

**Impacts of National Issues Forums
on Participant Efficacy and Behavior**

by

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Abstract

Deliberative democracy theorists argue citizen participation is a critical aspect of democratic government. In this exploratory study, deliberative community forums created by the National Issues Forums were conducted in five communities around the state of Alabama. Data collected from post-forum questionnaires and phone interviews were used to examine the impact these deliberative forums had on participants. The main research questions in this study explored the benefits and changes forums had on citizens, levels of participant efficacy that resulted, and actions people took as a result of their participation (behavior). After analyzing the data, the study demonstrated that all three arenas were reported by participants to be impacted: 1) participants in deliberative community forums reported they benefited and changed from the experience; 2) efficacy of participants was reported to be impacted by deliberative community forums and the majority reported they felt their participation in community affairs matters (efficacy); and, 3) more than half of the participants reported they became more involved with community activities and decision, thus behavior of participants was impacted by deliberative community forums as well. The results reported by participants demonstrated support for institutionalizing deliberative community forums as a tool to solve serious problems communities face in today's world.

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List of Abbreviations

NIF	National Issues Forums
DPA	Domestic Policy Association
CMD CAH	Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities
AIF	Alabama Issues Forums

Chapter 1: Introduction

Political participation in American government has been viewed as a critical feature of the democratic society. Some scholars, such as Dahl (1998), have even stated there is a set of criteria or standards needed to ensure all members of a community are equally able to participate in decisions about policies through a “democratic process”. He believed that democracy allows opportunities for “1. Effective participation 2. Equality in voting 3. Gaining enlightened understanding 4. Exercising final control over the agenda 5. Inclusion of adults.” (p.38) In more contemporary terms, democracy is viewed as an:

inclusive decision-making process that provides opportunities for citizens to establish and deliberate upon a political agenda and reach meaningful collective decisions. The ideal democratic process requires citizens who reach considered judgments, communicate among themselves, and engage in ongoing individual and group political action. (Gastil, 1994, p. 22-23)

Representation of citizen views to meet the needs of all groups is a basic foundational concept in the U.S. governmental system. This is evident in a quote by Thomas

Jefferson:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion. (Kettering, 1991)

Throughout American history, beginning with the premise behind colonial New England’s town hall meetings (Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs, 2004), the idea of a deliberative democracy, or deliberative decision making, has received a great deal of

attention as one way to promote “a sincere concern for the common good” (Nieuwenburg, 2004, p. 449). By recognizing that citizens are a central component in ensuring democracy works, encouraging more citizen participation with the use of such techniques as public deliberation has been viewed as a central theme in contemporary political processes, especially during the past few decades (Freeman, 2000).

Research Areas

The research areas addressed by this dissertation focus on: 1) benefits and changes deliberative forums reportedly had on participants; 2) citizens’ levels of efficacy reported after participating in deliberative community forums; and, 3) changes in behavior reported after participating in one or more deliberative community forums. This dissertation may show that communities can successfully solve some of the problems they face by utilizing deliberative community forums which spur citizens to take action for the collective good. By successfully implementing community forums in their local jurisdictions, citizens can demonstrate there is a need for more permanent deliberative structures to allow them to have input and influence on the solutions to problems. This research study is another step in the process of showing the impacts deliberative community forums can have on the political process. This is especially true at the most basic and fundamental levels of citizen participation.

Background

Dahl (2006) viewed decision making as the source of power. He viewed democratic theory as being “concerned with the processes by which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over their leaders” (p.3). Dahl further stated that democracy involves compromises. He examined two theories of democracy, Madisonian

and populist. Madisonian theory supports maximizing a non-tyrannical republic while populist theory focuses on sovereignty and political equality. Neither of these theories, in Dahl's view, is able to respond to real world issues. Instead, Dahl proposed the theory of polyarchy, which focuses on the "social prerequisites" for a democratic order rather than "constitutional prerequisites" (p. 82). Polyarchy involves citizens expressing preferences and making decisions about a set of alternatives throughout the stages of voting, which is the most fundamental form of citizen political participation. He recognized that only politically active citizens participate in elections. They are the group who set the limits for political elites, but there is a gap in information provided by these elites to citizens. Dahl explained that we view constitutional checks and balances as necessary to curb the power of majority and minority groups. However, we "ignore the importance of restraints imposed by social separation of powers" (p.83) and if this occurs then a tyranny may result. He believed the social variable is crucial to strengthening a democracy, which is also a basic belief in deliberative democracy and civic engagement.

Political participation of U.S. citizens in government processes has been the subject of study by numerous scholars. The concept of deliberative democracy came into being starting with Aristotle who was the first major theorist to promote the process in which citizens discuss and defend laws in a public arena. Aristotle supported the idea that average citizens can make better decisions through speaking to one another and deciding together than experts independently working alone. Even though this discussion took place in a much different context in Aristotle's day due to the structure of aristocracy of the time, the concept of deliberation was present.

The idea of a truly inclusive deliberative democracy for all citizens was not common practice when the United States was formed many centuries after Aristotle. The *Federalist Papers* made evident that there was still not a fully democratic form of deliberation in the U.S. at that time. As Gutmann and Thompson (2004) pointed out, institutions were to promote deliberation; however, the constitutional design was not conducive to the idea of attempting to bring together deliberation and democracy. The level of democracy which was promoted was very limited in membership (Gutmann and Thompson). John Stuart Mill (1991) encouraged “government by discussion” during the nineteenth century because he believed direct participation by citizens in political decision-making encourages them to be more actively engaged in addressing the problems in their lives. Mill is thought to be one of the promoters of deliberative democracy. Yet, Mill continued to prefer these sorts of dialogues stay among those who were educated which meant many citizens continued to be excluded from discussions.

Finally, during the early part of the twentieth century, deliberation was explicitly attached to democracy. At the time, there was the need for “political discussion in a polity recognizably democratic in the modern sense” (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p.9) as a necessary condition of democratic government. Habermas (1984) is given credit as the one responsible for facilitating the idea of deliberation in our day, giving it a democratic base. Regarding communication, discourse, and judgment, for example, Habermas explained:

One can understand reasons only to the extent that one understands *why* they are not sound, or why in a given case a decision as to whether reasons are good or bad is not [yet] possible....An interpreter cannot, therefore, interpret expressions connected through criticizable validity claims with a potential of reasons (and thus represent knowledge) without taking a position on them. And he cannot take a position without applying his own standards of judgment, at any rate standards

that he has made his own. These relate critically to other, divergent standards of judgment. (p. 116)

According to Gutmann and Thompson (2004), Habermas played a crucial role with his ideas:

His deliberative politics is firmly grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty. The fundamental source of legitimacy is the collective judgment of the people. This is to be found not in the expression of an unmediated popular will, but in a disciplined set of practices defined by the deliberative ideal. (p. 9)

A critical element in the democratic aspect of deliberation, according to Gutmann and Thompson, is its level of inclusiveness and less important were procedures used.

Gutmann and Thompson concluded by stating:

What makes deliberative democracy democratic is an expansive definition of who is included in the process of deliberation – an inclusive answer to the questions of who has the right (and effective opportunity) to deliberate or choose deliberators, and to whom do the deliberators owe their justifications. In this respect, the traditional tests of democratic inclusion, applied to deliberation itself, constitute the primary criterion of the extent to which deliberation is democratic. (p.10)

Proponents of deliberative democracy believe citizen participation is essential.

According to Weeks (2000), these scholars believe that one goal of deliberative democracy is “to revitalize civic culture, improve the nature of public discourse, and generate the political will necessary to take effective action on pressing problems” (p. 360). Several democratic theorists developed the concept of democratic deliberation (Barber, 1984; Cohen, 1989; Cohen & Rogers, 1992; Fishkin, 1991). In their view citizens need to be involved with inclusive deliberation so their diverse views can be communicated, understood, developed, and incorporated into the collective decision making process. Thus, the community’s institutions need to create opportunities for participation by its citizens. Gastil (1994) stated, “Ultimately, the value of the

institutional democratization depends on the ability and willingness of the members of the demos to become active democratic citizens” (p. 3).

The concept of involving citizens in dialogue with one another as well as with community leaders, where everyone is seen as an equal, has become an important factor in describing the effectiveness of citizen engagement. Dryzek (2000) stated in his work concerning the legitimacy of deliberative democracy that the public sphere is the most suitable location for deliberation which should be conducted among those who are free and equal. Wendling (1997) examined this ideal in her work concerning participatory democracy theory as she emphasized participatory democracy is the most egalitarian form of democracy, however inequalities can exist. By allowing everyone in a community to participate on equal footing, a shared sense of understanding and concern can be built as part of the foundation for community problem solving and taking action on issues impacting citizens. Other scholars share Dryzek’s sentiment. Yankelovich (1991) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996) also believed deliberation is face-to-face communication among equals.

Authentic participation is further discussed in discourse theory promoted by Fox and Miller (1996). They posed the question, “Why bother attending a discourse where claims are as likely to be counterfeit as authentic?” when they acknowledged that public discourse may represent inequality among citizens (p.11). Scott (1990) argued that social inequality does not allow citizens to fully participate in public discourse. Rather, their concerns or conflicting views are suppressed as they refrain or are kept from participating while others with more elite status express their views. As a result, real problems are not solved. Patterson (2000) asserted that the theoretical ideal of authentic discourse can be

difficult to achieve. Patterson referred to James Scott's work regarding an expanded view of citizen participation when she examined Fox and Miller's perspective of energetic and action-oriented discursive democracy:

If discourse is essential to coming to a fuller understanding of who we are, what our situation is, what we should do, and why we should do it, that discourse necessitates the inclusion of every willing and attending voice. The public energy fields of governance that aim to be democratic and inclusive must ask if the conditions for virtuous participation and authentic discourse even exist. (p.246)

The importance of authentic participation is further supported by the work of King, Feltey, and Susel (1998) who studied how public participation processes can be improved. They find that more dynamic and deliberative processes are needed, changing the traditional roles of citizens and leaders. They list the four major components involved in public participation processes as: 1) the issue; 2) administrative structures, systems, and processes within which participation occurs; 3) administrators; and 4) citizens. Unfortunately, the citizen is typically furthest away from the issue, necessitating the reframing of citizen participation. They stated, "As defined by the participants of our research, effective participation is participation that is real or authentic. Authentic participation is deep and continuous involvement in administrative processes with the potential for all involved to have an effect on the situation" (p. 321).

In the past, several different methods have attempted to encourage citizens to discuss and act on solutions to community problems through active participation. However, there continues to be an ongoing dilemma in the U.S. as to how to engage citizens more often and successfully in democratic decision making which affects their communities. Regarding the specific research related to this study, there has been an insufficient amount of empirical research conducted in public deliberation, discursive

participation, citizen engagement, and the “participation hypothesis” which claims people will become more involved in public affairs as their civic engagement increases (Delli Carpini, Cook and Jacobs, 2004; Gastil, 1994; Pateman, 1970). This lack of research is especially evident in evaluating public participation activities (Rowe and Frewer, 2004).

Methodology

The purpose of this dissertation is to study deliberative decision making through community forums to analyze the related citizen benefits and changes. Additionally, this study focuses on how participation in community forums reportedly affects citizen efficacy and behavior. An organization that has facilitated the use of deliberative forums is the Kettering Foundation, a research organization which supports and promotes the use of National Issues Forums (NIF) across the U.S. and around the world as deliberative decision making for community problem solving. In Alabama, Auburn University’s College of Liberal Arts Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities partnered with the David Mathews Center for Civic Life on a grant project for Alabama Issues Forums. They conducted forums in five communities around the state during the course of a school year as a way to introduce deliberative decision making as a form of community problem solving. Issue books produced by NIF and Kettering were used at the community forums. The format of each forum followed the structure outlined in the issue books. The moderators from the university and conveners from each community carried out three forums in each community. Their goal was to assist local citizens with learning this problem solving process in the hope that the communities would learn and continue to apply this format as a means for addressing and solving their community issues in the future.

The issue books that were used to frame the topics at the three NIF forums conducted in each community were “Preparing Today’s Kids for Tomorrow’s Jobs”, “Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?”, and “What Is the 21st Century Mission of Our Public Schools?” However, the data of interest centered on the research areas of benefits, changes, efficacy, and behavior reported to be produced after citizens’ participated in the NIF deliberative forums. Information was not gathered on the three specific themes or topics presented in the issue books.

This study used ex-post-facto mechanisms to collect data. This method allows for an exploratory study of information gathered. Questionnaires were distributed to the participants at the conclusion of each forum and were structured with closed and open-ended questions. Follow-up phone interviews were also conducted months after the forums ended. These data were used to analyze whether the citizens in these communities reported they benefited or changed from attending these forums. Data were also collected on participants’ reported levels of efficacy and behaviors after attending the forums.

Overview of the Chapters

To provide the necessary background for this research study, chapter two begins by discussing the basic elements involved with democratic theory, political participation, and the history of deliberative democracy in the U.S. Deliberative democracy is then described within the context of civic engagement and the term deliberation is defined. A brief history of the National Issues Forums (NIF) is provided and followed by an explanation the goals and process applied by NIF. The next section highlights research literature on the benefits of deliberative forums and the impacts on efficacy, intentions,

and behavior. Potential impacts of community forums are discussed in the last section of the literature review.

Chapter three details the research areas and methodology used for this research study. It explains the context, participants, research design, instruments, and procedures. Methods of analysis included frequencies and crosstabulation analyses. Anecdotal qualitative data was obtained from a few in-depth phone interviews that were conducted with participants who attended multiple NIF forums.

Chapter four describes the research findings. Quantitative data results were gathered by post-forum questionnaires and follow up phone interviews. Questions focused on participant benefits and changes, demographic data, levels of efficacy, and behavior of participants after attending NIF forums. Also, qualitative data results are reported from both the questionnaires and the in-depth phone interviews

Chapter five provides a brief review of the study and results, implications of the results, hypotheses for future study, weaknesses and limitations of the study, and future research suggestions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter one examined political participation of citizens in a democracy through deliberative decision making. Literature was presented on democratic theory, the importance of inclusiveness, and how deliberative democracy evolved. Chapter one provided background and support for community forums enabling all citizens to share diverse views in collective decision making processes where action can be taken to solve community problems. Through authentic participation by citizens in decision making, participants in community forums can work with community leaders to address serious issues.

Chapter two will further explore literature highlighting the theoretical and practical foundation for community forums as an effective form of public deliberation. This chapter will include further perspectives of deliberative democracy and citizen participation, citizen engagement, a specific definition of deliberation, and purposes and formats for deliberative democracy. A brief history of the National Issues Forums (NIF) is provided along with NIF's educational goals and processes. The benefits of deliberative forums, including impacts on participant efficacy and behavior will be addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion about measuring potential impacts of forums as well as potential problems that may occur when using deliberative community forums.

This research study plans to examine how using NIF community forums are beneficial to participants and produce changes in citizens. Through the use of

questionnaires and follow-up phone interviews, it is the belief of the researcher that participants will report increased levels of efficacy and changes in behavior after attending NIF forums. More specifically, this study hopes to show that participants will report a greater sense that their involvement in their community matters and they will become more involved in their communities. Thus, this study will demonstrate how deliberative decision making during NIF community forums encourages participants to become more active in their communities to solve problems.

Deliberative Democracy and Citizen Participation

Pluralist and social choice theories discussed by Miller (1983) focus on the types of variables that impact democratic and, more specifically, government decision-making. Pluralism involves the patterns of influence on the government. Miller focused on patterns of group affiliations and political preferences which impact political system stability in a democracy. He argued that the pluralist political process leads to unstable political choice which promotes the stability of pluralist political systems. As Madison stated in Federalist 10 (Wooton, 2003), “Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens...” (p. 173). This concept also applies to the rationale behind the advancement of deliberative democracy.

Another scholar, Barber (1984), further discussed democratic deliberation. He believed, as did Dahl, there was an important criteria for democracy. This criteria was that institutions should:

give expression to the special claims of strong democracy as a theory or talk, judgment, and public seeing by offering alternatives to representation, simple voting, and the rule of bureaucrats and experts. In other words, they should make possible a government of citizens in place of the government of professionals.

(p. 262)

Barber (1984) described “neighborhood assemblies” (page 267) as another form of citizen participation. He explained that citizens in Western democracies are not typically involved in voting on the policies that govern them but merely vote on those who govern them. Even less often are they given the chance to create their own agendas through any form of permanent “public discourse” (p.267), suggesting a permanent structure should be in place for citizen views to be incorporated into the policy processes in their communities.

Gastil (1994) and other scholars (Barber, 1984; Mansbridge, 1983, 1992; Mathews, 1994) agree that the “ideal citizen regularly engages in political conversation and deliberation with fellow citizens, as well as public officials and policymakers” (Gastil, p. 19). Gastil stated that through discussions with one another, citizens have opportunities to share and learn other citizens’ perspectives on issues which allows for more informed judgments. Gastil said, “In an ideal demos, the citizens are ultimately policymakers, and if they do not reach sound judgments among themselves, the demos will not make the best possible collective decisions” (p.19). The next step for citizens, then, is to take action. Also, according to Barber, ideal citizens involve themselves in “continuous political engagement and experience” (1988, p. 210-211) not only through electoral voting but ongoing political processes involving collective action. These activities allow for greater capacities for political influence (Cohen and Rogers, 1992: Mansbridge, 1992; Merelman, 1984).

It is important to more specifically define “deliberative democracy” because the concept has been discussed and used by so many authors and researchers during the past

several decades. According to Gutmann and Thompson (2004) there are four characteristics that are combined when defining deliberative democracy:

...we can define deliberative democracy as a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future. (p. 7)

The definition of “deliberative democracy” offered by Weeks (2000) is “informed participation by citizens in the deliberative process of community decision making....

That is, deliberative democracy requires that public participation be 1) broad; 2) informed; and 3) deliberative” (p. 361) with credibility being a fourth condition in order for acceptance by the community as a whole.

The above literature clarifies what is meant by deliberative democracy and how citizen participation is important. Consideration must be given as to how groups influence decision making to ensure that no one particular group overshadows another. It also reinforces the need for a permanent structure for citizens to share their views in order for collective action to be effective and influence decision making in a democracy. In defining deliberative democracy, it is evident that citizens should have an equal opportunity to give their input so informed and credible decisions can be reached.

Deliberative democracy can lead to a more engaged citizenry.

Deliberative Democracy and Civic Engagement

Another scholar, Robert Putnam (2000), has argued that social capital and civic engagement are critical to the success of a democratic society. This supports Dahl’s view of the importance of the social variable and the inclusive aspects of deliberative democracy. Putnam described social capital as features of social organization such as

networks, norms, and social trust that promote coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In his work, Putnam referred to belief promoted by de Tocqueville (1969) that nothing is more important than the intellectual and moral associations in America. Communities with empowered and participatory citizens promote motivation by all for collective benefits. According to Putnam, in the U.S., social trust and even neighborliness, participation in political activities such as voting, memberships to civic associations (PTA, churches, labor unions, Lions Clubs, etc.), and other societal commitments have greatly decreased during past decades. Putnam claimed that there is a strong correlation between social trust and associational memberships. Those involved in associations are more likely to participate in politics and invest time and energy in their community.

Increasing civic engagement and deliberative decision making by citizens in their communities has been a goal for some scholars, but still continues to be questioned by others. Some scholars question whether citizens should even be encouraged to deliberate about “matters of politics” (Mendelberg, 2002, p.151). This question is partly due to concerns about citizens lacking the ability to understand complex community issues and not being qualified to make decisions for action. Some believe decisions should be left to public officials who are entrusted as experts on such issues (Rowe and Frewer, 2004). This perspective echoes the less inclusive design of public discussions in the days of Aristotle which limited citizen involvement until the twentieth century. Furthermore, it has been difficult in the past to define or describe what deliberative decision making in communities may look like or what the beneficial outcomes may be.

As the controversy has been debated, scholars such as Putnam (2000) have argued that there is a growing disconnect between citizens and their concern for their community's well being. Putnam believed this disconnect has resulted in a decline in citizen participation or social capital. Ladd (1999) measured social capital differently, however, and contradicted Putnam's view. Ladd believed social capital is on the rise. He declared social capital is strong and is meeting community needs at the local level throughout America. Ladd discussed how citizen involvement in organizations and methods of civic engagement are not viewed in the same light as it was years ago. Furthermore, Ladd valued the new processes and methods. He believed new ways can be used to understand and measure social capital. Unfortunately, though, citizens have also been viewed as skeptical of the U.S. government, politicians, bureaucrats, and elected officials (Weeks, 2000) resulting in pessimism among citizens that collective action can solve community problems. The remedy for a growing number of political scholars and practitioners has been to increase opportunities for citizens to deliberate about political matters (Mendelberg, 2002).

The "participation hypothesis" is a theoretical claim that states if citizens become engaged in one civic activity, they will develop skills, activities, and habits that lead to deeper involvement into the public sphere (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser 2002; Finkel 1985; Freie 1997). This "participation hypothesis" relates to findings that citizen involvement in voluntary associations allows for stronger civic engagement and social capital which can then increase political participation and political efficacy (Evans and Boyte, 1992; Gastil, Deess, and Weiser 2002; Leighley, 1995; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). One particular form of participation, public deliberation, has been more specifically

examined over the past few decades. Though some benefits of public deliberation have been found, Gastil et al. asserted that current research on civic benefits are in the process of being uncovered. This study will contribute additional findings.

