be. Transaction costs have been shown to be as much a determinant of productivity as the factors usually cited --the cost of labor, capital and technology.

**Valuable vs. Values:** Choicework prompts people to examine what is most valuable to them, the most desirable ends and means of political action or “their deepest motives,” which are shared.

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## **We Are the “Public”**

We, the public, must be the primary actors in our democracy. To exercise our role as citizens in this democracy, we need to act on our responsibility to join together in public actions and set direction for public policy.

By “public action” we mean a particular kind of action different from what an institution does. Institutional action is uniform, linear and usually coordinated by some administrative agency. The fire department, for example, lays out safety rules for how to exit a building. It sends an inspector around from time to time to ensure that the rules are followed. The interactions are vertical – from officials down to citizens or, in some cases, from citizens up to officials.

Public action, on the other hand, is not linear, beginning at one point and ending at another. It is not planned action such as strategic planning nor is it spontaneous or magical. The process can wind around and around, resulting in a rich diversity of input. It grows out of deliberation that, if it goes well, results in a sense of direction for action. That sets the stage for identifying where interests overlap and purposes can be joined.

## Views of “Public”

The following chart depicts concepts of “public” evidenced in recent research compared with conventional assumptions. These concepts are not abstractions; they are the source of considerable conflicts as interest groups contest the legitimacy of another entity, such as a deliberative body or an informal association.

<b>Conventional Thinking</b>	<b>A New Way of Thinking</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is everybody – an audience, the inhabitants; it does not have to be freshly and repeatedly constituted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public or publicness is a certain way of relating in everyday life. It is a type of relationship.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by its relationship to providers; it is a constituency or body of consumers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by interrelated self-interest more than by commitment to a selfless common good.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by collections of special interest; there is no one public but many and they are often in conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by shared and reflective judgments rather than merely the aggregation of individual interest.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by opinion. It is the aggregate of individual opinions – illustration: a poll.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by a loose compact about what a community, state, or nation should be and do. The compact is not the consensus but rather it defines the arena between disagreement and agreement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by a value – a commitment of the good of all. It consists of those who are active in promoting the common wealth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public is constituted by common work – by its production.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public, as anything other than an abstract, is constituted by membership in a civic organization. The public acts through these nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The public exists in informal associations and not just in formal organization. These associations allow the public to act.</li> </ul>