According to participation theorists, increased public participation in the political process is required by democracy. Pateman (1970) asserted that the “participation hypothesis” supported the critical role citizen participation plays. (p. 63). As Verba (1961) explained, the “participation hypothesis” means that “significant changes in human behaviour can be brought about rapidly only if the persons who are expected to change participate in deciding what the change shall be and how it shall be made” (p. 206). Pateman (1970) further declared, “all the evidence indicates that ...participation [will] have a favorable effect on the individual in relation to the development of the sense of political efficacy” (p. 66).

Citizen participation in associations and other deliberative processes allow for inclusiveness and mutual benefit in collective decision making. As has been discussed, social capital can be strengthened and civic engagement increases when citizens are more motivated to get involved in their communities. Thus, more opportunities for citizen deliberation are needed. The “participation hypothesis” also leads us to believe that citizens will develop and change in the areas of behavior and efficacy when given more opportunities to participate in discussions and decision making. Public deliberation is a critical aspect to democracy.

Deliberation: What exactly is it?

Some scholars believe democracy must include deliberation. Page (1996) stated, “[p]ublic deliberation is essential to democracy, in order to ensure that the public’s policy

preferences – upon which democratic decisions are based – are informed, enlightened, and authentic” (p.1). Barabas (2004) examined how deliberation impacts policy opinions. Barabas stated that scholars present deliberation as a way to re-energize citizens and democracy. In their work, Gastil, Deess, and Weiser (2002) referred to public deliberation as “the careful weighing of alternative resolutions to any public or civic problem” (p.587). Ideal deliberation involves a very specific topic, active participation, sustained attention, critical listening, and reasoned discussion on a relatively focused topic in a face-to-face, small group setting (Cohen, 1997; Fishkin, 1991; Gastil, 1993, 2000).

The work of Gastil has been extensive in the field of deliberation and deliberative democracy. Gastil (2008) outlined three criteria for the democratic process. First, inclusion must occur where all adults within the bounds of the system, whether it be a country, organization, or group are welcome. Second, participation opportunities must take place. Once a citizen is acknowledged as a member of a democracy, they must have equal and adequate opportunities for participating. According to Gastil, this must be provided in three ways: 1) putting issues on the agenda; 2) expressing views on those issues; and 3) voting on those issues directly or indirectly. The third criterion for the democratic process is enlightened understanding. Gastil explained:

...all members of a democracy must have the chance to figure out which issues concerns them, what they think about those issues, and how they should vote when given the chance to do so. Enlightened understanding...is critical because...it separates a deliberative system from an unreflective one....Only when members of the public become accustomed to figuring out what's important will the issues of the day be of consequence. And only when people learn how to study issues and reflect carefully on their values – as well as those of their fellow citizens – will the public become well informed enough to speak, act, and vote in accordance with their enlightened self-interest, let alone for the greater public good. (p.7)

Gastil's comments emphasized crucial aspects that are incorporated in effective public deliberation. Through thoughtful discussions of differing viewpoints, participants are able to reach a common understanding of issues or problems. The participants are encouraged to reflect on their thinking as well as opinions of others. As a result, participants are well-informed, agreeable solutions can be found, and the hope is eventually collective action can be taken.

Gastil (2008) defined deliberation stating, "as people deliberate they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view" (p.8). More specifically, Gastil explained that deliberation transcends the various political communication settings. First, according to Gastil, a base of information is created to ensure the nature of the issue is understood. Next, the key values involved in the problem are identified and prioritized. Then, a wide variety of solutions that may solve the problem are identified. Fourth, citizens' values and knowledge are systematically used to weigh the positives, negatives, and compromises involved in the alternative solutions. Gastil commented, "A group will have deliberated in this respect if it faces the trade-offs among different alternatives, recognizes that no solution is perfect, and tries to grapple with conflicting values and information" (p. 9). Deliberation concludes when the group makes the most agreeable decision based on what was learned during the discussion. Individuals may make their own decision about the issue independently at the conclusion of deliberation if it did not occur within a decision-making body. Social aspects involved in deliberation include the assurance that all citizens who attended the discussion had a sufficient opportunity speak during the session. Also, participants need to carefully listen and consider the words and

comments each speaker is saying to the group, whether their statements stem from experience, knowledge, or perspective. This concept of consideration means using reasoning to think through what others are saying. According to Gastil, during deliberation, demonstrating respect for yourself and the others participating in the discussion is important.

Gastil's descriptions of public deliberation align with deliberations were conducted in this study. As Gastil (2008) explained, it was critical that the participants were given time to voice their views to the group and to give their opinions as well as share experiences or knowledge they have about the issue or problem. By actively participating and carefully listening to one another, participants were able to understand the points being made. Then the participants were better equipped to thoughtfully reflect on the conversation. This process allowed participants to make informed decisions and draw conclusions that accurately represented what was shared during the deliberative discussion. As a result, public deliberation conducted in this study upheld the goals and ideals of deliberative democracy.

Deliberative Democracy: Purposes and Formats

There are four purposes of deliberative democracy according to Gutmann and Thompson (2004). First, deliberative democracy promotes the legitimacy of collective decisions. The second purpose is to encourage public-spirited perspectives on public issues. Third, deliberative democracy promotes mutually respectful processes of decision-making. The fourth purpose of deliberative democracy is to help correct the mistakes made when officials and citizens take collective action. Gutmann and Thompson described a deliberative forum when they stated:

A well-constituted deliberative forum provides an opportunity for advancing both individual and collective understanding. Through the give-and-take of argument, participants can learn from each other, come to recognize their individual and collective misapprehensions, and develop new views and policies that can more successfully withstand critical scrutiny. When citizens bargain and negotiate, they may learn how better to get what they want. But when they deliberate, they can expand their knowledge, including both their self-understanding and their collective understanding of what will best serve their fellow citizens. (p.12)

A variety of formats have been utilized to find effective strategies for involving citizens in the political process. These formats have included traditional town meetings, citizen advisory panels, public hearings, surveys, deliberative polls, Televotes, and many other methods (Becker and Slaton, 2000; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 2006; Kelshaw, 2002). One method which has been applied on a regular basis during the past few decades is deliberative decision making through community forums. It is believed by many practitioners and scholars that a responsive and responsible democracy should strengthen citizen participation through deliberative forums (Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs, 2004). Scholars have pointed out the benefits of this form of citizen participation, such as the idea that deliberation improved the political sophistication of participants (Barabas, 2008). During community forums, participants are able to experience critical aspects of public deliberation as previously described by Gastil (2008) which are essential to deliberative democracy.

Public deliberation has received the support of several non-profit organizations, including the Kettering Foundation's "National Issues Forums" as well as the Study Circles Resource Center and the Pew Charitable Trusts (Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs, 2008). Cook, Delli Carpini, and Jacobs highlighted that public deliberation through community forums has been promoted for a variety of reasons. The reasons include educating citizens, building trust in political institutions and other citizens, moral

development, considering other interests and values, and producing collective decisions. Another reason is reconciling competing perspectives which is a valuable way to break the deadlock that may occur in the traditional avenues of electoral and legislative processes.

The National Issues Forums (NIF) are discussed by Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) as a growing network of communities use deliberation to make thoughtful decisions based on common understandings. These communities name and frame local issues for public deliberation. It is described by Melville et al. as a “nonpartisan, nationwide network of organizations and individuals who sponsor public forums and training institutes for public deliberation” (p.39). According to Melville et al., thousands of forums have been convened over the years by service clubs, universities, libraries, and other kinds of groups. NIF is the largest network of its kind (Melville et al.).

As with other models of public deliberation, NIF has a vision of how democratic communities should work. This involves discussions about relevant problems and agreeing on public actions according to Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005.). The key question is, “How is this accomplished?” The term *deliberation*, according to Mathews, means “to weigh carefully both the consequences of various options for action and the views of others” (1994, p.111) and not to just talk about problems. Through deliberations sound public decisions can be made that allow people to act together facing costs and consequences related to possible choices while working through potentially emotional issues. Page (1996) believed that “deliberation is essential to democracy...In modern societies, however, public deliberation is (and probably must be) largely mediated, with professional communicators rather than ordinary citizens talking to each

other and to the public through mass media of communications” (p.1). This sort of structure is applied during NIF community forums on a regular basis as trained moderators are used to facilitate the discussion. Melville et al. give a detailed description of public deliberation as follows:

...public deliberation needs to be anchored in facts, sound judgment – whether on the part of individuals or groups – is not based mainly on a command of pertinent facts, as policy experts often assume. Deliberation consists chiefly of exchanges about what individuals and groups value, their priorities and personal stories and their relevance to public concerns. People need to see issues named in a way that reflects their concerns and their way of thinking, which is often different from how policy experts or elected officials characterize issues. People are more likely to engage in forum discussions if what is most important to them is clearly reflected in the way the issue is named and if the framing leads to actions that can be taken at the local as well as national level. Through such conversation, which bears little resemblance to expert analysis or exchanges among pundits that are featured in the media, groups arrive a common ground for public action. The most important collective decisions are about what *should* be, and in this respect there are no experts. (2005, p. 42)

Gastil (2004) pointed out that civic associations such as the Study Circles Resource Center and the National Issues Forums have encouraged situations that support deliberation on current public issues by diverse populations of participants. These types of face-to-face deliberative activities allow equal opportunities for critical listening, sustained attention, active participation, and reasoned and passionate discussion (Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw, 2002). According to Burkhalter, Gastil, and Kelshaw (2002), however, only a small amount of empirical research has studied the extent to which participants’ political beliefs and behaviors were impacted by face-to-face deliberation. Deliberative program studies have more often been qualitative reports rather than program impacts tested by hypotheses (Gastil and Dillard, 1999a).

Though many formats have been used to conduct public deliberation over the past several decades, community forums are reportedly an effective method which has been

implemented often. Deliberative forums allow different points of view to be expressed and explained as citizens participate in the process of solving community problems that are important to them. The format provided by the National Issues Forums (NIF) has been implemented on a wide scale to address important issues facing communities.

A Brief History of the National Issues Forums (NIF)

A series of conferences held in the mid- to late- 1970's are given credit for creating the National Issues Forums (Gastil, 1994). The role of the public in domestic policy making was discussed among civic leaders, activists, public officials, scholars, and citizens at these conferences. David Mathews, the former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and then President of the University of Alabama, brought together this group of people to find ways to overcome public disengagement (Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005). In May, 1980, a Public Action and Social Change conference was held in Lexington, Kentucky. During this conference, the Domestic Policy Association (DPA) was created and Stephen Strickland was the Chairman. His report outlined its rationale:

The DPA would seek to identify, through its individual members and directors, the most critical substantive issues facing the nation, perhaps on an annual basis, and would seek to build structured, focused, and open dialogue about those issues. The first function of such an association would be an educative one...[The DPA] might be an important step toward a more dynamic democracy and a more coherent society (Hagood, 1983, p. 11-12)

David Mathews then became the main organizer for the DPA after he resigned from his position as President of the University of Alabama in 1980. In 1981, Mathews became the President of the Charles Kettering Foundation. The trustees at the Foundation made the central theme of their mission the public in democratic life. Thus, they dedicated a great deal of resources to the DPA. Later in 1981, Daniel Yankelovich, the President of the Public Agenda Foundation, assisted the DPA with focusing on issues

for the first year of forums which were then called the National Issues Forums (NIF). The issue books they created framed public deliberation at the forums. The goal was to “move people beyond superficial and uninformed opinions toward public judgment” (Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005, p.41). Public judgment was defined by Yankelovich (1991), who worked closely with Mathews, as “highly developed public opinion that exists once people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides, understood the choices it leads to, and accepted the full consequences of the choices they make” (p. 6).

In the fall of 1982, 9,491 people attended 313 forums in 17 states. The DPA is now called the National Issues Forum (NIF). The Kettering Foundation continues to provide NIF with logistical and organizational support (Gastil, 1994). NIF continues to be a voluntary group of institutions that collaborate. Over the years, there have been some changes to the content and formatting of the issues books, the yearly forums summaries, and the materials used to train moderators. However, the main aspects of NIF have stayed the same. NIF’s goals and educational methods have also remained as it continues to try to “strengthen the deliberative foundations of democracy” (Hamlin, 1993, p. 4; Kettering Foundation, 1991; NIF, 1992a).

The network of forum conveners and participants has changed in size and diversity (Gastil, 1994). Fewer than 30 people participated in the first NIF training program in 1981. By 1993, over 1,300 people came to the annual Summer Public Policy Institute, becoming conveners and moderators. Additionally, almost 900 people at 13 locations were also trained around the United States. In 1993, approximately 1,440 adult literacy programs, 2,600 high schools, and 1,360 civic organizations including libraries,

churches, and other groups held forums (NIF, 1993). There has also been greater diversity of NIF. The network now includes adult education, Catholic church, corrections, study circles, youth organizations, and other programs (NIF, 1992a, 1992b, 1993). In 1981, when NIF began the majority of people involved were community leaders and educators. Today, NIF participants vary greatly in age, race, economic class, and geographic region. The NIF network reaches “nonreaders as well as the highly educated, teenagers as well as retirees, prison inmates as well as community activists” (NIF, 1993, p.1). Today, NIF has its own website which allows organizations and conveners to use NIF materials for their own educational and institutional purposes. Users can access issue books, moderator guides, reports, network contacts, online discussions, materials for educators, and there is even an online store. NIF’s website currently displays a quote that states, “National Issues Forums (1981-2011): Thirty Years of Advancing Civic Engagement in Democracy” (<http://www.nifi.org/>). NIF has continued to advance this goal and the deliberative democratic process.

The NIF Educational Goals and Process

The goals of NIF are outlined in the booklet *Hard Choices* by McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews (1990), one of the most well known of the Kettering Foundation publications. The authors explained that both NIF and the citizens who participate in the forums hope to provide a setting that gives people a voice or sense of power. They stated that participants would like to have a more direct impact on politics in their communities by taking action on pressing problems and changing how all levels of government (local, state, and national) understand the interests of the public. By participating, citizens hope

to “learn how to make difficult choices” and “increase and improve the quality of public deliberation” by making it “more sensible and constructive” (McAfee et al., 1990, p. 4-5).

NIF is based on the idea that “democracy does not begin with elections; it begins with conversations” (McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews, 1990, p. 4). Deliberation and dialogue are two of the main focuses of NIF. Gastil (1994) explained the NIF philosophy further when he stated, “Political communication among citizens is most meaningful when it causes citizens to make public policy judgments or ‘hard choices’ on pressing national issues. Too often, people only reach policy ‘preferences’” (p. 8) rather than make difficult choices that are supported by people’s strongly held values. By tapping into people’s values and convictions, these forums encourage citizens to do “real work” (Gastil, p. 8). The forum forces participants to consider the negative effects of favored choices and the positive alternatives presented by other participants. Participants also consider the policy’s impact on both themselves and the community. The process of listening and empathizing as others share their viewpoints, opinions, and stories allows participants consider and question values they view as important. Deliberation, as described by McAfee et al. (1990) is the “act of weighing carefully...It’s a process of determining what action is in the best interest of the public as a whole” (p.17-20). Throughout the forum, participants have the time to “talk through” issues with their peers and begin “to understand our options, face up to our limitations, and put ourselves in a position to make a serious choice” (McAfee et al, p. 20). The issue books are published by NIF and frame issues on a national level. Policy choices are presented in the books with the values and reasons underlying them. According to NIF, after the forum, participants will talk and think about the facts and values presented and continue to

develop their points of view on the issues. Then, participants make choices based on their preferences as their opinions become “public judgments”. McAfee et al. distinguished judgment from opinion because judgment “rests on what we think the second time – after we have talked with others, considered the consequences of our options, and worked through the conflicts that arise” (p. 22; NIF, 1991; NIF 1992a; Yankelovich, 1991). “Common ground” for a community can then stem from these personal judgments. They explained:

Even when we are not in full agreement, we can find enough common ground to move ahead. Common ground is a shared frame of reference or sense of direction...In creating common ground for action it is enough to delineate the range of actions that are politically acceptable and can be supported for the long haul (McAfee et al., 1990, p. 24-25).

Thus, citizens can then convey the policy alternatives that are agreeable so they can speak together in one “public voice”.

As NIF explained in their NIF *Leadership Handbook* (NIF, 1992a) and in the publication *Organizing Your First Forum/ Study Circle* (NIF, 1990), there is no one best way to organize a forum. NIF discussions may take many forms. They may be community-wide town meetings which invite the general public to attend or small study circles sponsored by individual citizens or local organizations. Discussions may include book clubs or church groups (NIF, 1992a, p. 23). According to NIF, it is best to have a series of study circles with five to twenty people. Ideally, participants receive NIF issue books in advance of the forum for participants to read the important facts related to the issue. Most importantly, though, reading the book ahead of time allows the participants to begin the process involved in working through the issue. In each issue book, the current policy for that issue is clustered into three or four general choices and some of

these views may or may not be mutually exclusive (Gastil, 1994). NIF recognized that not all of the participants read the issue books beforehand. Therefore, the first part of the forum is dedicated to reviewing the NIF process and the different stances presented on the issue. Some forums also give participants pre- and post- questionnaires which are collected at the conclusion of the forum by the moderator.

At each NIF forum, a neutral and objective moderator facilitates the discussion. He or she attempts to “establish a friendly and informal atmosphere from the start” and gives “a general audience orientation on the nature of NIF and the format of the program” (NIF, 1992a, p. 31). The moderator should also “explain the expectation that all those present will be both active listeners and active participants - - it is their program” instead of participants expecting to vote on something or finding concrete solutions by the end of the forum (NIF, 1992a, p. 32). The moderator is also responsible for setting the ground rules which participants agree to follow during the forum:

identify the range of realistic alternatives and move toward a choice, (2) make a good case for those positions one dislikes as well as the position one likes, and consider choices one has not considered before; (3) understand others have reasons for their choices and that their reasons are very interesting - - not dumb, unreasonable, or immoral; (4) realize that one’s knowledge is not complete until one understands why others feel the way they do about the choices; (5) consider the underlying values of each choice; and (6) leave the forum/study circle “stewing” over the choices (NIF, 1992a, p. 32).

Sometimes, after discussing the ground rules, a short video may be shown to the participants by the moderator. He or she explains that the video gives an overview of the issue and presents three to four policy choices. It is used to reinforce the participants’ understanding of the issue by suggesting advantages and disadvantages of the alternative choices to frame the discussion (NIF, 1992a, p.13). Moderators can also facilitate a discussion that poses questions to introduce them to the topic before considering the

policy choices. The moderator may say, “Within your family or friends, is this an important issue?” or “How does this issue affect people?” for participants to consider their “personal stake” in the issue (NIF, 1992a, p.13). This strategy using questions engages the participants in the discussion and makes the issue more concrete (Gastil, 1994). Gastil explained:

The moderator then leads the group into deliberation. During this phase, the moderator remains neutral on the issue, guiding but not directing or influencing the direction of the discussion. Moderators encourage participants to connect choices with values, illustrate their ideas with stories or examples, consider hypothetical dilemmas, and explore the consequences of actions for different people (p. 13).

After approximately one to three hours of deliberation guided by the moderator, the forum enters the conclusion stage. At this time, the moderator asks the participants to describe the experience they just had but not to report results. He or she may ask, “What trade-offs are people willing to make to get to what they want?” or “What makes this issue so difficult to decide? What is really at issue?...Is there enough common ground for action? What is unresolved?” (NIF, 1990, p.14).

After the forum, the hope is that participants will attend another forum or study circle and reflect on the forum discussion. Some moderators directly ask participants to reflect on the forum afterward. McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews, (1990) explained that what happens after the forum is significant because a single forum may not create lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes.

By participating in NIF forums, citizens are given an engaging format for public deliberation. They can actively discuss various views related to an issue or problem in their community with the assistance of a trained moderator. During the process, participants listen to many different viewpoints which may offer new ideas about issues.

Through reflection and public judgment, participants can work toward a consensus and attempt to solve problems for the greater good. It is important to note that participation in one deliberative forum may not create lasting changes in participants, therefore the impact of participation in several forums may be important. After participating in deliberative forums, especially those using the NIF format, research will show that citizens report benefits and changes as well as impacts on efficacy and behavior.

Deliberative Forum Impacts: Benefits, Changes, Efficacy and Behavior

Ideal deliberation has been described by West and Gastil (2004) as including “careful problem analysis, an egalitarian process with adequate speaking opportunities and careful listening, and dialogue that bridges divergent ways of speaking and knowing” (p.2). They found increases in both political efficacy and future civic activity. Herbst (1996, 1999) also found benefits of face-to-face deliberation even when it doesn’t occur in structured forum settings. He found participants had increased knowledge, efficacy, and involvement (see also Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). Knowledge gained by participants when they listen to the variety of viewpoints presented creates a better understanding of both the opinions of other participants and factual information depending on its accuracy and credibility (Gastil, 2006).

Explorations of the benefits of public deliberation became more common in the 1990s (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002). According to Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, “proponents of citizen deliberation claim that taking part in public forums, conventions, and panels can change citizens’ attitudes and behaviors” (p. 587). David Mathews, the current President of the Kettering Foundation, stated that citizens who have participated in deliberation “have actually experienced a measure of democratic ideal in practice” and

then believe that “if deliberation can happen in one meeting, it can happen in others; that if citizens can claim responsibility and act in one community, they can become the solution they are looking for in other communities” (1994, p. 195). More specifically, the benefits ascribed to deliberation are many and include informed and insightful judgments, a higher level of political efficacy, and engaging in political action more often (Cohen, 1997; Fishkin, 1991; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Mathews, 1994; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). Bandura (1986) found, however, that only when behavioral performance of deliberation is successful is it then likely to increase political efficacy. This means in well-conducted deliberative forums where participants effectively engage in deliberative processes by following the moderator’s guidelines, the forum can increase efficacy in participants.

A promising finding was made in previous research on the Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) model. They found a very high correlation between intentions and behaviors. In Gastil’s work, he stated the “theory of reasoned action” explained that “a person’s behavior is directly influenced by intentions, which are shaped by attitudes and subjective norms. Attitudes are a person’s overall evaluative orientations toward behaviors” (Gastil, 1994, p. 26). This “theory of reasoned action” is further explained by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Future behavior is shaped by present outcome expectancies and outcome valuations. Outcome expectancies are the anticipated results of engaging in a behavior and outcome valuation is the desirability of those results. Behavioral intentions are also shaped by a person’s willingness to comply with perceived social norms. Perceptions of social rules can guide the actions a person takes when they desire to follow those social rules (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Later, because this model was not able to explain

“behaviors over which people have incomplete volitional control” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181), the “theory of reasoned action” (Ajzen, p. 181) was replaced with a “theory of planned behavior” (Ajzen, p.181). As a result, effects of “perceived behavioral control” (p. 184) are taken into account when considering intentions and behavior. The new term given by Ajzen (1991) as an addition to this model is very similar to Bandura’s use of “self-efficacy” according to Ajzen (1991). Gastil (1994) and other authors (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Maddux and Stanley, 1986) support the notion that self-efficacy has proven “highly predictive of behavior in numerous studies employing a diversity of measurement procedures and examining a variety of behaviors over which people do not have complete volitional control” (p. 28).

In defining self-efficacy, it is important to consider the definition offered by Bandura (1986a, 1986b). Bandura’s definition of efficacy separates ability from outcome. Efficacy is:

people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses. Judgments of personal efficacy are distinguished from response-outcome expectations. Perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance, whereas an outcome expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such behavior will produce (p. 391)

Morrell (2005) contended that there is limited understanding of the factors that create positive effects of deliberation. Clearer investigations are needed to identify when deliberation is beneficial. Morrell examined the effects of deliberation on internal political efficacy. In his earlier research, Morrell found the manner in which deliberation affects citizen perceptions of the democratic decision-making process (1999). In his more recent work, Morrell investigated whether the structures in which deliberation

occurs affect internal political efficacy, which Morrell stated “refers to citizens’ feelings of their own personal competence to participate in politics” (Morrell, 2005, p.50).

Morrell stated, “Without a sense of internal political efficacy, citizens will likely become apathetic about, indifferent to and disengaged from the democratic process” (2005, p.50). He concluded from his data that it suggests deliberation can have positive consequences for citizens’ internal political efficacy but it is likely “these effects are neither guaranteed nor as direct as deliberative theorists expect” (2005, p.50). What matters more, according to Morrell, is citizens deliberating face to face, not the structure of deliberation. The relationship between deliberation and political efficacy was made explicit by several scholars, including Gastil (2000), who agreed that potential benefits of deliberation include more informed and reflective judgments, a greater sense of political efficacy, and an increase in the frequency of political action (Bohman, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Fishkin, 1995; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Mathews, 1994; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997).

It is logical then to believe, according to Morrell (2005), that citizens get a type of training for democracy by engaging in deliberation. This in turn could increase citizens’ confidence that they can participate in the political system. Gastil and Dillard (1999a and 1999b) conducted qualitative studies that focused on citizens who deliberated in National Issues Forums (NIF) and indicated the confidence in their abilities to participate in politics increased. Other scholars, including Doble, Higgins, Begasse, and Fisher (1996), used participant reports and moderator interviews. These sources gave anecdotal evidence that NIF forums affect people’s sense of what they can accomplish in their communities, “help people feel more efficacious and self confident,” and allow people “to develop a public voice or sense of agency while deliberating” (1996, p.39-40). These

investigations support the idea that democratic deliberation may promote an increase in the political competence that citizens feel. According to Gastil and Dillard (1999a), “in all likelihood, significant increases in political efficacy occur more often for active participants at relatively successful deliberation events” (p. 587). One caution (Wollman and Stouder, 1991) is that:

Although a relationship exists between believed efficacy and behavior, and the more specific the measure of efficacy, the better the prediction, the fact that people in general feel that they can be effective by taking a particular action does not necessarily imply that they will act (p. 564-565).

Finkel (1985) further stated that people will “feel able to exert influence in government more consistently when they will actually act on those feelings” (p.899). Thus, the idea of efficacy leading to action rather than just intention to act is a critical consideration in the current research.

Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) listed six ways participation in public deliberation may affect individuals:

- Participation in NIF forums heightens interest in specific issues and in public affairs and leads to higher levels of public engagement.
- Participation in NIF forums broadens the outlook of participants.
- As a result of participating in forums, individuals come to experience themselves in different ways, and they learn new ways of taking part in groups.
- Participation in NIF forums enhances people’s sense of themselves as political actors who can make a difference in their communities.
- People construe their self-interest more broadly as a result of taking part in deliberative conversations. (p.48-50)

Other NIF findings shared the effects of NIF deliberation. At the individual level, there are increases in self efficacy and self worth among participants. Gastil (1994) reported that public deliberation increases people's expectations that their actions will have significant political impact. "NIF gives participants a greater sense of 'political efficacy', the belief that one is capable of political judgment, deliberation, and action. It also leads people to place greater value on their own political involvement and influence" (Gastil, 1995, p.2). Doble (1995) reported that, "The NIF conveners and moderators interviewed [in eight communities] said the forums help people feel more efficacious and self-confident. After the forums, people feel they are capable of addressing these issues, and deserve to be included in the discussion" (p.31). In a review of NIF studies, Dedrick (1991) found that "an increased sense of self-worth and an enhanced sense of personal efficacy are noticeable effects" (p. 5). Alamprese (1995) stated that one of the more frequently reported outcomes from the NIF is the development of self-efficacy in learners resulting in increased civic participation. Further, the experience of being an active member of a group, having one's ideas approved by others, and being able to act on one's beliefs all contribute to one's sense of self-efficacy (Alamprese). In telephone surveys, which were conducted by Margie Loyacano (1991), respondents reported a greater sense of self-efficacy and personal work after participating in NIF.

Doble and Peng (1999) found that high school students who participated in NIF forums demonstrated they gained a sense of agency. This is described by the authors as:

a sense that we, ourselves, have the capacity to do something about the problems that face our community, state, or country....Through the realization that they were civic actors, not just spectators, many of the students were more inclined to accept responsibility for public problems...It is often the case that their experience had a deep impact. (p. 36)

Doble and Peng stated that other students also connected with their communities during and after their NIF experience. Some attended or convened community forums with other citizens and many have become more involved with community projects, organizations, and groups (Doble and Peng, 1999). “By accepting more responsibility for the future, the students feel less isolated from their communities, and have, in effect, been reconnected to public life and, in the broadest sense, to the political process” (p.37).

The NIF model has been viewed as one avenue of reform for public participation which impacts participant efficacy according to Williamson and Fung (2005). This is due to the NIF “theory of change that postulates that through deliberation, Americans will develop ‘a different way to talk, another way to act’ that will improve the vitality of American democracy” (p. 78). A study of high school students showed the forums “effectively instilled a sense of political efficacy, an interest in thinking about public issues and sharing opinions, and a more nuanced understanding of complicated public issues” (p. 78).

Gastil (1994) found NIF participants gained self-efficacy, motivation to learn, and take action. Gastil (2004) further examined the impact of deliberative forums as a way to provide civic education to participants. He found that “dispositions and behaviors were positively associated with forum experiences that involved higher levels of reading, listening, observing, and enactment” (p.308). His findings showed that educational impact varies greatly with forum participation, but these results also support the value of deliberative forums as a way to provide civic education. Gastil (1994) summed up NIF effects when he explained:

Overall, NIF moderators and conveners attribute a wide range of effects to NIF. They believe that the forums have the potential to change the way people view

particular issues as well as the way they view politics and their role as a citizen.
(p. 22)

The research discussed above has shown several impacts deliberation has on participants. There is evidence of benefits and changes on participants after deliberating. Benefits include motivation to learn, a broader outlook, increased knowledge after listening to others' viewpoints, gaining a better understanding of others' opinions and factual information, more informed and reflective judgments, and more confidence to participate in the political process. Changes in attitude and behavior were evident in the literature as well. Researchers found participants had increased levels of efficacy which included an increased sense of self as a political actor who can make a difference, an increased sense of agency, more confidence, stronger feelings of self worth and being capable of addressing issues, and higher value was placed in their own involvement and influence. The impact on participant behavior after deliberating showed evidence of more community involvement, including motivation to take action, more civic activity, higher levels of public engagement, involvement in community projects and groups, increases in the frequency of political action, attending or convening more forums, and reconnecting to public life. This study plans to find many of these impacts and outcomes when the data reported from deliberative forum participants is explored.

Community Forums: Measuring Potential Impacts

In his NIF work, Gastil (2004) suggested that a longitudinal following participants before, during, and after engaging in deliberation would be useful. If a study was conducted over several months or possibly years a more reliable estimate involving the long-term impact of deliberation could be explored. Regarding the overall impact of forums on communities as a whole, Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) mentioned

several effects, especially in communities that hold forums repeatedly over several years. In those instances, it becomes a civic habit to deliberate about problems. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick further commented, “What is apparent in many communities is that the habit of public deliberation builds skills and bolsters confidence that communities can respond effectively when problems arise” (p. 51). According to Levine, Fung, and Gastil (2005), “when deliberation is well organized, participants like it....they find it deeply satisfying and significant” (p. 2) and participants are eager to deliberate again. The authors further stated that deliberative democracy is deeply fulfilling, can reinforce support for itself when it is successful, and spurs further involvement. According to Levine, Fung, and Gastil, “This has certainly been the experience of some of the longest running deliberative programs, like the National Issues Forums and Study Circles, in which today’s volunteer participants become tomorrow’s forum and study circle organizers” (p.3). These authors concluded that for those participants, “deliberation was so rewarding that they felt the impulse to join the nascent deliberation movement and bring that same experience to others” (p.3). However, Melville et al. commented that even though the impact is the most powerful when people deliberate repeatedly on different issues, even a single forum or a series of forums on a single issue can change a community.

The NIF community forums studied in this research share these goals as well. This study examined participant reports after they attended either one forum or more than one forum. Based on the literature cited above, the data should confirm that participants report interest in deliberation after having a positive experience at the forum and, as a result, report they would like to attend another forum. It is the hope that after conducting

multiple deliberative forums over time, participants and their communities will continue to utilize this format to successfully solve the problems they face. However, preventing and correcting potential problems with deliberative community forums is critical.

Potential Problems with Forums

It is important to consider problems with conducting forums and collecting information. Many factors can influence the way in which a deliberative forum is conducted which affects the process and outcome. Factors that can inhibit the success of a forum may include the time and location of the forum, the skill level of the moderator, participants' understanding of the ground rules and deliberation process, the level of engagement by participants, familiarity with the issue, and participant comfort level when sharing views. It is important to be aware of the different factors influencing a deliberative forum in order to prevent negative outcomes and lack of success. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) asserted that:

...real-life deliberation can fan emotions unproductively, can exacerbate rather than diminish power differentials among those deliberating, can make people feel frustrated with the system that made them deliberate, is ill-suited to many issues, and can lead to worse decisions than would have occurred if no deliberation had taken place. (p. 191)

They also stated that it is not wise to have people discuss political issues with people who do not share similar concerns (2002). Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2004) acknowledged that empirical research on deliberative democracy is significantly behind as compared to theory. Deliberative democracy is more complex than theorists or political scientists believed it to be.

Although Williamson and Fung (2005) contended it is likely NIFs “positively impact citizens’ interest and/or feelings of efficacy in relation to politics, at least in the

short-term” (p.77) they stated that NIFs alone are not adequate to transform participants into ideal citizens. The Kettering Foundation acknowledges brief exposure to the model is not sufficient to change citizens’ thinking about their role in public life (Doble and Peng, 1999). This study explored data collected from participants who either attended one forum or several forums. That information will be helpful in gauging whether or not participants changed their thinking about their role in their community as a result.

The success of a deliberative forum can depend on multiple factors that may or may not be within the control of the organizers or moderators. Carefully planning the forum and using a standardized set of guidelines regarding where and when the forum will take place, established ground rules, the level of moderator training, and allowing enough time for the entire deliberative process to occur should help to eliminate the known preventable problems. However, unknown variables such as the number of participants who attend, participant levels of understanding of the process or topic, and dynamics between the participants can create difficulties during the forum. A skilled moderator may be able to keep these problems to a minimum, nonetheless the challenge is predicting when a problem may interfere with a successful forum and eliminating it.

In chapter two, literature was reviewed showing support for benefits and changes citizens may experience after participating in community forums. Additionally, the literature showed that after NIF community forums participants experienced increased levels of efficacy and involvement in their communities. Benefits that were reported by participants were increased knowledge, informed and insightful judgments, a higher level of political efficacy, and engaging in political action more often (Cohen, 1997; Fishkin, 1991; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and

Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Mathews, 1994; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). Changes that can also occur by participating in deliberative forums have been found. These include changes in attitude and behavior (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002). Absent from the literature was further exploration about whether participants reported benefits and changes resulted from listening or learning about others' views and if they were more motivated as a result of the forums.

In the literature, it was stated that efficacy is highly predictive of behavior (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Gastil, 1994; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). Participation in deliberative forums allows citizens to increase their confidence about participating in the political system (Gastil and Dillard, 1999; Morrell, 2005). Several scholars such as Morrell (2005) and Doble, Higgins, Begasse, and Fisher (1996), found evidence that NIF forums impact people's ideas of what they can do in their communities, increase people's feeling of being more efficacious and self-confident, and may promote an increase in the political competence that citizens feel. Further examination should be made to find in what ways citizens feel their participation in community affairs matters, such as in helping to create a change in their community or simply by becoming more aware of others' opinions.

Scholars have also found that participation in deliberation can produce higher levels of public engagement, involvement, citizens taking action, more involvement in community projects and groups, and engaging in political action more often (Doble and Peng, 1999; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 1994; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). The ways in which participants become more

involved also need to be explored. These activities may include listening to others' view points and information, sharing information with others, or attending more forums.

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Chapter 3: Research Questions and Methodology

The idea that citizens should be engaged in a variety of democratic processes is supported by theory and practice over the past few centuries. By participating in deliberative community forums, citizens are directly involved in processes and opportunities to hear other people's views as they discuss important topics that affect their lives. To solve problems in their communities, citizens have been encouraged to participate so that their voice is heard along with the ideas their community leaders have to offer.

This study applies scholarly work in the areas of democratic theory, deliberative democracy, political participation, and civic engagement in its examination of the impact deliberative community forums can produce. Leaders in the field of deliberation, especially Gastil and the Kettering Foundation, have implemented a specific type of community forum experience called National Issues Forums (NIF) believed to have positive impacts on participants leading to beneficial change, including increased efficacy and community involvement. Deliberative community forums, such as those created by NIF and utilized in this study, invite all citizens in a community to share their ideas equally with others in a face-to-face setting. This allows everyone in attendance to hear, judge, and discuss issues affecting them and their community. In this way, participants deliberate about problems and concerns as community leaders and citizens work together to find ways to meet the needs of everyone.

Targeted and strategic deliberative community forums conducted in five different Alabama communities allowed a great deal of information to be collected about the possible benefits of this type of citizen engagement throughout the state. With many concerns and issues faced by local communities, the need to find an effective means to discuss and solve those problems while engaging and empowering citizens brings great value to the insights gained from this study. The questions addressed by this research focus on benefits and changes participants experience as well as levels of efficacy and behaviors of participants after attending one or more forums in their community.

After attending and participating in deliberative community forums, several questions were posed to participants. The three main research areas of this study are to explore how citizens reportedly: 1) benefited from participating in deliberative forums and any changes forums had on them; 2) levels of efficacy were impacted after participating in deliberative community forums; and, 3) experienced changes in behavior after participating in deliberative community forums.

Benefits and Changes

The first research area involves benefits and changes the NIF forums had on participants. Previously, researchers have found those who participated in deliberation may report motivation to learn, increased knowledge, a better understanding of others' viewpoints and factual information, informed and insightful judgments, higher levels of interest in public affairs and in public engagement, and broader outlooks and self-interest. and (Gastil, 1994; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Mathews, 1994; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005). Researchers also found changes in attitudes and behaviors (Gastil,

Deess, and Weiser, 2002). Based on these findings, the two related research questions in this study are:

- 1) Do citizens think they personally benefitted from participating in deliberative forums in their communities and, if so, what benefits do they say they gained?
- 2) Do participants believe there were any changes the forum had on them or on their community, and, if so, how?

Efficacy

Gastil (1994) found participants were more efficacious and confident. Gastil (1994) also found participants had increased self-efficacy and self worth, allowing for increased expectations their actions will have significant impact and influence. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) found individuals experience themselves in different ways and people's sense of themselves as political actors who can make a difference in their communities is enhanced. Morrell (2005) believed participation in deliberative forums allowed citizens to increase their confidence about participating in the political system. Several scholars including Morrell (2005) and Doble, Higgins, Begasse, and Fisher (1996), found evidence that NIF forums impact people's ideas of what they can do in their communities, increase people's feeling of being more efficacious and self-confident, and may promote an increase in the political competence that citizens feel. Efficacy has proven highly predictive of behavior (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Gastil, 1994; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). It is critical, however, as Finkel (1985) asserted, that citizens actually act on those feelings. The third research question in this study investigates reported participant efficacy:

- 3) Do participants feel their participation in community affairs matters and, if so, how?

Behavior

Research has also shown a very strong connection between intentions and behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Gastil, 1994). A person's behavior is directly influenced by intentions. Furthermore, efficacy has proven highly predictive of behavior (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Gastil, 1994; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). It is critical, however, as Finkel (1985) asserted, that citizens actually act on those feelings. Several researchers have found that participation in deliberation can produce higher levels of public engagement, involvement, citizens taking action, more involvement in community projects and groups, and engaging in political action more often (Doble and Peng, 1999; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 1994; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). However, as mentioned above, the Kettering Foundation acknowledges brief exposure to the model is not sufficient to change citizens' thinking about their role in public life (Doble and Peng, 1999). It is the hope of NIF that participants would enjoy their experience in a deliberative community forum and be interested in attending more forums. McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews (1990) agree that what occurs after a forum is significant because participation in a single forum may not create lasting behavior changes. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) discussed the effects of multiple community forums and asserted a habit arises for these communities to use deliberative forums when a problem occurs. They further argued that deliberating repeatedly on different issues is most powerful, but a single forum or a series of forums on an issue can also change a community. Levine, Fung, and Gastil (2005) also found that when deliberation is successful and fulfilling, participants will want to

become further involved. These findings lead to the fourth through seventh areas of research that explore reported behavior after participating in a deliberative community forum:

- 4) After attending a forum, did participants become more involved with community activities and decisions, and if so, how?
- 5) If participants did become more involved in their community, did their involvement have any actual influence and, if so, how?
- 6) Would participants attend another community forum?
- 7) Did participants who attended multiple deliberative forums in their community think it had an affect on them and, if so, what was the impact?

By gathering participant responses about their feelings of efficacy and the reported impacts it had on their behavior after attending deliberative community forums, many more communities may be able to effectively address some of the serious community issues they face today and in the future through the use of deliberative community forums.

Context

The community forums in this study were conducted through a joint partnership between the David Mathews Center for Civic Life, associated with the University of Alabama, and the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities (CMD CAH) at Auburn University. The David Mathews Center for Civic Life is a non-profit organization. The purpose of the Center is to “foster infrastructure, habits, and capacities for more effective civic engagement and innovative public decision making” (<http://mathewscenter.org/>). They are focused on “how citizens create political will and sustain innovative community decisions” (<http://mathewscenter.org/>). One of their most well known programs is the Alabama Issues Forums (AIF), working with the National Issues Forums (NIF). The AIF conducts community forums and related research to

provide annual reports to the public on how citizens are thinking about issues such as education, economic development, and public health. The CMD CAH at Auburn University also shares a partnership with AIF. In cooperation with the David Mathews Center for the Civic Life and a number of local partners, CMD CAH coordinates deliberative forums in communities around the state. According to CMD CAH, “deliberative forums offer the public an opportunity to discuss significant issues of concern in a non-threatening and non-divisive environment” (<http://media.cla.auburn.edu/cah/programs.htm>). The organization believes “forums foster dialogue among citizens - not debate - and lead to an informed and engaged public demonstrating civic responsibility” (<http://media.cla.auburn.edu/cah/programs.htm>).

To support the ongoing involvement of citizens in their communities, the National Issues Forums (NIF) has developed issue books which are published with the help of other entities to design and develop approaches to issues relevant to communities.

According to NIF:

National Issues Forums bring people together to talk about important issues. They range from small study circles held in peoples’ homes to large community gatherings modeled on New England town meetings. Each forum focuses on a specific issue such as illegal drugs, Social Security, or juvenile crime. The forums help people of diverse views find common ground for action on issues that concern them deeply. NIF forums are structured deliberative discussions, led by trained moderators. Using nonpartisan issue books, participants weigh possible ways to address a problem. They analyze each approach and the arguments for and against. ([http://www.nifi.org/.](http://www.nifi.org/))

NIF provides resources for communities to learn about community forums and how to hold forums in their community. It also offers information about how they can obtain reports describing the results of community forums which were held in other communities.

For this project, the topic of education was addressed in the community forums by introducing three main issues, one issue at each forum, and the related approaches from NIF issue books. According to NIF, “Each year, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) identifies several public issues of national concern. Nonpartisan issue deliberation materials are prepared that are intended to stimulate serious public deliberation about these issues by the public.” (http://www.nifi.org/issue_books/index.aspx) The three issue books upon which the community forum topics were based were: (A) “Preparing Today’s Kids for Tomorrow’s Jobs” published by NIF in 2008, (B) “Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?” published by the Kettering Foundation in 2008, and (C) “What Is the 21st Century Mission of Our Public Schools?” published by the West Virginia Center for Civic Life in 2007.

Participants

The body of quantitative and qualitative data gathered for this project included demographic information about community forum participants, their responses to attending the forums, and their actions during the months following the forums. Five Alabama communities participated in a series of three community forums. The five communities were selected based on working relationships particular community members had previously established with directors from the David Mathews Center and the CMD CAH. The particular contact person in each community agreed to serve as the logistical coordinator for arranging the forums and became the convener for that location, as will be described later. The five communities in which the series of forums took place included small to medium-sized towns and small cities. The populations of these communities ranged from 1,600 to 24,000 residents. These five communities were

located in different geographical areas throughout Alabama. The names of these communities shall remain anonymous and will be referred to hereafter as community A, B, C, D, and E. Each of the community forums occurred in a variety of building locations depending on the city or town. Locations included libraries, community centers, Chambers of Commerce, a coffee house, an Alabama state Extension office, and a church. At each forum, the participants were seated in chairs in a semi-circle seating arrangement, with or without tables depending on the location. The seating arrangement ensured all participants could view one another and the moderator, who was facilitating the forum.

There were approximately three forums in each community over the course of eight months from September 2008 through April 2009. Each forum typically took place during a weekday afternoon or evening. All community forums were open to anyone in the community to attend and participate. As the data will show, the citizens from each community who attended and participated in the forums varied greatly. They came from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, careers, education levels, and roles in their communities. Participants at each forum included community members who were teachers, students, parents, principals, school superintendents, school employees, School Board members, school bus drivers, County Commissioners, mayors and other elected officials, Extension Agents, Chamber of Commerce members (business owners), local business employees, ministers, non-profit organization directors and employees, public housing employees, retirees, and other private citizens or public servants who lived or worked in that particular community. The number in attendance at each forum varied from three people to over 40 participants. Most forums were attended by and planned for

adult participants over the age of 18. In some communities, youth forums were planned for children and adolescents ages 8 to 21. Two of the forums in one town were bilingually conducted in Spanish and English depending on the formats chosen by the convener in that community. At these two forums, questionnaires in both English and Spanish were provided.

Each community had a contact person, called a convener, who communicated with the directors of the project. One of the directors of the project, who also served as one of the moderators, was the Assistant Director of the CMD CAH. The two other moderators were graduate assistants from the Political Science Department at Auburn University. They received training on how to be a moderator through support from the David Mathews Center for Civic Life. The designated convener was responsible for planning the logistics for each community forum once a date and time was agreed upon by the conveners and moderators. The conveners were typically public servants from the each of the communities. They included librarians, a minister, an Executive Vice President of a Chamber of Commerce, and a President/CEO of a Community Foundation. Conveners were responsible for arranging locations for the forums as well as marketing the forums to the community. Typically, the conveners discussed these types of logistics with other community members in order to allow the most number of citizens to attend. Several posters and one hundred postcards were sent to each convener by the project director weeks prior to each forum to be used to advertise the topic, date, time, and location in the community. Conveners also used other means to invite citizens to participate, including radio and newspaper advertising, personal invitations such as phone

calls and emails, press releases, bulletins, and videos about the topic playing in local businesses such as grocery stores, .

The moderators of the project traveled to each community to conduct the forums. The moderators were trained in their role to follow the expectation to stay neutral and unbiased throughout each forum as they facilitated the discussions. They were not expected to be trained experts on the issues being discussed because that might have inhibited the free exchange of participant ideas. Moderators were also trained to make it difficult for citizens to rely on the moderator too much for what they think might be the “correct” answers, when in actuality there were no “right” answers. Moderators typically stated ground rules at the beginning of each forum, which included participants listening to everyone’s comments, speaking in turn, respecting everyone’s point of view, and speaking to one another rather than to the moderator. At times, the moderator may have charted the responses of the group if it was convenient or appropriate, or another moderator may have acted as the recorder. The moderator also introduced each of the three approaches to each issue and then asked participants to make comments based on their perspectives and/or personal experiences. After approximately ninety minutes, when all three of the approaches to each issue had been discussed, the moderator encouraged the group to reflect on the conversation as a way to discuss possible options for next steps for the community. At that time, common themes and possibly common ideas for action might be explored, or else participants could acknowledge unresolved issues that needed further deliberation.

Research Design

In this project, three issue books prepared by NIF were used to frame the topics and approaches presented and discussed at the series of three forums conducted in each community. The theme of the topics of the three forums in each community was education. Three approaches to each education issue were used to structure each of the three forums. For the purposes of this study, the specific forum topics were irrelevant. The education issues and concerns discussed at each forum were very detailed and complex. The focus of this research was not to analyze education issues presented. Instead, the focus of this study was to gather data regarding the participants' responses to participating in the community forum structure and the impact it made on the participants' subsequent feelings and actions as related to civic engagement in their community. This data was collected by asking participants to fill out surveys at the conclusion of each forum they attended. The purpose of these surveys were to gather demographic data about the participants while, more importantly, finding out the participants' immediate responses to the forums such as what benefits or changes they thought participating had on them. It also allowed them to express their intentions of becoming more involved in their communities by asking them what actions they believed they would take after attending the forums in their community. Further data was collected several months after the forums ended when phone interviews were conducted with those who volunteered. One purpose of these phone interviews was to gather more specific information about whether the participants believed their participation in their community increased as they may have intended, which shows change in behavior. Participants were also asked during the phone interview if their involvement in their

communities mattered, which addressed self-efficacy. By also asking participants during the phone interviews what influence their actions had on their community, further data was collected about both efficacy and behavior.

The director of the David Mathews Center for Civic Life supplied the moderators with the three NIF issue books and topics that would be utilized at the series of three forums held in each community. The moderators were asked to distribute the NIF issue book questionnaires to the participants at the end of each forum. The three NIF issue books from which the questionnaires were drawn and distributed at the forums, in chronological sequence during the eight months, were (A) “Preparing Today’s Kids for Tomorrow’s Jobs”(September – October), (B) “Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?” (October – December), and (C) “What Is the 21st Century Mission of Our Public Schools?” (January through April). According to NIF, “Each year, the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) identifies several public issues of national concern. Nonpartisan issue deliberation materials are prepared that are intended to stimulate serious public deliberation about these issues by the public” (http://www.nifi.org/issue_books/index.aspx). The questionnaires were published in the last pages of the NIF issue books. The participants were given post-questionnaires, rather than both pre-questionnaires and post-questionnaires, because the Center found in the past that pre-questionnaires were not as effective in reflecting helpful information as were post-questionnaires. In the past, according to the director, the Center and other entities had given the NIF issue book questionnaires both as the pre- and post- questionnaire at the forums. The logistics of asking participants to complete the pre-questionnaire as well as the information gathered were deemed ineffective. Also, according to the Center’s

director, since the forum is limited in time, it was believed to be more time-efficient and less cumbersome to only employ post-questionnaires. Furthermore, according to Gastil (personal communication), it may not be necessary to use both pre- and post-questionnaires at forums because it is difficult to measure impacts on participants during a forum which spans only 90-120 minutes. The post-questionnaires were collected by the moderators at these forums and this researcher used this secondary data to analyze the information expressed in the questionnaires.

This research study applied a mixed methods design which included both quantitative and qualitative data. The data was collected from 304 forum questionnaires completed by forum participants who were each provided a three-page questionnaire at the conclusion of each forum (post-questionnaires). Further qualitative data were collected through 54 structured phone interviews when participants were asked a set of nine open-ended questions. These phone interviews lasted approximately ten minutes and occurred two to four months after the conclusion of the series of forums in all of the communities. The list of telephone interview questions is presented below. There were an additional six structured phone interviews during which those participants were asked the original set of nine phone interview questions as well as eight more in-depth open-ended questions in order to obtain a deeper understanding of their perspectives of the forum impacts. Those participants were chosen for the additional phone interview questions because they had indicated that they attended multiple forums in the series. Those six phone interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes in length. Including these six in-depth interviews, the total number of follow-up phone interviews conducted with forum participants was 60.

Instruments

The NIF questionnaires distributed at the end of the forums included both open-ended questions and questions closed in format pertaining to both the specific education issue being discussed as well as questions regarding broader participant reactions to the forum experience and demographic information about the participant. This researcher was interested in the data from the open-ended responses about the general forum experience, especially as related to efficacy and the intended subsequent behaviors, and the closed-ended demographic participant data. All three questionnaires from all three of the forums (A, B, and C) asked for the same information from the participants; however, there were differences in the wording and sequencing of the questions when comparing those used for forums A and C as compared to forum B. The questions on the questionnaires that were the main focus for this study's research areas concerning the participants' forum experience and its impact are listed below in Table 1. These data points support the aim of this research as do the more in-depth questions presented later. The quantitative data collected on the questionnaires regarding the demographic information (Phase 1 data collection) included information about the participant's gender, age, race, education level, primary occupation, and volunteerism.

As discussed above, the NIF questionnaires from each issue book were modified to include additional post-forum questions (see Table 1). These additional questions were created by one of the project's moderators, then reviewed and approved by directors of the project who have worked closely with NIF projects in the past involving civic engagement. Their input helped to ensure the questions posed were well-worded and captured the impact the forums had on participants. The additional questions that

supplemented those already listed on the original NIF issue book post-questionnaires which combined quantitative and qualitative data points supporting the research questions for this study are presented below in Table 1. The ways in which the additional questions listed in Table 1 were incorporated into the questionnaires for forums A, B, and C is described below.

Table 1: Questions of Interest Added (if necessary) to Original NIF Questionnaires

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) How many National Issues Forums have you attended including this one?2) How did you find out about this forum?3) Why did you decide to attend this forum?4) What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?5) Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum? If yes, how?6) Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? If yes, how?7) Did you learn about or consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before?8) What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?9) What, if anything might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?
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All of the forum questionnaires can be viewed in the Appendices (see Appendices E, F, and G). As can be seen in the Appendices, the original NIF questionnaires from the first and third forums in the series (A and C) asked the exactly the same questions for numbers 4-12 as did the additional page of questions 1-10 which were attached to the original questionnaires. On those two questionnaires, the original NIF questions for numbers four through six explored the participants' responses to the forum experience and possible impacts on their efficacy and subsequent behavior in the community. Questions 7-12 on the original NIF questionnaires for A and C were also duplications and pertained to the participants' demographic information. The additional page of questions (numbers 1-10) which were not part of the original NIF questionnaire further investigated

the participants' responses to attending forums A and C as well as their intended actions after the forum. The NIF questionnaire for the second forum topic B varied slightly from the questionnaires for forums A and C in the wording of the open-ended questions about the forum experience and demographic information that was gathered at the end of the questionnaire for questions 6 -12. It is important to note that the original questionnaire distributed for forum B had slightly altered wording, sequence, and questions as compared to A and C. As a result, the additional questions 1-9 that were attached to the original questionnaire for forum B are also slightly altered in wording, sequence, and questions that were asked on the additional page for forums A and C. The comparison of the original NIF questionnaires and numbers for the questions asked as well as the wording is shown in Table 1 below.

Comparison of Questions on NIF Questionnaires

Table 2 (See Appendix A) begins with a comparison of the original NIF questions on the questionnaires for forums A and C (marked with an "O") and moves to the additional list of questions that were added to the questionnaires for forums A and C (marked with an "A") as it compares those on the original ("O") and additional ("A") questions on the questionnaire for forum B. All of the questionnaires, including the original NIF questions and the additional page of questions that were generated, are in the Appendices for reference. The representation of information comparing these three questionnaires was presented on Table 1 in as much of a logical, chronological sequence as was possible. For the Table 1, "A" refers to the first forum questionnaire from the NIF issue book entitled "Preparing Today's Kids for Tomorrow's Jobs", "B" refers to the second forum questionnaire from the issue book entitled "Too Many Children Left

Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?”, and “C” refers to the third forum questionnaire from the NIF issue book entitled “What Is the 21st Century Mission of Our Public Schools?”. Question numbers and the wording of the question are given for both. The wording of the questions may slightly differ when comparing questions from A and C with those from B; therefore, the wording is given for each question in order to show how they are similar which resulted in gathering the same or similar information from participants.

On each questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they would agree to a follow up phone interview that took place approximately two to four months after the conclusion of the forum series in their community. See the Appendices for specific wording on the page with the additional questions that was added to the original NIF questionnaires for forums A and C. For forum B, the request for a phone interview was part of the original NIF questionnaire. Once again, the wording and sequence is slightly altered when comparing the actual questionnaires. If attendees agreed to participate in a phone interview, they were asked to write a phone number at which they could be contacted without including their name. The phone interviews were conducted by one of the project’s trained moderators. One of the project directors from the Center was not aware of any phone interview questions that had been created or utilized in the past as part of the NIF issue books, questionnaires from the NIF organization or any other entities that published NIF issue books. As a result, the phone interview questions were then created with input from other researchers who have worked on NIF projects in the past several decades and who have helped publish issue books and/or reports for NIF Margaret Holt, John Doble, John Gastil, and John Dedrick.

Their input assisted in ensuring the questions posed in the phone interviews were well-worded and captured the possible impacts on the participants regarding efficacy and subsequent behavior as stated in the research questions. The phone interview questions (Phase 3 data collection) are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Structured Phone Interview Questions

<p>1) How many forums did you attend?</p> <p>2) Do you believe you personally benefited from attending the forum(s)? If yes, how? If no, what makes you believe that?</p> <p>3) Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on you? If yes, what? If no, what makes you believe that?</p> <p>___Probe if needed – paraphrase: Some people have said that participating in the forum(s) process had a direct effect on them. That, afterward, their thinking about an issue or other public issues changed, or they watched the news a little differently, or they discussed the issue or other public issues with others, or became more active as a citizen. How about you? Do you believe participating in the forum(s) had a direct affect on you, and if so how? If not, what makes you believe that?</p> <p>3a) Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on your community? What leads you to that conclusion?</p> <p>4) After attending the forum(s) do you feel like your participation in community affairs matters? If yes, how? If no, what makes you feel that way?</p> <p>5) After attending the forum(s), did you become more involved with community activities and decisions? If yes, how? If no, please explain. a) If you became more involved, did your personal involvement have any actual influence? If yes, how? If no, what makes you say that?</p> <p>6) If you had the opportunity to go to another forum of this kind in your community would you go? Please explain.</p> <p>7) (If they attended more than one forum) Do you think participating in repeated forums had any affect on you? If yes, what? If no, what makes you say that?</p> <p>8) Is there anything else you would like to say about the forum(s)?</p> <p>9) Is it okay if I call you again if I need to follow up with any more questions?</p>

For those participants who attended more than one forum based on completed questionnaires, they were asked the following additional, more in-depth questions during the structured telephone interview to further examine the impact of attending multiple forums on their efficacy and behavior. See Table 4 below. Again, those researchers in the field, Holt (1985) and Doble (1999), who have conducted similar interviews were

consulted during the creation of these more in-depth phone interview questions to ensure quality and pertinence to the ideas presented in the research questions.

Table 4: Additional In-Depth Structured Phone Interview Questions

- 1) What made you decide to attend more than one forum?
- 2) What did you like the most about attending these forums?
- 3) What did you like the least about attending these forums?
- 4) How interactive did you become in the discussions initiated by participants? (not at all, somewhat, very) What made you participate at that level?
- 5) Were the forums successful? If yes, what made them a success? If no, please explain.
- 6) How did you see yourself or your role as a member of your community before, during, and after the forums?
- 7) What was the most valuable experience that has happened as a result of your participation in the forums regarding your own actions and feelings?
- 1) Do you think your participation in these forums had any impact on how you see yourself as a member of your community? If so, in what ways?

Validity: Questionnaire and Phone Interview Questions

The original NIF issue book questionnaires, as stated earlier, were published by entities that have conducted numerous NIF forums and have worked closely together to gather NIF data from participants. The Kettering Foundation, as stated on the inside back cover of each of the three issue books utilized for this project, has provided books and materials for the NIF since the NIF network began in 1982. The publishers for the three NIF issue books used in this project, as stated earlier, were the NIF Institute (issue A), the Kettering Foundation (issue B), and the West Virginia Center for Civic Life (issue C). Upon viewing the acknowledgements stated on the inside back cover of each NIF issue book, it is clear that many of the people involved in creating each issue book work for organizations that frequently collaborate to create the NIF issue books and, consequently, the questionnaires. For example, McKenzie, who is one of the directors of this project as well as the President of the David Mathew's Center for Civic Life, is listed as having

helped create the questionnaire for B. Regarding the validity of the original NIF forum questionnaires, however, it is important to note that no document was secured which stated or demonstrated the original NIF questionnaires were reliable or valid measures.

Considering several experts in the field of conducting and reporting on community forums were consulted during this project for creating both the additional questions for the questionnaires and the questions used for the phone interviews, the instruments may be viewed as valid. Instruments are valid if “the extent to which measures correspond to the concepts they are intended to reflect” (Manheim, Rich, Willnat, and Brians, 2006, p. 415). Holt, Doble, Dedrick, and McKenzie are some of the original organizers of the NIF nationwide network in 1982. Each of them has performed extensive work with NIF and Kettering conducting forums, creating issue books and questionnaires, distributing and gathering data on NIF questionnaires, and writing NIF reports discussing the findings of the data collected. Their feedback and comments were invaluable in creating the additional questions for the questionnaires as well as for the phone interview questions. The questions that were created and added to the questionnaires effectively focused on participants’ thinking and intended future actions. The phone interview questions were also valid in that they were able to elicit responses from the participants regarding thoughts, feelings, and actions since they attended the forum(s). In chapter four, it will become even more evident that the instruments applied were valid when the data showed results of participant responses.

Procedures

This research study applied a two-step data collection process. During Step One, questionnaire data were obtained from 297 forum participants at the conclusion of each

forum. The questionnaires and writing utensils were distributed by the forum moderators at the conclusion of each forum and participants were given unlimited time to complete the surveys. The average amount of time it took for participants to complete the questionnaires was ten minutes. Participants were encouraged by the moderators to take their time to carefully read and respond to each question in order to ensure their responses were accurate and complete. The moderators verbally directed the participants not to include their names or any other identifying information on the questionnaires. Phone numbers were requested in writing at the end of each questionnaire only if the participants were interested in receiving a follow up phone call two to four months after the forum series concluded in their community. The participants were told that at the time of the phone call, they would be asked several questions as part of a structured interview that would last from five to ten minutes. They were told by the moderators that the phone interview questions would pertain to their thoughts and actions since attending the forum(s). All of the questionnaires were collected from the participants by the moderators at the conclusion of every forum. Once collected, the questionnaires were kept in stacks according to the date and location of the forum so the chronology of the data collection was kept intact. This allowed an identification number from 1-304 to be placed on each questionnaire once all of the forums had been completed. Next, the data was entered onto SPSS 16.0 after it was coded as shown below.

To conduct the follow up phone interviews for Step Two of the project, one of the moderators called all of the forum participants who had written a complete phone number legibly on their questionnaire. First, the moderator piloted the nine phone interview questions shown in Table 3 above using three graduate students from the Political

Science Department who had participated in the project's mock forum in their class which simulated the forums conducted during this project. The structured interviews went well during the piloting of the questions, thus few if any edits or modifications were necessary.

Once the Step One data from the questionnaires was coded and entered into SPSS, it was determined that a total of 134 forum participants had written a phone number on their questionnaire. One of the moderators spent several days from June 10 through June 30 calling every phone number collected. Phone calls were made during weekday business hours as well as some weekday evenings depending on the availability of the moderator and participant requests to call again at a more convenient date and time. A total of 59 phone interviews were conducted by one of the moderators. A Spanish speaking graduate student in the Political Science Department at Auburn University attempted to contact five Spanish speaking forum participants by calling the phone number they had written on the Spanish version of the questionnaire they had completed. That graduate student was also able to contact a forum participant and conduct one phone interview in Spanish. As a result, a total of 60 structured phone interviews were conducted during Step Two of the project. The remaining 74 phone calls were not successful because phone numbers were disconnected, voice messages were not returned, and for a variety of other reasons the moderator was unable to make contact with participants through the phone. Of the 60 phone interviews, six participants had completed two to three forum questionnaires indicating through matching phone numbers on the questionnaires they had participated in multiple forums in the series. The six participants who attended multiple forums were asked to verbally respond to the original

set of nine phone interview questions as well as respond to the additional eight questions that were more in-depth. These six phone interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes.

During the phone interviews, notes were taken by the moderator as the participants responded to the structured questions. Prior to conducting the interviews, copies of the phone interview questions were made which allowed the interviewer to write the information from the interview in the blank spaces on the sheets.

Methods of Analysis

In this study, SPSS 17.0 was applied to analyze and to calculate descriptive statistics, more specifically frequencies and crosstabs, to find relationships and significance. Demographic data collected on each questionnaire relating to each participant was coded as shown in Table 5 (See Appendix B). The information in this section was quantitative using closed question formats. The codes for the demographic information were entered into SPSS for further analysis.

For each open-ended question in this section, all of the participant responses were categorized into groupings which reflected sets of the most similar responses. Then names for the groupings were created based on the general theme of the participant responses in that grouping. In this way, the codes were created for the open-ended responses to these questions. Question 1 from Table 1 above was omitted in Table 6: Phase 2 Data Collection Codes from Questionnaires: Open-Ended Questions 2-6, 8-9 from Table 1 (see Appendix C) because it was included in the quantitative data codes in Table 5 above. Question 7 from Table 1 above was not a data point of interest for this research; therefore, it was omitted from the data point codes.

The notes which were taken during the phone interviews were transcribed into a grid for easier viewing, grouping, and coding. The responses were grouped and coded as shown below in Table 7 (see Appendix D).

This study incorporates instruments and procedures used by moderators and conveners who worked collaboratively on a project with entities affiliated with Alabama Issues Forums. The David Mathews Center David for Civic Life, associated with the University of Alabama, and the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities (CMD CAH) at Auburn University established a joint partnership to conduct deliberative community forums. They used three issue books published by the National Issues Forums (NIF) and the Kettering Foundation. In five Alabama communities, citizens were invited to attend three forums over the course of a school year. At the conclusion of each forum, participants completed questionnaires to share their feedback. Months later, several participants also engaged in phone interviews to discuss their thoughts and actions since the forum(s). The areas of interest for this study included benefits and changes participants believed occurred from attending the forum(s) as well as reported impacts made on their sense of efficacy and actions they took (behavior) since the forum(s). The results should show there were reported effects in each of these areas.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The three main research areas of this study are to explore reports of how: 1) citizens benefited from participating in deliberative forums and any changes forums had on them; 2) levels of citizen efficacy were impacted after participating in deliberative community forums; and, 3) citizens experienced changes in behavior after participating in deliberative community forums.

The first research area centers on benefits and changes the NIF forums had on participants. Researchers have found those who participate in deliberation may report motivation to learn, increased knowledge, a better understanding of others' viewpoints and factual information, and broader outlooks (Gastil, 1994; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005). Changes in attitudes and behaviors were also found (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002). This study further explores these findings by asking research questions focused on benefits participants reportedly gained and whether they changed after participating in deliberative forum(s).

Efficacy was explained by Bandura (1986a, 1986b) as judgments people make about their ability to take action and attain a certain level of performance. Gastil (1994) found participants were more efficacious and confident after participating in deliberation. Several researchers, including Morrell (2005) and Doble, Higgins, Begasse, and Fisher (1996), also found participation in deliberation increases people's feeling of being more efficacious and self-confident as well as an increase in competence citizens feel. The

third research question in this study investigates reported participant efficacy by asking if and how participation in their community matters.

Behavior can be predicted by efficacy (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Gastil, 1994; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). Scholars found evidence that participation in deliberation resulted in more public engagement, involvement, citizens taking action, and increased involvement in community projects and groups (Doble and Peng, 1999; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 1994; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997). Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) discussed the effects of multiple community forums and asserted a habit arises for these communities to use deliberative forums when a problem occurs. They further argued that deliberating repeatedly on different issues is most powerful. This research leads to the four other questions exploring behavior after participating in deliberative community forum(s). These address if and how participants reportedly become more involved with their community, whether and how their involvement had any influence, if they would attend a forum again, and what affect attending multiple deliberative forums had on participants.

By gathering participant reported responses about their feelings of efficacy and the impacts it had on their behavior, many more communities may be able to effectively address some of the serious community issues they face today and in the future through the use of deliberative community forums. This research study uses quantitative and qualitative data reported from participants of NIF community forums to explore subsequent impacts on their feelings of efficacy and the actions they took (behavior). The results of the data collection are presented below. Frequencies were generated for all

phases of data collected, which included the questionnaires and phone interviews. Following this analysis, crosstab procedures determined Pearson's Chi-square statistics. Crosstab analyses allowed the relationship between questionnaire and phone interview data to be examined. These analyses explored relationships primarily among nominal data points and information shared on the questionnaires and phone interviews. Five cross tabulations demonstrated statistically significant Pearson Chi-Square relationships. Statistical significance was greater as the value reached .05, .01, or .001 or less. The other cross tabulation results showed several relationships between variables that did not have statistical significance. Upon further inspection, however, there were several findings that are worth mentioning which will be included below.

Benefits and Changes

This study examined the impact NIF deliberative community forums had on participants. First, the participants were asked to report benefits they received and changes the forums had on them. The two related research questions are:

- 1) Do citizens think they personally benefited from participating in deliberative forums in their communities and, if so, what benefits do they say they gained?
- 2) Do participants believe there were any changes the forum had on them or on their community, and, if so, how?

Participants were asked on the questionnaire "Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum?" A large majority of forum participants (93%) reported that they benefited from attending the forum(s). Responses are presented in Table 8 below. If participants responded to the question with "yes" then they were asked how the forum was beneficial to them. See Table 9 below for participant responses. The most common way participants stated they benefited was by "learning", which meant hearing information and learning about issues presented through various points of view.

Discussing ways participants can help the community and what can be done to help youth were the second and third ways participants responded they benefited from the forums.

Table 8: Participant report of whether or not forum was beneficial (percentages)

Yes	93
No	7
Total	100
N	270

Source: Alabama Issues Forums questionnaire

Table 9: Participant report of how forum was beneficial (percentages)

learn	60
help youth	11
help community	9
give input	7
job opportunities	5
other	9
Total	100
N	208

Source: Alabama Issues Forums questionnaire

During the phone interviews, participants were asked months later “Do you believe you personally benefited from attending the forum(s)?” and 89% said that they did benefit. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Participant report of whether or not they benefited from attending the forum(s) (percentages)

Yes	89
No	11
Total	100
N	56

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Presented in Table 11 are results when participants were further asked about benefiting from attending forum(s). The questions asked “If yes, how? If no, what makes you believe that?” Most of the participants (66%) reported they were able to listen and learn about the topics and related to views of other participants as their own awareness was raised.

Table 11: Participant report how they benefited from attending the forum(s) (percentages)

listen/learn	66
network	7
opportunities	7
input/talk	5
think/prepare for life	3
other	12
Total	100
N	58

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

The data presented in Tables 8 and 10 show strong consistency and support the claim that the participants believed they benefited from the forums initially as well as months later. The benefits participants reported in both instances centered on learning. This data supports the previous literature cited that stated forums can be beneficial (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002) and increase knowledge (Gastil 2006; Herbst, 1996, 1999).

Crosstab analyses gave further information worth noting about the participants in this area of study. On the questionnaire, 86% of participants who stated that they learned about or considered aspects of the issue they hadn't considered before also responded during the phone interview that they believed they personally benefited from attending the forum(s). Furthermore, 96% of participants who responded on the questionnaire the forum was beneficial also reported during the phone interview they personally benefited from participating. Also, 94% of those who responded on the questionnaire attending the forum was beneficial responded during the phone interview the forum made changes in them. Finally, another interesting result was that more participants indicated on their questionnaire that they were not thinking differently about an issue after the forum than those who responded that they were thinking differently. This means participants were or were not thinking about the issue the same or differently after the forum as compared to

when they arrived at the forum. Of those who stated they were not thinking differently, the majority believed they personally benefited from attending the forum.

Participants were asked during the phone interview “Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on you? If yes, what? If no, what makes you believe that?” There were more participants who stated in the telephone interviews that the forum(s) made changes on them (54%) than those who didn’t believe there were any changes (46%), as presented in Table 12. In Table 13 the results are presented for the changes participants believed the forum(s) made on them. These include being exposed to new information as they heard other people’s views (21%), becoming more motivated to take action in their community (20%), and that they did subsequently take action since attending the forum(s) (7%). There were also some participants who were still planning to take action (5%). Taken together, 12% of the participants either did take action or intended to take action after attending the forum(s). These data support prior research showing evidence that changes in attitudes and behaviors can result from participating in forums (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002). Several respondents stated the forum(s) did not create a change in them because they were already involved in their community before they attended the forum(s) (see Table 13 below).

Table 12: Participant report of changes the forum(s) had on them (percentages)

Yes	54
No	46
Total	100
N	57

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 13: Participant report of what changes forum had on them or why it did not change them (percentages)

information/ views	21
Motivated	20
already involved/ no change	16

took action	13
not yet/ will take action	5
future/ opportunities	4
can't recall	4
other	18
Total	100
N	56

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

From the crosstab analysis a statistically significant finding was participants who said on the questionnaire that they were thinking differently about the issue after participating in the forum also believed during the phone interview there were changes the forum had on them ($\chi^2 = 2.72, p = .099$). This indicates participants reportedly experienced a long term effect after the forum(s).

On the questionnaires, participants were asked “What, if anything, might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?” The greatest number of participants responded the community would work together (34%). Others answered more generally that more would be done by people in the community (26%). Still other participants wrote more school support (17%) or jobs for the youth (12%) would result. The specific responses are presented on Table 14.

Table 14: Participant report of what citizens might do together differently as a result of this forum (percentages)

work together	34
do more	26
school support	17
youth jobs	12
nothing	3
other	7
Total	100
N	180

Source: Alabama Issues Forums questionnaire

During the follow-up phone interviews, participants were asked “Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on your community?” They then were asked

“What leads you to that conclusion?” Slightly fewer participants believed the forum(s) had any changes on their community (49%) than those who did not believe there were changes (51%), as reported in Table 15. Several responded that they did not know if the forum had any changes on their community. A variety of reasons were given for participant responses as presented on Table 16. Those who believed the forum(s) had changed their community stated that there was more awareness and a better attitude among people in the community. Another result they reported was action taken by people in the community. Those who did not believe there were any changes stated that they had not seen or heard about any changes in their community or that they no longer had contact with people in that community. Other participants stated that no changes occurred. However they believed there was more awareness of others’ views and ideas as a result of the forum(s). Those participants who did not know if there was a change in the community believed it was a motivating start to conduct the forum(s) or they had no more contact with the community.

Table 15: Participant report of any changes the forum(s) had on their community (percentages)

Yes	49
No	51
Total	100
N	41

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 16: Participant report of what lead them to their conclusion (percentages)

Yes, awareness/ attitude	16
Yes, action taken	14
Yes, network/ talk together	3
Yes, potential/ make a difference	3
No, not seen/ heard any change	21
No, more awareness/ ideas	12
Don’t know, no contact/ moved	10
Don’t know, motivating/ start	7
Other	14

Total	100
N	58

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Demographic Data and Implications

Demographic data was collected as part of the original NIF questionnaires that were adapted for this study. Data points included participant ages, gender, race, and occupations. This information was not an intended focus of the study originally; however, this data can provide more details about the kinds of participants who attended the forums.

It can be determined that 37% of those who attended were age 17 or younger and 63% were over the age of 18. See data presented in Table 17 below for this information.

Table 17: Participant report of age (percentages)

17 or younger	37
18 or older	63
Total	100.0
N	304

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Of those reporting information on the questionnaires, 45% of the participants at the forums were male and 55% were female. Furthermore, 38% were African American, 1% were Asian American, 8% were Hispanic, 1% were Native American, and 51% were White/Caucasian.

From the demographic data given above, it is revealed that in the five communities in which these NIF forums took place the majority of participants were female, Caucasian, and age 18 or older. In the future, studies could include some sort of measurement of the potential impact on the different types of people who attend community forums. From the information gathered in the current study, no clear determinations can be made about how all of the different types of people who

participated in the NIF forums relate to the findings. It would be helpful to conduct future research about what types of reactions participants have to forums based on their age, gender, race, or occupation.

Some small findings could be made with some of the demographic data reported in this study. Crosstab analysis involving age was conducted with participant responses regarding whether or not they benefited from attending the forum as indicated on the questionnaire. It was found that 89% of those 17 or younger said they benefited while 96% of those 18 or older stated they benefited. This is a statistically significant result ($\chi^2 = 5.27, p = .022$). The finding gives slight evidence to the idea that younger people do not report that they gain as many benefits overall as older people when they participate in NIF forums. However, more investigation could be conducted in the future as to how or why this may or may not be true.

When asked how they benefited, 62% of those 17 years old or younger reported they learned. For those 18 and older, 58% said they learned. Even though this crosstab analysis was not statistically significant, it still gives evidence that younger participants reported slightly more than older participants that they learned more. This finding may simply be due to the younger age and smaller base of knowledge or experience. More specific information could be gathered in the future which could help researchers understand how or why these sorts of findings about the types of benefits participants report according to differences in age may occur. This line of questioning was not analyzed for age for the phone interview responses which would give more information about the long term effects of perceived benefits participants report. Maybe one possible hypothesis could be that those under the age of 18 do not believe they benefit as much as

older participants due to lack of previous exposure to certain concepts. This may result in younger participants learning more than older participants during forum deliberation as a consequence of their limited experiences and/or education.

A statistically significant crosstab analysis was also found when age was related to reasons why participants attended the forum based on responses given on the questionnaires ($\chi^2 = 73.77, p = .000$). Of the participants who were 17 years old or younger, 34% reported they attended the forum to learn, 32% said it was required, and 6% stated they cared about youth. As for participants 18 years old or older, 36% replied they cared about youth, 25% said to learn, and 4% stated it was required. Clearly, many youth were required to attend the forum as part of a school or some other assignment while many others wanted to learn from the experience. Older participants responded that they cared about youth and that is why they attended which wasn't a priority for the youth. More information could be gathered in the future if research gave more attention to the reasons different participants of different ages attend forums. Then possibly other variables such as forum topics could be more targeted for participants of particular ages based on findings. One question for future study may be why youth are more inclined to attend a forum to learn than older participants.

When asked if they were thinking differently after the forum, over half of the participants responded they were thinking differently than before. Participants who were 17 years old or younger reported 59% of the time they were thinking differently after the forum while 54% of those 18 or older reported thinking differently. Crosstab analysis showed this finding to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 12.22, p = .016$). The largest percentage (54%) of those 17 or younger reported they thought differently due to what

they learned at the forum while 15% of that population thought about helping the community, and 13% thought about helping youth. In contrast, of participants who were 18 or older, 37% reported thinking about helping the community while 25% of this population learned and 15% thought about helping youth. These results continue to support the idea that younger participants report learning more at forums than do older participants. Furthermore, older participants became more thoughtful about helping the community than younger participants. Future studies could possibly continue to analyze the thoughts of youth versus older participants regarding what needs to be learned before participants begin to think about helping their community. Perhaps one hypothesis to be explored is that younger citizens are less apt than older citizens to extend help to their community because they are still learning about the community as a whole and the community's needs.

When ethnicity was examined, crosstab analysis was statistically significant for the forum being beneficial as reported on questionnaires ($\chi^2 = 23.60$, $p = .000$). As for African American participants, 85% said they benefited from attending the forum. This is in slight contrast to the other participants where at least 94% or more reported it was beneficial. There were 94% of the Hispanic, 99% of the White/Caucasian, and 100% of each of the Asian American and Native American responding that the forum was beneficial. It may help in the future to find out why this discrepancy exists for African Americans versus the other ethnicities. One consideration is that the current study took place in Alabama which is in the South and historically is where discrimination of African Americans has been documented. It is possible that comments made during the

forum were viewed as less inclusive of that population or less representative due to the different perspectives historically held among ethnic groups in the South.

Determining whether participants were citizens in the community or if participants were politically connected is difficult because the data categorized occupations but did not give enough information to make clear categorizations in this area. As presented in Table 18, an overwhelming percentage of participants were not employed (34%). This is most likely due to the amount of youth under the age of 18 who attended the forums. There is also data which is presented in Table 30 that lists the occupations of those who attended. Data results were 16% worked for the city or county government, 7% for state government, and 2% indicated they worked for government without indicating which level. These data sum to 25% of participants who were government employees. Some participants indicated they worked for the school district, which oftentimes is a position funded by the government. This data adds another 4% for a total of 29% who may possibly be employed by the government at some level. Participants who worked for non-profit organizations were 19%, private sector employment was 14%, and employment by social service organizations was 4% which may or may not be funded by government. As a result, there is a possibility that as many as 33% of participants worked for the government and may be connected politically in the community if their job involved an election or appointment by an official. This percentage would be an extremely high number of participants and is probably very unlikely. Instead it can be stated that there is a strong possibility there were several people who attended who hold elected or politically connected positions in the community. There is not enough detailed data to calculate exactly how much

participation by political figures occurred at the forums. Those who were private citizens and who did not hold an elected position may be 37% based on the data collected. However, again, it is very difficult to determine which participants were exclusively private citizens based on the data. It also cannot be determined which participants lived in the city limits, in the county limits, or elsewhere because that data was not collected. Nor can it be determined if participants attended forums due to control by outside institutions versus those in town or as part of their job because that particular type of data was also not collected in this study. If these data could be collected in the future, it would be possible to determine the particular types of participants and possibly motives behind participant attendance at forums as well as the subsequent authority certain participants may hold in making changes in their community. It would also allow some indication of citizen potential to create a change in a community instead of relying on officials. A possible hypothesis that could be explored is those elected officials and citizens who live inside the city limits are more apt to take advantage of community forum opportunities because they are most directly affected by problem solving and decisions, especially if it is made into city policy.

Table 18: Participant report of occupation (percentages)

City/county government	16
State government	7
Private sector	14
Non-profit organization	19
Not employed	34
School district	4
Social service organization	4
Government	2
Total	100
N	304

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Efficacy

Participants were asked questions pertaining to levels of efficacy they experienced after the forum(s). The research question for this area is:

- 3) Do participants feel their participation in community affairs matters and, if so, how?

Participants were asked during the phone interview “After attending the forum(s) do you feel like your participation in community affairs matters? If yes, how? If no, what makes you feel that way?” Almost all participants (97%) stated during the phone interview that they feel like their participation in community affairs matters, which reflects a sense of efficacy. (See Table 19 below.) Most people responded this was due to being able to help or make some sort of change in their community, or to become aware of other people’s opinions and views. This is presented in Table 20 below. As explained previously, efficacy has been shown by many researchers to increase after people engage in deliberation or deliberative forums (Cohen, 1997; Dedrick, 1991; Doble, 1995; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 2000; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Morrell, 2005; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997; West and Gastil, 2004) which can lead them to take action in their community. As Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) found, participation in NIF forums enhances people’s sense of themselves as political actors who can make a difference in their communities. By becoming more aware of other people’s views and opinions, participants’ attitudes and behaviors can change after taking part in public forums (Gastil, Deess, Weiser, 2002).

Table 19: Participant report of whether or not they feel like their participation in community affairs matters after attending the forum(s) (percentages)

Yes	97
No	2
Other	2
Total	100
N	58

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 20: Participant report of how their participation matters or why it does not matter (percentages)

help/change	35
opinions/awareness	35
part of job	12
already did	8
later	5
other	5
Total	100
N	60

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Further analyses of the data through crosstabs revealed other statistically significant findings. One result was participants who indicated on the questionnaire they learned about or considered aspects of the issue they hadn't considered before also felt months later during the phone interview their participation in community affairs matters ($\chi^2 = 6.37, p = .041$). Another finding was participants who responded on the questionnaire that it was beneficial for them to attend the forum also felt during the phone interview their participation in community affairs matters ($\chi^2 = 17.99, p = .000$). An interesting finding, but one that was also not statistically significant, was those participants who wrote on the questionnaire they were not thinking differently about the issue after the forum later stated during the phone interview they felt their participation in community affairs matters. This result is possibly due to participant thoughts and views being confirmed by others at the forum which supported the idea their involvement in their community is important.

Behavior

The third area of research focused on participant reported behavior after attending the forum(s). Research questions four through seven are related to this area:

- 4) After attending a forum, did participants become more involved with community activities and decisions, and if so, how?
- 5) If participants did become more involved in their community, did their involvement have any actual influence and, if so, how?
- 6) Would participants attend another community forum?
- 7) Did participants who attended multiple deliberative forums in their community think it had an affect on them and, if so, what was the impact?

On the forum questionnaires, participants were asked “What, if anything do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?” The highest number of participants (31%) responded they would have more community involvement. Others (23%) reported they would promote more opportunities for youth. Some participants (19%) reported they would give input and discuss issues with others. Results are presented in Table 21. The connection has been made by scholars between intentions and behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980; Gastil, 1994) who recognized that a person’s behaviors are directly influenced by intentions. In this data, it is clear participants who completed the questionnaires at the conclusion of the forums intended to become more involved with community activities and decisions.

Table 21: Participant report of what they might do differently as a result of this forum (percentages)

Community involvement	31
Youth opportunities	23
Give input	19
Nothing	15
Other	12
Total	100
N	170

Source: Alabama Issues Forums questionnaire

During the phone interviews, participants were asked “After attending the forum(s), did you become more involved with community activities and decisions? If yes, how? If no, what makes you say that?” More than half of the participants (51%) responded they did become more involved in their community which is presented in Table 22. Several researchers found an increase in community involvement as a result of forum participation (Gastil, Deess, and Weiser, 2002; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Mathews, 1994; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997; West and Gastil, 2004). This gives support to the idea behavior can be related to intentions to act. A few participants replied they were already involved so their level of community involvement stayed the same. In Table 23 data presented shows most of the participants (38%) reported they became more involved by taking some type of action in their community which may have involved sharing ideas with others. Otherwise, they were involved already and their involvement stayed the same as before the forum(s) (32%). Several stated they are already involved due to the nature of their job. A few responded they did not have time to become more involved or they had moved so they were unable to be more involved in their community.

Participants gave specific and personal responses during the phone interview with diverse examples when asked how they became more involved with community activities and decisions. One participant stated, “I started going to the library more and trying to help kids younger than me to read.” Another one responded, “By doing the right thing like cleaning up trash with some friends around the neighborhood.” Other reasons participants gave for why they were more involved in their communities included the following individual responses. Participants vary in their explanations, from helping

those who can't help themselves to working with local organizations, volunteering their time for local events or as part of their role in the community:

Participant #202: I joined a group called Southside Pride. They help people in the community who need help with their houses and reading or with running errands. Some people weren't able to do things so we helped them.

Participant #206: I always do the most community service I can do because you might need it later. I volunteered at the enrichment program 'Reading and Writing Counts' at an elementary school, helped the Salvation Army, and Habitat for Humanity.

Participant #142: I try to stay involved anyway after that. I did get involved with a few more activities with the Chamber. A committee I served on was to help with planning for the 2010 Celebration for [Town E] as part of the 'Year of the Small Town' in Alabama. Also 2010's 'Big Read' so we hope to do them together.

Participant #239 & 295 (same person - attended multiple forums): I talked about it [the topic] with people who attended and didn't – I'm more likely to discuss the topic with others as a result. I sought out people to discuss [the] topic with. As the librarian who hosted the forums and not typically seen as having an agenda, it allows people to see the info presented in a neutral way.

Participant #294: I did [get more involved]. There's nothing more important than to voice your opinion about what's said in the news and media. Our family is involved in working in elections on voting days and we voice our opinion at the workshops and trainings to say what's happening in our community. It opens the eyes of people. On a small scale even if one person's child is able to benefit from information we learned like the number of credits they need or subjects they can take in school like career tech classes so in small ways.

Participant #230 & #270 (same person – attended multiple forums): Not anything directly as a result. It broadened my thinking. It opened some avenues for further involvement. It caused me to realize I do need to be more involved from listening to people and providing information on school issues. Just being there and showing an interest has caused me to have more influence with several folks like the school board member from [Town E] especially since [Town E] has specific problems and a unique situation. Since the schools are all black, I don't understand that culture as much as someone living there. It opened my eyes to what their wants and desires are. I've been to a community meeting there since the forums. A lot of times people are there for one issue or else because they live there. It's an interesting dynamic. I might not have gone otherwise if I hadn't gone to the forums.

Clearly, some of the responses above were made by youth who joined groups or organizations to take action to help others in their community. Other participants have made connections with the Chamber of Commerce in their community to help with activities sponsored, have jobs such as the librarian which allow them access to other community members, or join their family in more formal community activities such as volunteering on an election day in their community. One participant credits attendance at a subsequent meeting to first attending forums and stated that it helped with more cultural awareness and sensitivity to others' desires. Each participant cited above became more involved in their community after attending the forum(s) and, in general, it was so they could help their community in some way.

Several participants stated they stayed the same in their involvement or were already involved. One youth replied, "I had been involved already with school activities and community things. I just went to it. I was in Girl Scouts, a cheerleader, clubs, and school doing community work and services." Another participant involved with other non-profit organizations responded:

I was already involved in non-profit organizations. We're trying to create a cultural center. I got the PTO at the high school. Also, I'm involved in visual arts society with Jackson State University. I'm a local artist using recycling – painting without a brush.

A second participant explained how it was part of the role of their organization:

That's the nature of our work (at the Community Foundation). We have a higher involvement in education because of the forums. Our emphasis is directed towards creating social change and the forums have helped focus that. It was more scattered before. Now it is more refined especially regarding kindergarten and pre-kindergarten rather than GED and other programs.

Another participant commented on helping another culture to reach a goal:

I was about as involved as I had time to get. I'm involved with the black community – I'm the only white. We're in the process of buying an old school building to restore it for the black community.

A fourth participant who works with those learning English said:

I already in my work are (am) somewhat involved. Maybe a little more involved after the forums but it's hard due to my schedule. I'm now more vocal. I try to keep my students informed about (the) community and on issues that affect them. I'm the adult ESL teacher working with Spanish adults and students.

As stated above, there are many different ways participants explained they are already involved in their community. One other participant stated, "It stayed about the same. I'm pretty involved working to develop a Sheriff's garden to give the inmates something to do and eat." Another participant replied, "I'm already pretty involved. I work with the Board of Education to make schools better. I'm on the County Commission." Still another said, "I've always been involved as part of my job in education and as a principal." Finally, one participant explained:

I already am very involved. I'm a retired school teacher. I'm already involved in my church and my community and different ways trying to improve the community through faith-based efforts. I'm on the advisory board of the Boys' Home and involved with people and students in my church.

It may be found through further research there is a tendency by a group of those who attended these community forums to typically be more involved in their community already. The interest demonstrated by these participants to attend the forum(s) in the first place may simply be a result of their community-oriented thinking and behavior which have already occurred over time due to their work and/or interests.

Table 22: Participant report of whether or not they became more involved with community activities and decisions (percentages)

Yes	51
No	43
Same/already	6
Total	100

N	53
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Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 23: Participant report of how they became more involved or why they did not become more involved (percentages)

took action/ shared ideas	38
involved already/ same	32
already with job	18
no time/ moved	5
other	7
Total	100
N	60

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

An interesting finding from crosstab analyses related to this research area, but that was not statistically significant, was participants who responded on the questionnaire about what they may do differently as a result of the forum. Approximately one-third stated they planned to have more community involvement and another one-third stated during the phone interview they would give more input about their thoughts as they discussed issues with others.

Individual participant responses were tracked from the questionnaire to the phone interview by identifying participant phone numbers. The responses on the questionnaire were compared to the replies during the phone interview to find out if the way in which the participant intended to become more involved in their community was how they actually did become more involved later. It was found that out of the 31 participants whose responses could be identified, tracked, and compared in this way, 12 participants, or 39%, matched the original reply on their questionnaire with their phone response months later regarding the actions they took in their community after attending the forum(s). Basically, this group did what they said they intended to do. Also, it was found that 20 out of the 31 participants, or 65%, became more involved in their community when responses were compared in this way. There were 11 out of 31

participants, or 35%, who stated on both the questionnaire and during the phone interview they were already involved in their community due to their job or some other related reason. These results give promising indications that future actions of participants can be related to original intentions to act.

The next question in the phone interview was “If you became more involved, did your personal involvement have any actual influence? If yes, how? If no, what makes you say that?” In Table 24 the data presented indicates almost all of the participants (94%) who stated that they became more involved in their community after the attending the forum(s) responded their personal involvement had influence on others in their community. As support for this data, Gastil (1994) found participants placed a greater value on their own political involvement and influence. When asked to explain how their involvement had influence, 32% responded they took action which directly helped others (e.g. volunteering, helped implement a program) and is presented in Table 25. Other participants (26%) discussed the forum information with others at church, school, and other places where people showed interest. Still other participants (23%) reported others in the community followed their example. Once others saw them doing something to help the community, then they too started to take action to help as well.

Other crosstab analyses showed interesting information to add to these results even though there was no statistical significance. One result was 93% of the participants who responded it was beneficial to have attended the forum on the questionnaire also stated during the phone interview that they then became more involved with community activities and decisions. Another result was 99% of the participants who indicated on the questionnaire they learned by going to the forum also stated their personal involvement in

their community had an actual influence when they were asked during the phone interview.

Table 24: Participant report of whether or not their personal involvement had any influence (percentages)

Yes	94
No	7
Total	100
N	31

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 25: Participant report of how their involvement had influence or why it did not have influence (percentages)

took action/helped	32
discussed information	26
others followed example	23
part of job	10
other	10
Total	100
N	31

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

During the phone interview participants were also asked “If you had the opportunity to go to another forum of this kind in your community would you go? Please explain.” A large majority of participants (93%) stated if they had the opportunity to go to another forum of that kind in their community they would attend (see Table 26 below.) Others (50%) responded they would go to the forum to listen to others’ ideas, views, and concerns to learn more information about their community because it would be helpful. Participants stated they liked learning new and different points of view and hear what others think as others stated that they are always interested in community information and networking. Several participants stated they wanted to learn and hear opinions as others said that it gives people a better understanding. Others commented that they would go to another forum due to the information received, insights, knowledge, and people starting to take action, to share information about how to improve the community, and they want to meet with peers to discuss subjects again to get new ideas and challenge community

members. Specific examples of these sorts of participant responses during the phone interviews included the following comments about why they would want to attend again. One participant stated, “get people together to talk to make progress.” Another said, “to see over time, see people care, as an avenue for concerns, ideas, and changes so more [people] would go,” while another participant said forums should be a “top priority – people need to be seen and heard.” This idea was supported by another participant who said more forums are needed “to follow up on improvements and so people know from others what they can do to help.” Comments from those that could be tracked as attending two of the NIF forums were: “It’s beneficial, engaging, and helped the community be more progressive.”; “It’s an opportunity to meet people and listen to concerns”; and, “I enjoyed gaining information and being involved.”

Other participants stated it was an interest of theirs and they enjoyed attending the forum(s) (13%). These participants made statements such as: “I like it”; “It’s a long standing interest”; “It was fun”; and “I am interested and want to make a difference.” Participants also said they would take action to help the community and get more involved by making a difference through things like adding programs. For example, one participant stated they would attend again “to follow up on improvements and so people know from others what they can do to help.” Others said, “to work together to better the community” and “to help the community.” Some participants said they would attend again depending on the availability in their schedule and the location of the forum (see Table 27 below). A participant also stated, “I hope it is expanded until it is heard by the school board and they listen.” These data support Levine, Fung, and Gastil (2005)

research that deliberative forum participants find it deeply satisfying and significant and participants are eager to deliberate again.

Table 26: Participant report of whether or not they would attend another forum (percentages)

Yes	93
No	3
Maybe	3
Total	100
N	59

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 27: Participant report explaining why they would go to another forum or not (percentages)

Listen	50
Enjoy/ interested	13
Schedule	12
Action	10
Location	3
Other	12
Total	100
N	60

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

During the phone interview participants were also asked (if they attended more than one forum) “Do you think participating in repeated forums had any affect on you? If yes, what? If no, what makes you say that?” All of the participants in the phone interviews agreed attending multiple forums had an affect on them except for two people (see Table 28 below) which means 88% agreed. Participants stated several impacts came from attending multiple forums. Of these participants, 35% reported hearing different perspectives, ideas, and issues from people. One of these participants stated, “The more you go, the more you understand different points of view and more information is share if different groups are there to hear different sides of the story.” Another participant responded, “It is beneficial to go to more than one forum because you get people with different perspectives.” Other participants (29%) reported gaining better knowledge of

the community and what needs they could help to fulfill in their community by being more involved. It was stated, “The first had little affect, the second more [affect] – each one I could learn more.” Another participant said, “Each one – every time you get fired up and more enthusiastic about community involvement.” Still other participants (24%) responded there is a need for multiple forums since issues can’t be resolved in just one forum and attending multiple forums would help build trust among community members (see Table 29 below). A participant in this category of data stated, “Some people I already knew. Others met 2 to 3 times in forums and it allowed us to lend trust to those we met there.” Another replied, “You think about how things said at one forum can affect another forum.” Thus, an overwhelming majority of participants agreed there were affects the forums had on them which could be classified as factors that allow a community to become more informed about what is happening in the community. This, in turn, could build social capital which Putnam (2000) described. These affects on community members would hopefully result in connectedness and social networking to bring people together to understand and take action regarding community issues that need to be addressed.

Table 28: Participant report of whether or not participating in repeated forums had an affect on them (percentages)

Yes	88
No	13
Total	100
N	16

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Table 29: Participant report of what effect repeated forums had or why it did not have an effect (percentages)

Hear perspectives	35
Knowledge of community/needs	29
Need multiple forums/ build trust	24
No	6

Other	5.9
Total	100.0
N	17

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

Crosstab analyses demonstrated a few statistically significant results in which participants who responded on the questionnaire it was beneficial for them to attend the forum also stated during the phone interview they thought participating in repeated forums had an affect on them ($\chi^2 = 7.47$, $p = .006$). Also, participants who responded on the questionnaire they learned about or considered aspects of the issue they hadn't considered before also stated participating in multiple forums had an affect on them ($\chi^2=2.94$, $p = .086$). Another finding was not statistically significant but is helpful information. Results showed most of the participants who responded on the questionnaire they learned during the forum also stated during the phone interview they would attend another community forum if they had another opportunity. This result is possibly related to the comments participants made about finding it interesting to attend forums, and they enjoyed learning information and hearing various points of view. Ultimately, the hope is that the previous participant comments about finding ways to get more involved in their community to help solve problems would be relevant to this finding.

Impact of Multiple Forums

Six of the phone interviews were conducted with participants who attended more than one of the community forums that took place in their community as part of this project. Three of these participants attended two forums and three of them attended three forums. These participants were asked the same set of interview questions as the other 54 phone interview participants. They were then asked an additional set of eight questions.

These questions were constructed to give these particular participants to provide more detailed feedback about their forum experiences. Of particular interest were the participants' answers to question: 6) "How did you see yourself or your role as a member of your community before, during, and after the forums?"; 7) "What was the most valuable experience that has happened as a result of your participation in the forums regarding your own actions and feelings?"; and 8) "Do you think your participation in these forums had any impact on how you see yourself as a member of your community? If so, in what ways?" These three questions were asked to find out if attending multiple forums affected their level of efficacy and view of themselves in their community to a greater degree. Also, it allowed participants to report more specifically how they felt (efficacy) and their actions (behavior) after attending multiple forums. See Table 30 below for the list of additional in-depth questions.

Table 30: Additional In-Depth Phone Interview Questions

Question #	
1	What made you decide to attend more than one forum?
2	What did you like the most about attending these forums?
3	What did you like the least about attending these forums?
4	How interactive did you become in the discussions initiated by participants? (not at all, somewhat, very) What made you participate at that level?
5	Were the forums successful? If yes, what made them a success? If no, please explain.
6	How did you see yourself or your role as a member of your community before, during, and after the forums?
7	What was the most valuable experience that has happened as a result of your participation in the forums regarding your own actions and feelings?
8	Do you think your participation in these forums had any impact on how you see yourself as a member of your community? If so, in what ways?

Source: Alabama Issues Forums phone interview

In response to Question 1 "What made you decide to attend more than one forum?" three participants stated they attended more than one forum due to their interest

in the topic. One of these participants also added that they felt they needed to represent their organization at the forum. Another participant commented, “I thought it was a valid effort to get the community involved.” It was stated by another participant they enjoyed the first forum so they went to the second one. “You see the dynamic in each is a little different. It’s a little exciting and there were times when people said different perspectives you didn’t expect even if you knew the person,” commented another participant.

One of the participants liked listening and appreciated the opportunity to hear other disciplines when asked to respond to Question 2 “What did you like the most about attending these forums?” Four of the participants responded similarly to Question 2 and they commented on the climate of the forums. One participant stated that it was a comfortable environment where everyone was on the same level discussing solutions to problems. A second participant stated that the moderating format allowed people to go into discussing other subjects that branched off into sharing other ideas. A third participant responded that the discussion was very open and honest with a good exchange of ideas and information where no one felt threatened about sharing opinions. The fourth participant who discussed the climate stated:

The arrangement of it – it brought people together. People all participated and/or could see everything happening. The setting conveys commitment to openness and engaging each other. It’s not a lecture which is what some people are use to or may expect, but that we’re all here to talk together.

When asked Question 3 “What did you like the least about attending these forums?” three participants commented about time limits of the forum and two commented on participants. One commented that scheduling the time to attend for an hour and a half to two hours either in the afternoon or evening is difficult for people. A

second participant commented that there wasn't enough time and that it is limited due to time demands balancing between work and home. The third comment was that the forums were not long enough and that the timing should be changed so that people can delve deeper into topics. Two participants made statements that they would have liked to have seen broader participation from the community and one added that it would have been helpful to have more principals, teachers, and students attend. One of the participants stated that they couldn't think of anything they liked least about the forums and another participant added that they would have liked to have had a better understanding about why they were meeting so they could have been more prepared.

In response to Question 4 "How interactive did you become in the discussions initiated by participants? (not at all, somewhat, very) What made you participate at that level?" four participants stated that they were "somewhat" interactive during the discussions. One stated that they were "somewhat" to "very" interactive and another stated that they were "pretty interactive". Those who described themselves as somewhat interactive made similar comments regarding why they participated at that level. One participant summed it up well by stating, "I liked listening and spoke if I had something to add or a point to make but not just to talk." Overall, these six participants enjoyed hearing what others said and didn't want to talk too much or monopolize the conversation. Also, generally, they didn't feel a need to say things to the group just in order to keep the discussion flowing. One participant explained more about her participant in the forums and stated:

I wanted to know more about what someone was saying – asking them more about their comments especially if they had an education background. Also, things I was aware of, such as resources in the community, needed to be shared so that I could tell others that information.

Question 5 asked “Were the forums successful? If yes, what made them a success? If no, please explain.” In general, these six participants agreed the forums were a success. Three participants stated that the forums were a success because it brought people together to share good information with qualified points of view for a quality discussion. One of these participants stated, “There was good participation, lively discussion, people were candid and did not hold back – people felt comfortable.” Another one stated that getting people together to talk about their community is “the first step in seeing some actions to work to improve the community.” Two other participants qualified their comments about the degree of success. One responded that it was successful to an extent, but “to be really successful we need to meet another time and come up with a plan of action.” The other participant stated that the level of success depends on the goal – it was successful “in opening the dialogue and giving an opportunity to do that. Because they were broad it was hard to know what the next steps were.” A different participant made the comments that they were all successful because they exposed people to participate as a way of civic engagement. Another comment this participant made was:

It is important to find issues and topics important to the people that are sustainable. Make it clear to people that this is a process and the topic isn't as important as this model of public engagement. We'd like you to experience talking and listening with others and finding common ground. Refining the process is what we need to do next.

These six participants were asked in Question 6 “How did you see yourself or your role as a member of your community before, during, and after the forums?” Almost all of these participants responded generally the same way to this question. Each of them replied that their view of their role in the community stayed the same overall because

they were already involved, viewed themselves as an informer, a facilitator, or in some way getting people talking about issues whether it is due to their job, committee, or organization they are involved with. Some of the comments made included exposing people and promoting opportunities in their community, participating in whatever they can to benefit the community and make things better, getting perspectives and getting people talking. One participant added, “The forums put me in circles of people I otherwise wouldn’t have met.” Another one stated, “I found after there are other places you could be involved if you know where to go.” A different participant commented:

Before it was usually through committees. Now having a grasp of civic engagement there’s another way to have discussions with people. After...we can take this tool and apply it to something else in our community to guide the process. It’s been a significant shift but we needed to hold these forums to learn how the process works. It’s an invaluable learning process.

The six participants were asked in Question 7 “What was the most valuable experience that has happened as a result of your participation in the forums regarding your own actions and feelings?” Most of the participants responded with comments that did not directly involve their own feelings or actions, but those of the community. One participant, however, made comments about building their credibility in the community by showing interest for the greater good, not just as part of their job. A second participant responded that they had a better understanding of other people’s feelings in the community and they were disappointed about someone’s comment regarding the school system because “our goals are more lofty and we strive to meet those. It was a bit of a wake-up call.” Another participant also said that at the forums there were able to allow “real strong points of view from different backgrounds...to see it from their shoes...so more aware of views from different ethnic backgrounds can be seen

differently.” A fourth response was that the participant was realizing “my community feels strongly about the education system is very valuable and what the community was willing to put out was very encouraging.” Another participant stated, “Feelings – understanding for some they weren’t sure what kinds of next steps would come out of them.” The last participant did comment on actions when they commented about attending one of the youth forums and said:

Seeing the kids – we had no idea it would have the impact it had. It opens the door that this is something that needs to happen all the time. We have to talk to the people who we are trying to affect with programs. Bring the people who you will impact as part of the solution.

The final question of the in-depth phone interview, Question 8, was “Do you think your participation in these forums had any impact on how you see yourself as a member of your community? If so, in what ways?” Generally, all of the participants replied that the forums had an impact on them. Four of the participants made comments about being involved in the community, including contributing at some level and helping, not hindering, the community, needing to foster more conversations about these topics to foster some sort of action, giving a sense of involvement - and that was good they said - because they hadn’t been involved in years, and continuing to be an informer to promote opportunities and resources. Two of the participants commented on how their jobs are involved. One stated:

It will keep you humble. It’s easy to become self-centered the older you get. That’s something – it does keep you aware people expect a lot more of groups like a school board and any other government organization. It’s constantly work to live up to what they expect. I take it seriously because we work for the taxpayers.

The other participant stated:

I feel like part of our role is to be involved in things. By...being more engaged in the community the bar has been raised. We can be part of the solution by being exposed and engaged in forums with broad groups in the community.

Overall, the results have shown participants found they benefited from attending NIF forums. The forums created changes in many who participated. Benefits participants reported included listening and learning from others. Changes participants believed they experienced were gaining more information and views as well as being motivated. Results also showed efficacy was impacted. Participants felt their participation in community affairs matters because they can help or make a change and they have more awareness of others' opinions also. Participants further reported they would become more involved in their community. The results demonstrated that after attending NIF deliberative community forums there was a change in behavior. Participants reported they became more involved in their community afterward. Those participants who became more involved took some kind of action or shared ideas with others. Participants reported their community involvement had influence because they helped or took action, discussed information with others, or others followed their example. Results also demonstrate participants would attend more forums if given the opportunity so they could listen to others. Furthermore, those who attended multiple forums thought it had an affect on them. Those participants reported they heard others' perspectives, gained knowledge of the community and its needs, and having multiple forums builds community trust. Thus, results have shown NIF deliberative community forums had impacted participant benefits, changes, efficacy, and behavior. These results show that communities may very well be able to solve serious problems they face if they take the time to deliberate in a forum setting. One participant who attended multiple

forums really captured this idea when he/she stated, “I wanted to know more about what someone was saying – asking them more about their comments.... Also, things I was aware of, such as resources in the community, needed to be shared so that I could tell others that information.”

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Review of Study and Results

This research examined the effects of deliberation to explore the impact NIF community forums have on participants. Forum moderators conducted community forums in five localities around the state of Alabama. NIF issue books were used to frame the forum discussions. Questionnaires were distributed at the conclusion of the forums and phone interviews were conducted months after the forums ended. The main areas studied were the reported benefits and changes forums had on citizens, levels of participant efficacy that resulted, and actions people took as a result of their participation (behavior). After analyzing the data, the study demonstrated that all three arenas were reported by participants to be impacted.

Benefits and Changes

There is substantial evidence that many of the participants in deliberative community forums benefited and changed from the experience. On the questionnaires, 93% of participants reported that they benefited from the forums. Of those responding to phone interviews, 89% also stated they benefited and 54% believed they changed after attending the forum.

Efficacy

Efficacy of many participants was reported to be impacted by deliberative community forums. Participant reports gave evidence that 97% felt their participation in

community affairs matters (efficacy). This included helping or creating a change, sharing opinions, or having more awareness.

Behavior

Many participants reported they were impacted by deliberative community forums and intended to or had acted. On questionnaires, 31% of participants responded they intended to have more community involvement after the forum. A total of 73% reported on the questionnaire they planned to take some sort of action and 51% said during the phone interview that they did become more involved with community activities and decisions (behavior). Of those interviewed by phone, 94% reported further involvement in the community after attending the forums. Those who responded they would attend another community forum of that kind accounted for 93% of the participants. Of those who attended multiple forums, 88% stated during phone interviews that participating in more than one forum had an affect on them. These effects included hearing the perspectives of others, gaining knowledge of community needs, and believing there is a need for multiple forums.

Implications of Results

This study investigated the ways in which community members are impacted by their attendance and participation at deliberative community forum(s). The research includes reports of changes in the participants' feelings of efficacy and actions taken as indicated on the questionnaires completed immediately upon the conclusion of the forum and as stated in phone interviews many months after the forums were completed. It was expected that participants would become more efficacious and involved in their community as a result of participating in the deliberative community forum(s). It was

beyond the scope of this study to investigate the participants' responses to the specific educational topics and issues that were discussed during the forums. The study took a broader view of the forums and the ways in which community members are affected (or not). It is not the intent of this research to make any definitive statements about the causes and effects surrounding community forum participation. This is an exploratory study that considered much of the information gathered during the project to discuss possible relationships between community forum participants and their personal feelings about and activities in civic engagement. As the extant literature indicated and the participant comments made during data collection confirmed, community forums are clearly important venues for people to discuss and analyze serious problems and issues that communities face. Deliberative community forums, as implemented by NIF, can have a multitude of impacts based on the results of the data collected in this study. The data demonstrated that benefits, efficacy levels, and communal behavior can change with participation in deliberative community forums. Following is an elaboration on this point.

Participant Benefits and Changes

Past research indicated that participants in various public deliberation processes benefited by increasing their knowledge, motivation to learn, understanding others' viewpoints and new information. Furthermore, other benefits included an increased interest in public affairs and engagement and a broader general outlook on a wide variety of public issues (Gastil, 1994; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Mathews, 1994; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005). The results of this study therefore lend support to this previous research. Additionally, participants stated on questionnaires and in interviews

they benefited because they learned about issues through other participants' points of view and the information shared. Benefits of deliberative community forums were found to be long term, lasting from the conclusion of the forum(s) to months later. The implication of these findings is that citizens will become and stay more civically engaged after participating in deliberative community forums like those structured by NIF. As a result, these freshly engaged citizens are more likely to work toward solutions to problems in their communities.

Similar changes in attitude and behavior were also reported by Gastil, Deess, and Weiser (2002). The current study also found support for modest changes on participants through NIF forums. More specifically, a little more than half of the respondents reported during the phone interview they changed after their participation in NIF forum(s). Changes they reported included having more information and view points about issues discussed (21%) and being more motivated (20%). Others reported they had already taken civic action (13%) or planned to do so in the future (5%).

An important implication of this study, as well as others, is that far fewer participants experienced a change in behavior (13%) after the forums than experienced an internal shift in thinking (41%). This may support the notion that citizens find it easier to *think* differently than to *act* differently in their community. Thus, a strong relationship between stated intentions and direct behavior is not strongly supported by these findings. As a result, further study should be conducted to more specifically examine the statements made by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and Gastil (1994) that there is a very high correlation between intentions and behavior. According to the findings in this study, this may not always be the case and future research should examine it further.

The crosstab analyses showed some interesting and important statistically significant relationships among variables. Results indicated those who reported thinking differently on the questionnaire also reported other kinds of changes from the forum during the phone interview. These participants began to change their minds about the topics discussed during the forums after hearing the viewpoints of others and information shared. The connection may be made, then, that by thinking differently, there was a long term change that occurred. These results may mean those participants were more open and aware of other perspectives and they continued to be more aware in the long term.

Changes in a Sense of Personal Efficacy

Bandura (1986a, 1986b) described efficacy as judgments people make about their ability to accomplish something and attain an improved level of performance regardless of skills they think they possess. After participating in deliberation, Gastil (1994) found participants were more confident, and possessed increased self-efficacy and self worth. This allowed them to have increased expectations that their actions would have significant impact and influence in the real world. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) also found that people's sense of themselves making a difference in their communities was enhanced. Morrell (2005) believed deliberative forums allowed citizens to increase their confidence about participating in their community. Several other authors, such as Morrell (2005) and Doble, Higgins, Begasse, and Fisher (1996), have found evidence that NIF forums impact people's ideas of what they can do in their communities and increase people's feeling of being more efficacious and self-confident. Furthermore, efficacy has proven highly predictive of behavior (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b;

Gastil, 1994; Maddux and Stanley, 1986). However, as Finkel (1985) argued, it is crucial that citizens actually act on those feelings.

The results of this study not only confirm the above but indicate an astounding change in efficacy: 97% of participants felt their participation in community affairs would matter. This measures efficacy because it involves feelings that they can take action and make a difference in their community. Results of the crosstab analysis also demonstrated that participants who stated on questionnaires they learned or considered aspects of the issue they had not considered before also felt their participation in community affairs had some influence when asked about that during the phone interview.

Whether or not these NIF participants are correct or not is irrelevant to the proposition put forth in this study. A sense of personal efficacy may actually be wrong. In other words, just because someone thinks that they can accomplish something in the outside community in the future, does not mean they can or will. It is the internal belief structure of a person we are first concerned with here. Thus, if they say they believe this, and there was no external incentive for this declaration, then they most likely do believe it. This new sense of personal efficacy, then, is an important change brought about by their participation in the process.

A Reported Increase in Actual Community Involvement (Behavior)

A high correlation has already been demonstrated between intentions and behavior in this field of study (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Gastil, 1994). A person's intentions direct their behavior. Participation in public deliberation can create higher levels of public awareness of the complexity of community problems and potential solutions and thus lead to increased involvement in community discussion, planning,

projects, and groups (Doble and Peng, 1999; Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 1994; Gastil and Dillard, 1999a, 1999b; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Herbst, 1996, 1999; Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick, 2005; Pearce and Littlejohn, 1997).

Regarding participant behavior after NIF forum(s), the results of this study found that 31% of participants reported they intended to be more involved in their community. About three-fourths planned to take some kind of action, whether or not that meant they would get more involved in their community, and 51% of the phone interview respondents stated that they actually did become more involved in community activities and decisions. Nearly 75% of them (38% of the 51%) stated they took action or shared ideas with others when asked how they became more involved in their community.

In other words, it would appear that “community action” was largely confined to continuing the public deliberation process with other members of the general community. It is unclear from the data what “community actions” the remaining 25% took. Thus, these results still generally support prior research because more than half of the participants (51%) stated they became more engaged in their community after the forum(s). As further proof of this, 26% of the telephone respondents said they discussed information with others and 23% reported others followed their example. Again, through self-reports, a significant number of participants indicated they became more civically engaged after the deliberative forums as previous research has suggested.

Taken together, these results give strong support for the idea that a large group of citizens actually did become more involved after attending deliberative forums as they promised. This gives reason to believe deliberative forums influenced and increased citizen participation in community actions and decisions.

The Effects of Attending Multiple Citizen Deliberation Forums

The Kettering Foundation has stated that brief exposure to the deliberative forum model is not all that is required to change citizens' thinking about their role in public life (Doble and Peng, 1999). NIF hopes, however, participants who enjoy and receive some of the benefits discussed above will want to attend more forums. Levine, Fung, and Gastil (2005) also found that when deliberation is successful and fulfilling, participants will want to become further involved. McAfee, McKenzie, and Mathews (1990) agree that what occurs after a forum is significant because participation in a single forum may not create lasting behavior changes.

In this study, results demonstrated that if participants had the opportunity to attend another forum 93% said they would attend again. The major reason given was that they'd want to listen to others again (50%). This squares well with the fact that the major "engagement" in community affairs after attending an NIF forum was that they talked with others about it in their community.

Further data revealed 88% of participants who attended more than one of the NIF forums agreed that participating in repeated forums had an affect on them. As for those effects, they are similar to the ones analyzed above: 35% stated they were able to hear other people's perspectives, 29% said they gained knowledge of the community's needs, and 24% responded that multiple forums are needed to build trust in the community.

Implications for these findings are that many citizens are truly interested in knowing the opinions and information others have about important issues in their community. This finding gives strong support for the idea that citizens value one another's ideas and knowledge if they are willing to participate in such deliberative

democratic processes. As democratic deliberation theory posits: it is important that citizens stay informed so there is much less of a gap in information between them and community leaders. Having an informed and aware citizenry about what is happening in a community may be considered a critical factor before any official action can be taken to solve community problems without risking serious obstacles from the citizenry later. Thus, according to the above studies and as reinforced by this dissertation's data and analysis, officials should consider multiple citizen deliberation forums before taking any serious steps for their communities.

There is even more evidence to support this idea. Melville, Willingham, and Dedrick (2005) discussed the effects of multiple community forums and asserted that a habit arises for these communities to use deliberative forums when a problem occurs. They agree that deliberating repeatedly on different issues is most powerful, but one forum or a series of forums on an issue can also change a community.

It is difficult to determine from this study whether or not an entire community changed after NIF forums took place. However, based on the data and specific comments participants made, it seems that many of the participants may agree that institutionalizing deliberative forums would help their communities effectively address important problems. There were several participants who acknowledged the affects of multiple forums on a community, especially in creating an atmosphere of trust and helping the community make progress by getting involved. Participants stated that by sharing points of view and discussing information they can help the community improve and take action. Comments from participants supported the idea that a series of forums can build momentum and enthusiasm so citizens can feel empowered to work together to better

their community. The results of this study, then, help to promote the idea that permanent, institutionalized structures should be provided for citizens to deliberate because then they are more likely to produce ideas, plans and solutions that are based on the broad, deliberated spectrum of the community necessary to make their homes a better place to live for everyone.

Conclusion

In summary, a theory of the effects of deliberative community forums can be developed in terms of benefits, changes, efficacy, and behavior. When participants view deliberative forums as beneficial, they have learned and heard many new views about the issues and problems confronting their community and many ideas about how they can get more involved in helping their community. All of this spurs them to be motivated to help their community. After hearing information and exchanging ideas, they can discuss a need for change which allows them to believe their participation matters. They can take the risk to influence others based on their increased sense of efficacy. Once they feel this empowerment, they change their behavior and take public action to help their community. As they attend more forums, citizens can become even more involved in improving their community and work for the common good.

Building on this theory, then, when considering the ages, gender, ethnicity and types of occupations of the participants, other theoretical implications arise. Many of the participants were under the age of eighteen and unemployed. However, many youth stated they became more involved in helping their community in small ways. For example, by picking up trash or through organized groups like “Southside Pride” citizens could make a difference. This is empowering for citizens, builds their efficacy,

and inspires them to work towards solving community problems even on an informal, small scale.

Most of the participants were eighteen or older and had jobs. By working together, those who were unemployed, had government jobs, jobs in the private sector or with non-profits also took time to get more involved in their community. In the future, data could be gathered more specifically to find out what particular types of occupations participants hold. However, in this study the data show a diverse set of participants who worked for the common good of their community.

Even though it was not clear where participants lived, worked, or if they were politically motivated, the participants in this study showed evidence that they shared a common understanding that helping make their community better was important and needed. Through their comments, they gave evidence they did make a difference and helped others in their community after attending the deliberative forums. They even supported the idea of having more forums to help improve their community even more, which leads to the conclusion that it is possible for communities to institutionalize deliberative forums. Community leaders and citizens agreed to the benefits, changes, efficacy, and actions which occurred after attending the deliberative forums.

Hypotheses for Future Study

From the theory stated above which is based on results of the demographic data and the findings involving participant efficacy, changes, benefits, and the effects multiple forums, several hypotheses can now be proposed. One hypothesis is that participants aged 17 and under do not believe they benefit from community forums as much as older participants as a result of limited experiences and education. Another hypothesis is to

measure how much participants 17 and under learn from attending community forums than older participants. A third related hypothesis is community needs must be learned by participants under age 17 before they become as thoughtful about, or extend help to, their community as readily as older participants. A fourth hypothesis is intentions of younger participants result in subsequent actions in their community less often as compared to older participants. This stems from the findings that intentions do not always result in behavior.

If more specific data could be collected on participant occupations in future studies, it would be possible to determine the particular types of participants and possibly motives behind participant attendance at forums. Also, the subsequent authority certain participants may hold in making changes in their community can be revealed.

Furthermore, it would allow some indication of citizen potential to create a change in a community instead of relying on officials. One hypothesis is those elected officials and citizens who live inside the city limits will more likely attend community forums because they are most directly affected by problem solving and decisions, especially if it is made into city policy. This hypothesis is connected to the findings that citizens who attend forums, especially more than one forum, become and stay more civically engaged in the long term. As has been previously theorized based on results of this study, participants start to think differently after they hear information and perspectives shared which increases personal efficacy and actions in the community.

Weaknesses and Limitations of this Study

The use of questionnaires and phone interviews in this study in a “ex-post-facto” fashion created the normal weaknesses and limitations of such a research design. Since

the questionnaires were only distributed at the conclusion of the forums and no pre-test/pre-questionnaire or control group was utilized, the true affect(s) the forum(s) had on the participants may be questioned. Causal relationships between variables cannot be constructed.

Also, the questionnaires rely on the participants' self reports about their perceptions and intentions at the time they completed it. Ultimately, perceptions may differ from reality. Participants' intentions may remain the same; however, there may be a discrepancy between what they said they would do as a result of attending the forum as compared to what they actually do once the forum was over. This "perceived effect" matters because intentions participants have during the moments they completed the questionnaire may not be sustained weeks and months afterward. The participants may have also become subject to an "agency factor".

Another flaw in the design is that their responses to the open-ended questions could have been written according to how they felt they "should" respond. This also affects the role they believe they should play in the community. For example, participants may have believed at the time they completed the questionnaire that they would become more involved in their community after the forum to help others in some way, but that intention may never have come to fruition. This sort of discrepancy needs to be managed more effectively when collecting data from participants. More research and literature concerning retrospective surveys, perception data, and linking intentions to future behavior used for post hoc analysis needs to be built into a future research design. These types of studies would especially need to control and minimize negative affects and inaccuracies that result from collecting data "after the fact".

Other weaknesses of this research relate to the use of NIF issue book questionnaires that may never have been analyzed for validity or reliability. It was unclear after much consultation whether the original NIF questionnaires were field tested prior to publication. Since different NIF issue books included different versions of questionnaires, it is difficult to determine whether using different versions had an impact on the data collected during this project. The formatting of the closed and open questions may also affect participant responses.

Another weakness may involve the fact that the questionnaires were each adapted differently by adding additional questions. The questionnaire format differed for forums A, B, and C. For example, for Forum A, the additional questions were at the end of the three-page questionnaire, whereas for Forum C the additional questions were on the front page. This simple change, which was intended to ensure the information of most interest would be gathered before participants stopped completing the questionnaire, may have shifted the reliability of the questionnaires overall. The adapted versions of the questionnaires with additional questions were also not field-tested. In addition, there were no procedures in place to contact non-respondents to the forum questionnaires.

The participants themselves may have also inadvertently introduced bias to this research. The data collection was dependent upon the participants being capable of reading the questionnaires independently. This is another concern since the age range for participants varied from very young adolescents to retired citizens. The educational levels of participants also affect how quickly they read, understand, and respond to questions written in the questionnaire. Some participants may have partially filled in their responses due to lower reading levels or loss of focus or patience with completing

the entire questionnaire. Others may not fully have comprehended what a question was truly asking, misinterpreted the question, not given their best effort, or given a response that was not related to the topic due to a variety of reasons. Those participants whose jobs involve meeting the needs of that community may also have had very different reasons and motivations for attending the forums. Data from their responses may have resulted in different impacts than citizens whose jobs were not related to helping or engaging the community. These other citizens may have been more genuinely interested in discussing the forum topics. Thus, they may have wanted to take more and different action than they had in the past.

Another area of weakness of this study was the phone interview questions. There were no previously constructed sets of questions for the structured phone interviews established by NIF or the other entities prior to this study conducted by the Caroline Marshall Draughton Center for Arts and Humanities. The original NIF issue book questionnaire for forum B stated that participants could take part in a follow up phone interview. However, no standardized set of interview questions could be located after much research. Thus, it was a major weakness that no set of interview questions existed from NIF or any other entity involved with NIF, even after consulting with many NIF leaders. As a result, it was challenging to create appropriate questions for the phone interviews and to ensure the phone interview questions that were created were reliable and valid for the purposes of this project.

Furthermore, it was limiting to use phone calls to contact and interview participants months after the forums took place. Some phone numbers were sometimes no longer in service. Other participants did not answer the phone after several attempts to

reach them nor did they return phone messages. Also, the person who answered the phone may not have been the original forum participant. There were many other reasons for unsuccessful attempts to interview the participants. The longevity of the project was partially a weakness that limited the data collected during the phone interviews. Some participants who were interviewed had attended a forum in September, for example. They had a very difficult time remembering the discussion and the impact it made on them because the forum had taken place ten months prior to the phone interview.

The response rates regarding those participants who volunteered to write a phone number on their questionnaire also limited the research. Less than half of the participants (134 out of 304) provided a legible phone number on their questionnaire. Then, less than half (60 out of 134) of the phone contacts successfully resulted in a phone interview from a participant. Information that could be gathered and compared longitudinally was also limited. Some of the participants did not write responses to some of the critical questions on the questionnaires. Those responses, then, could not be used later to compare participants' thoughts and actions at the time of the forum. Ultimately, as discussed in Chapter 4, the pool of responses was greatly reduced overall from 304 to 31 participants who provided adequate information for all phases of this project. Such a small number of participants created a limited sample size, which makes it much more challenging to generalize findings to the larger population.

Future Research

In the future, it would be very beneficial for anyone collecting data using community forums to distribute a pre-forum questionnaire as well as a post-questionnaire. This way, data could be collected from the participants before any sort of

forum experience had occurred which could be compared to information collected after participating. Researchers could then more accurately study and understand the impacts the forum experience made on those who participated.

Also, it would be very helpful in future research to make this a true experiment, i.e., a control group of people who did not ever participate in a community forum could complete a questionnaire at the same time the pre-forum questionnaire was given to the participating group for comparison. This would allow two groups to be compared before and after the forum(s), or “treatment variable”, occurred. Months later, both groups could participate in interviews. Data collected at that time would make any differences, if there were any in the two groups’ responses, clear. This research design would allow the data to show more definitively if the forum really had the impacts that were inferred throughout the analysis above.

Since participant questionnaires and interviews are based on self-reports, future research could include a mechanism to control for participant accountability. For example, it is possible that participants who responded on the questionnaires or during phone interviews embellished their level of community involvement after the forum(s). When participants completed the questionnaire, they may have written actions they planned to take after the forum but may have never taken. In the phone interviews, participants may not have remembered or been honest when they reported their actions since the forum(s). In this study, there was no mechanism to hold participants accountable for actions they may have reported they took after the forum(s). To prevent inaccuracies in self-reporting, a system could be created for participants to periodically “check in” so researchers could physically verify the actions participants report they’ve

taken since the forum(s). As a result, the data collected about participants' actions would be more accurate. This would allow causal relationships to be drawn from the participant data.

This study focused on the effects of conducting several deliberative forums by using NIF in five Alabama communities. It was not funded and there were no other resources at the disposal of the principal investigator, which in part explains many of the weaknesses discussed above. However, the principal investigator believes that the design was a unique research venture in the field of deliberative democracy and accomplished several things. First, it corroborated some much more well funded studies conducted in this field as to the effects of deliberative democratic processes. Second, it added evidence to the forum's ability to change citizens' attitudes and at least reported new behavior in citizen engagement post-deliberative process. Finally, it showed, by its own inherent flaws in design, what kinds of new and better experimental research can be done in the future to enhance our understanding of just how well, or not, these deliberative democratic processes actually impact the participants and their communities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table 2: Comparison of Questions on NIF Questionnaires

Forum	Question Number	Question
A & C B	O4 A5	Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If yes, how?
A & C B	O5 A7	In your forum, did you thoughtfully consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Did you learn about or consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
A & C B	O6 A9	What, if anything, might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?
A & C B	A7 A8	What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?
A & C A & C B	O7 A1 A1	How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one? <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 or more <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one? <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 or more
A & C B	O8 O9	Are you male or female? <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female Are you: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
A & C B	O9 O7	How old are you? <input type="checkbox"/> 17 or younger <input type="checkbox"/> 18-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-64 <input type="checkbox"/> 65 or older How old are you? <input type="checkbox"/> 17 or younger <input type="checkbox"/> 18-30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 <input type="checkbox"/> 61-70 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 70
A & C B	O10 O8	Are you: <input type="checkbox"/> African American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian American <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> Native American <input type="checkbox"/> White/Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) ____ What is your race or ethnic heritage? <input type="checkbox"/> African American/Black <input type="checkbox"/> Asian American/Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/White <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> Native American <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) ____
A & C B	O11 & O12 O (last question and no number)	Where do you live? <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Small town <input type="checkbox"/> Large city <input type="checkbox"/> Suburb What is your ZIP code? City where your deliberative forum was held ____
A & C B	A2	How did you find out about this forum?
A & C	A3	Why did you decide to attend this forum?

B		
A & C B	A4	What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?
A & C B	A5 A6	Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? _Yes _No If yes, how?
A & C B	A8 O10	How much schooling have you had? _no high school _some high school _high school graduate _some college, university, or technical school courses _degree from a college, university, or technical school _some graduate level courses _graduate degree or higher
A & C B	A9 O11	Do you volunteer for any charitable organization? _Yes _No Please put a “check” by each of the following descriptions that apply to you today: _Student _Parent _Employee of a school district _Employee of a social service organization _Volunteer associated with a local school district _Volunteer associated with a local social service organization _Employed by the government (not elected or on the staff of an elected official)
A & C B	A10 O11	What is your primary occupation? _city or county government _state government _non-profit organization _not employed at this time (see previous section)

APPENDIX B

Table 5: Phase 1 Data Collection Codes from Questionnaires: Demographic Information

Data Point	Codes
Title of Forum Attended	01 = “Preparing Today’s Kids for Tomorrow’s Jobs” 02 = “Too Many Children Left Behind” 03 = “21 st Century Mission of Our Public Schools”
Location of Forum	01 = A 02 = B 03 = C 04 = D 05 = E 06 = alternate location for C 07 = alternate location for E 08 = alternate location for D
Participant’s Gender	01 = Male 02 = Female
Participant’s Age Range	01 = 17 or younger 02 = 18-30 03 = 31-40 04 = 31-45 05 = 41-50 06 = 46-64 07 = 51-60 08 = 61-70 09 = 65 or older 10 = over 70
Participant’s Ethnicity	01 = African American 02 = Asian American 03 = Hispanic 04 = Native American 05 = White/Caucasian 06 = Other
Participant’s Education Level	01 = no high school 02 = some high school 03 = high school graduate 04 = some college, university, or technical school courses 05 = degree from a college, university, or technical school 06 = some graduate level courses 07 = graduate degree or higher
Participant’s Primary Occupation (Employer)	01 = city or county government 02 = state government

	03 = private sector 04 = non-profit organization 05 = not employed at this time 06 = school district 07 = social services organization 08 = government
If Participant is a Volunteer	01 = yes 02 = no
Participant's Role	01 = parent 02 = student
Number of NIF Forums Participant Attended (including that forum)	01 = 1 02 = 2 03 = 3 04 = 4 05 = 5 06 = 6 or more

APPENDIX C

Table 6: Phase 2 Data Collection Codes from Questionnaires: Open-Ended Questions 2-6, 8-9 from Table 1

Question	Data Point	Codes
Question 2	How did you find out about this forum?	01 = church 02 = school 03 = advertisement 04 = specific invitation 05 = organizer 06 = familiar contact 07 = job 08 = community organization 09 = other
Question 3	Why did you decide to attend this forum?	01 = learn 02 = help community 03 = care about youth 04 = get job 05 = give input 06 = civic duty 07 = have kids school 08 = required 09 = official in community 10 = don't know 11 = other
Question 4	What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?	01 = learn 02 = help community 03 = care about youth 04 = job information 05 = give input 06 = don't know 07 = other
Question 5	Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum? If yes, how?	01 = learn 02 = help community 03 = help youth 04 = don't know 05 = other
Question 6	Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? If yes, how?	01 = learn 02 = help community 03 = help youth 04 = job information 05 = give input 06 = other
Question 8	What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?	01 = community involvement 02 = encourage youth about Opportunities

		03 = give input 04 = don't know 05 = other
Question 9	What, if anything, might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?	01 = do more 02 = youth job opportunities 03 = work together 04 = school support 05 = don't know 06 = nothing 07 = other

APPENDIX D

Table 7: Participant Response Codes

Question	Data Point	Codes
1: phq1	How many forums did you attend?	01 = 1 02 = 2 03 = 3 04 = 4 05 = don't know
2: phq2	Do you believe you personally benefited from attending the forum(s)?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = don't know
2: phq2 explain	If yes, how? If no, what makes you believe that?	01 = listen/ learn 02 = input/ talk 03 = think/ prep for life 04 = network 05 = opportunities 06 = don't know 07 = other
3: phq3	Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on you?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = don't know
3: phq3 probe?	Was the probe used to help the participant answer question 3?	01 = yes 02 = no
3: phq3 explain	If yes, what? If no, what makes you believe that?	01 = motivated 02 = information/ views 03 = took action 04 = future/ opportunities 05 = already involved/ no change 06 = not yet/ will 07 = other 08 = can't recall
3a: phq3a	Do you believe there were any changes the forum(s) had on your community?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = don't know
3a: phq3a explain	What leads you to that conclusion?	01 = Yes, take action 02 = Yes, awareness/ attitude 03 = Yes, network/ together 04 = Yes, make a difference/ potential 05 = No, not seen/heard any change 06 = No, more awareness/ ideas 07 = Don't know, motivating/

		Start 08 = no contact/ moved 09 = other
4: phq4	After attending the forum(s) do you feel like your participation in community affairs matters?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = other
4: phq4 explain	If yes, how? If no, what makes you feel that way?	01 = help/ change 02 = opinions/ awareness 03 = part of job 04 = already did 05 = later 06 = other
5: phq5	After attending the forum(s), did you become more involved with community activities and decisions?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = same/ already
5: phq5 explain	If yes, how? If no, please explain.	01 = took action/ shared ideas 02 = involved already/ same 03 = involved already with job 04 = no time/ moved 05 = other
5a: phq5a	If you became more involved, did your personal involvement have any actual influence?	01 = yes 02 = no
5a: phq5a explain	If yes, how? If no, what makes you say that?	01 = took action/ helped 02 = others followed example 03 = part of job 04 = discussed information 05 = other
6: phq6	If you had the opportunity to go to another forum of this kind in your community would you go?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = maybe
6: phq6 explain	Please explain.	01 = listen 02 = action 03 = schedule 04 = enjoy/ interested 05 = location 06 = other
7: phq7	(If they attended more than one forum) Do you think participating in repeated forums had any affect on you?	01 = yes 02 = no 03 = don't know
7: phq7 explain	1) If yes, what? If no, what makes you say that?	01 = hear perspectives 02 = knowledge of community/ needs 03 = need multiple forums/ build trust

		04 = no 05 = other
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APPENDIX E
(page 1)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST

Preparing Today's Kids For Tomorrow's Jobs: What Should Our Community Do?

Now that you've had a chance to participate in a forum on this issue, we'd like to know what you are thinking. Your conclusions along with those of thousands of others who participated in these forums, will be reflected in a summary report that will be available to all citizens, including those who took part in the forums, as well as officeholders, members of the news media, and others in your community.

- | | Strongly
agree | Somewhat
agree | Somewhat
disagree | Strongly
disagree | Not
sure |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| 1. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below? | | | | | |
| a. Many of today's high school graduates lack basic work skills. | | | | | |
| b. Meeting the needs of local businesses and industries is essential to the health of this nation's economy. | | | | | |
| c. Today's me-first culture has eroded the ability of young people entering the job market to work well with others. | | | | | |
| d. The United States is rapidly losing ground as a leader in the world economy. | | | | | |
| e. There are many good job opportunities for young people who do not attend college. | | | | | |
| f. Math, science, and computer technology courses are the keys to success in tomorrow's job market. | | | | | |
| g. Schools cannot do it all; the full educational resources of the community must be used. | | | | | |
| h. The future economy will require creative approaches we have not yet imagined. | | | | | |

- | | Strongly
favor | Somewhat
favor | Somewhat
oppose | Strongly
oppose | Not
Sure |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| 2. Do you favor or oppose each of these actions? | | | | | |
| a. More businesses and industries should collaborate with schools to educate today's young people. | | | | | |
| b. Schools should beef up requirements in math and science. | | | | | |
| c. Parents, community organizations, and schools should encourage young people to involve themselves in community service. | | | | | |
| d. Communities and schools should emphasize education that will support and strengthen the local economy. | | | | | |
| e. Character education should be incorporated in the school curriculum. | | | | | |
| f. Communities should demand accountability for better performance in their schools. | | | | | |
| g. Communities must use all their educational resources (museums, libraries, theater groups) to assist schools in preparing young people. | | | | | |
| h. Communities must develop more ways to develop creativity and innovation in their young people. | | | | | |

APPENDIX E
(continued – page 2)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST

Preparing Today's Kids For Tomorrow's Jobs: What Should Our Community Do?

Strongly favor Somewhat favor Somewhat oppose Strongly oppose Not Sure

3. Do you favor or oppose the statements listed below?
- a. We must do more to instill basic work skills, such as responsibility, teamwork, and leadership. EVEN IF there are few, if any, ways to measure success in the short term.
 - b. We must put more emphasis on teaching math, science, computer skills, EVEN if this risks short-changing students who do not have aptitudes for these subjects and students who have other interests.
 - c. We must focus community educational resources on preparing young people to meet the employment needs of local businesses, EVEN IF this results in limiting the educational horizons of some students.
4. Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in this forum? Yes No
If yes, how?

5. In your forum, did you thoughtfully consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? Yes No
6. What, if anything, might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?

7. How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one?
 1-3 4-6 7 or more Not sure
8. Are you male or female? Male Female
9. How old are you?
 17 or younger 18-30 31-45 46-64 65 or older
10. Are you:
 African American Asian American Hispanic Native American White/Caucasian
 Other (please specify)
11. Where do you live?
 Rural Small town Large city Suburb
12. What is your ZIP code? _____

Please give this form to the forum leader, or mail it to the National Issues Forums Research, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777

APPENDIX E
(continued – page 3)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST PART 2

Preparing Today's Kids For Tomorrow's Jobs: What Should Our Community Do?

1. How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one?
____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5 ____6 or more
2. How did you find out about this forum? _____
3. Why did you decide to attend this forum?

4. What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?

5. Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? ____ Yes ____No
If yes, how? _____
6. Did you learn about or consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? ____ Yes ____ No
7. What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?

8. How much schooling have you had?
____no high school ____ some high school ____ high school graduate
____some college, university, or technical school courses ____degree from a college, university, or technical school
____some graduate level courses ____graduate degree or higher
9. Do you volunteer for any charitable organization? ____ Yes ____ No
10. What is your primary occupation?
____ city or county government ____ state government ____ private sector
____ non-profit organization ____ not employed at this time
- Are you willing to participate in a follow up phone interview in 3 months to discuss what you did after you participated and as a result of this forum? ____ Yes ____No
If yes, what phone number may we use to reach you? _____
Please give this form to the forum leader.

APPENDIX F
(page 1)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST

Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?

1. Which statement best describes your knowledge about the achievement gap before the forum started?
 I had never heard of the achievement gap.
 I had heard the term, but did not know what it was.
 I knew a little bit about the achievement gap, but not very much.
 I had a basic understanding of the achievement gap.
 I knew a lot about the achievement gap.

2. Which statement best describes your knowledge about the achievement gap after the forum ended?
 I heard the term, but still do not understand it.
 I know a little bit more about the achievement gap, but not enough.
 I have a basic understanding of the achievement gap.
 I know a lot about the achievement gap.

3. Which of the following approaches offers the most promise for addressing the achievement gap in your community?
 Raise expectations and demand accountability.
 Close the spending gap.
 Address the root causes.
 A combination of "raise expectations and demand accountability" and "close the spending gap."
 A combination of "raise expectations and demand accountability" and "address the root causes."
 A combination of "close the spending gap" and "address the root causes."
 A combination of all three approaches.
 None of the approaches is appropriate for our community.

4. During discussions of important social issues, participants often experience a few moments of surprise when they learn something for the first time, or come to understand the point-of-view of other people in a new way. What surprised you most about the achievement gap discussion?

APPENDIX F
(continued – page 2)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST

Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?

Strongly Agree Neither Disagree Strongly disagree
agree

5. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a. I feel that the achievement gap is a very important issue.
- b. As a result of the forum, I feel a greater desire to learn more about the test scores in my community.
- c. As a result of the forum, I feel a greater desire to understand what the local schools and community organizations are doing to reduce the achievement gap.
- d. As a result of the forum, I feel a greater desire to get involved in local efforts to reduce the achievement gap.
- e. Ordinary citizens need to take this issue seriously and participate in efforts to reduce the achievement gap.
- f. The achievement gap is an issue for the schools and not the community.
- g. The achievement gap is an issue for the community and not the schools.

6. As you look forward to next week, what one action do you think you could take to improve the educational Experience of a single child in your neighborhood?

How likely are you to take that action? Not at all likely Somewhat unlikely Not sure Somewhat likely Very likely

7. How old are you?

17 or younger 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 Over 70

8. What is your race or ethnic heritage?

African American/Black Asian American/Pacific Islander White/Caucasian Hispanic
 Native American Other (please specify)

9. Are you: Male Female

10. How much schooling have you had?

No high school. Some high school. High school graduate
 Some college, university or technical school courses Degree from a college, university, or technical school
 Some graduate level courses Graduate degree or high

11. Please put a "check" by each of the following descriptions that apply to you today:

Student Parent Employee of a school district
 Employer of a social service organization Volunteer associated with a local school district
 Volunteer associated with a local social service organization
 Employed by the government (not elected or on the staff of an elected official)

As part of our research effort, we would like to conduct a follow-up interview with people who participated in the achievement gap discussion. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please provide your name and phone number below. Not everyone will be contacted and your information will not be used for any other purpose.

Name _____ Phone Number _____

City where your deliberative forum was held _____

Please give this form to the forum leader, or mail it to The Public and Public Education Research, Kettering Foundation, 200 Common Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777.

APPENDIX F
(continued – page 3)

QUESTIONNAIRE: POST

Too Many Children Left Behind: How Can We Close the Achievement Gap?

1. How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one?

1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

2. How did you find out about this forum?

3. Why did you decide to attend this forum?

4. What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?

5. Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum?

Yes No

If yes, how?

6. Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? Yes No

If yes, how?

7. Did you learn about or consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? Yes No

8. What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?

9. What, if anything, might citizens in your community do together differently as a result of this forum?

APPENDIX G
(page 1)

QUESTIONNAIRE

What Is the 21st Century Mission for Our Public Schools?

1. How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one?

1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

2. How did you find out about this forum?

3. Why did you decide to attend this forum?

4. What expectation(s) did you have about this forum?

5. Was it beneficial for you to have attended this forum? Yes No

If yes, how?

6. Did you learn about or consider aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? Yes No

7. What, if anything, do you think you might do differently as a result of this forum?

8. How much schooling have you had?

no high school some high school high school graduate
 some college, university, or technical school courses
 degree from a college, university, or technical school
 some graduate level courses graduate degree or higher

9. Do you volunteer for any charitable organization? Yes No

10. What is your primary occupation?

city or county government state government private sector
 non-profit organization not employed at this time

Are you willing to participate in a follow up phone interview in 3 months to discuss what you did after you participated and as a result of this forum? Yes No

If yes, what phone number may we use to reach you? _____

Please give this form to the forum leader.

APPENDIX G
(continued - page 2)

QUESTIONNAIRE

What Is the 21st Century Mission for Our Public Schools?

Now that you've had a chance to participate in a forum on this issue, we'd like to know what you are thinking. Your opinions, along with those of thousands of others who participated in these forums, will be reflected in a summary report that will be available to all citizens, including those who took part in the forums, as well as officeholders, members of the news media, and others in your community.

Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly	Not
agree	agree	disagree	disagree	sure

Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

- a. Schools should do more to prepare students to compete in the global economy.
- b. Letting students focus on their particular interests and strengths will not prepare them for the "real world."
- c. Schools should teach students to become responsible, contributing members of society.
- d. It's not wise to design a curriculum to meet the needs of today's workplace since the economy is changing so rapidly.
- e. Teaching to a standardized curriculum leaves too many students behind.
- f. It's the job of the family, not the schools, to instill a sense of responsibility and ethics in young people.

Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly	Not
favor	favor	oppose	oppose	sure

Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?

- a. Collaborate with employers to develop curriculum that helps student learn about specific occupations and their requirements.
- b. Adopt service-learning programs in public high schools.
- c. Reduce the number of educational requirements to allow for more individualized instruction.
- d. Add more instruction in government, history, law, and democracy throughout the K-12 curriculum.
- e. Establish high-quality public preschool programs.
- f. Give teachers more discretion with regard to what and how they teach.

APPENDIX G
(continued – page 3)

» **QUESTIONNAIRE**

What Is the 21st Century Mission for Our Public Schools?

Strongly favor Somewhat favor Somewhat oppose Strongly oppose Not Sure

3. Do you favor or oppose the statements listed below?
- a. Add more math and science to the public school curriculum, EVEN IF that means sacrificing some humanities, social studies, and arts courses.
 - b. Integrate character education in the curriculum for all students, EVEN IF this raises controversy about which moral and ethical values are taught.
 - c. Tailor the curriculum to meet the individual needs of each student, EVEN IF this means that students take fewer required classes.
4. Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum? Yes No
If yes, how?
5. In your forum, did you talk about aspects of the issue you hadn't considered before? Yes No
6. What, if anything, might citizens in your community do differently as a result of this forum?
7. How many NIF forums have you attended, including this one?
 1-3 4-6 7 or more Not sure
8. Are you male or female? Male Female
9. How old are you?
 17 or younger 18-30 31-45 46-64 65 or older
10. Are you:
 African American Asian American Hispanic Native American
 White/Caucasian Other (please specify) _____
11. Where do you live?
 Rural Small town Large city Suburban
12. What is your ZIP Code?

Please give this form to the forum leader, or mail it to National Issues Forums Research, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777