

What Does the Kettering Foundation Do ?

RESEARCH

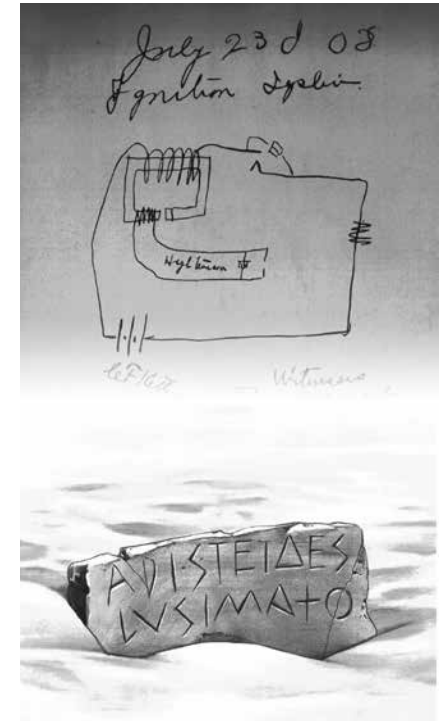


What Kind of Research THE KIND INVENTORS DO

A LEGACY OF INVENTION

A Mechanical Invention

In 1908, Charles F. Kettering began experimenting with one of his most important inventions, the electric automobile self-starter. Throughout his life, Kettering sought to encourage innovative thinking on all kinds of problems.



A Political Invention

An early political invention: a clay ballot, dating from the 5th century in Athens, Greece.

More Political Inventions

Other political inventions include the National Issues Forums issue guides, which are “self-starters” for deliberative decision making.



What Is the Focus of Our Research ?

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK AS IT SHOULD



THE FOUNDATION'S RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT WHEN DEMOCRACY IS WORKING AS IT SHOULD, THESE THREE ELEMENTS ARE ALIGNED:

- **CITIZENS** who are civically engaged and can make sound choices about their future
- **COMMUNITIES** of citizens acting together to address common problems
- **INSTITUTIONS** with public legitimacy that contribute to strengthening the work of citizens

Problems Behind

KETTERING PROBES UNDERNEATH OBVIOUS PROBLEMS TO FIND THE DEEPER CAUSES, OR “PROBLEMS BEHIND THE PROBLEMS,” THAT PREVENT DEMOCRACY FROM WORKING AS IT SHOULD.

CITIZENS ARE SIDELINED.

They aren't always engaged in politics. Maybe the political system has sidelined them by gerrymandering their voting precincts. Or maybe they've sidelined themselves because they don't think they can make a difference.

the Problems

A second problem comes on the heels of the first:

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IS POLARIZED.

Issues are framed in ways that promote divisiveness. Not all options for solving a problem are considered.

The result is a dearth of deliberative reasoning and decision making. Citizens may be involved but tend to make poor decisions.

PEOPLE OFTEN REACT HASTILY WITHOUT REACHING SHARED OR REFLECTIVE JUDGMENT.

Communities face daunting problems that can only be solved if citizens work together to produce things that counter them.

PEOPLE DISAGREE ABOUT WHAT TO DO,

which prevents them from joining forces. Traditional routines for solving problems may also limit the role citizens play.

Another problem is that **CITIZENS THINK THEY DON'T HAVE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES TO ACT.** Yet institutions can't do their jobs as well as they should without the benefit of citizen action, which can complement the work of institutions.

When citizens do act, they often don't have a shared sense of purpose.

CITIZEN EFFORTS CAN GO IN SO MANY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS THAT THEY AREN'T EFFECTIVE.

Institutional attempts to organize them can backfire by draining away the vital energy that people bring.

THE MUTUAL DISTRUST BETWEEN CITIZENS AND MOST MAJOR INSTITUTIONS HAS BEEN QUITE ACUTE FOR DECADES.

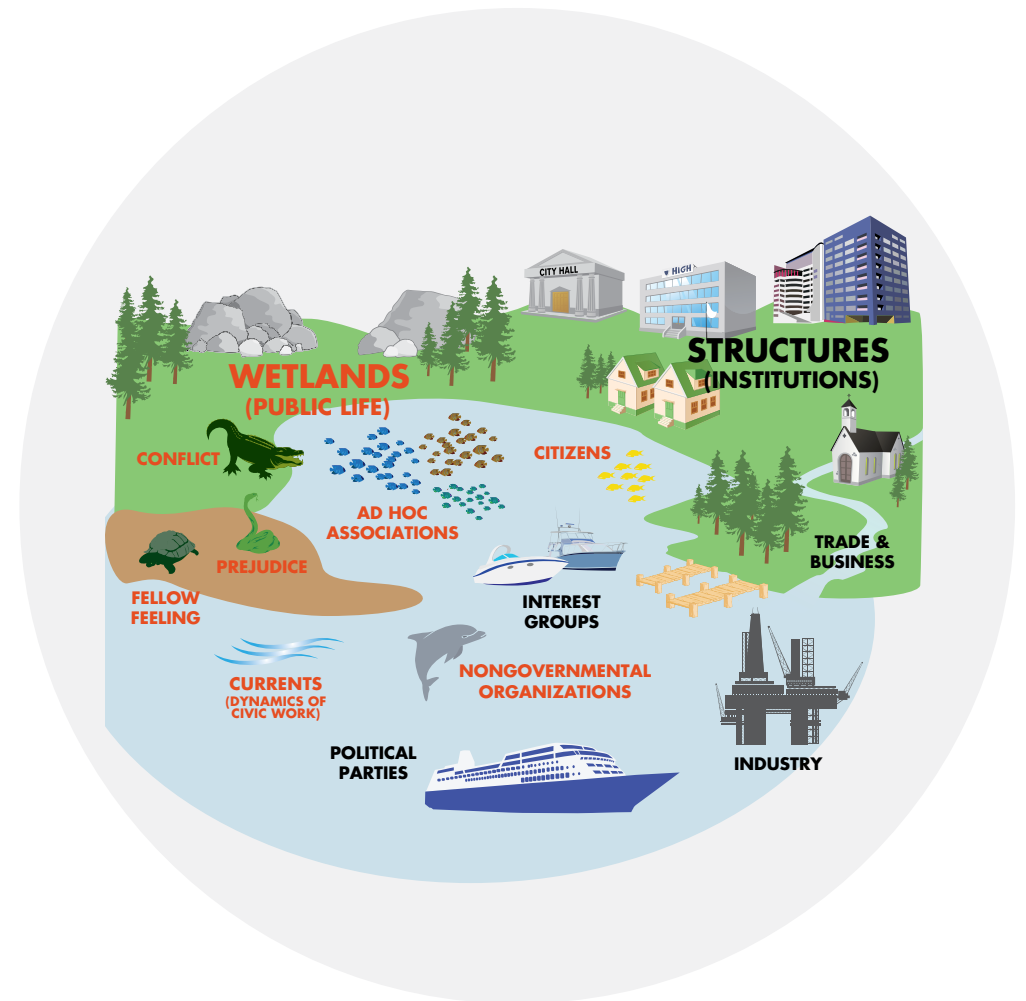
Citizens see institutions as unresponsive as well as ineffective, and institutions doubt that citizens are responsible and capable.

Finally, democracies have to respond to both ever-changing circumstances and to perennial challenges. Citizens can't declare victory and go home. Democracies depend on constant collective learning, which promotes both experimentation and persistence.

THE ABSENCE OF LEARNING UNDERMINES EFFORTS TO COMBAT DEMOCRACY'S PROBLEMS.

What Are We Learning ?

THERE ARE EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO SHAPE THEIR FUTURE

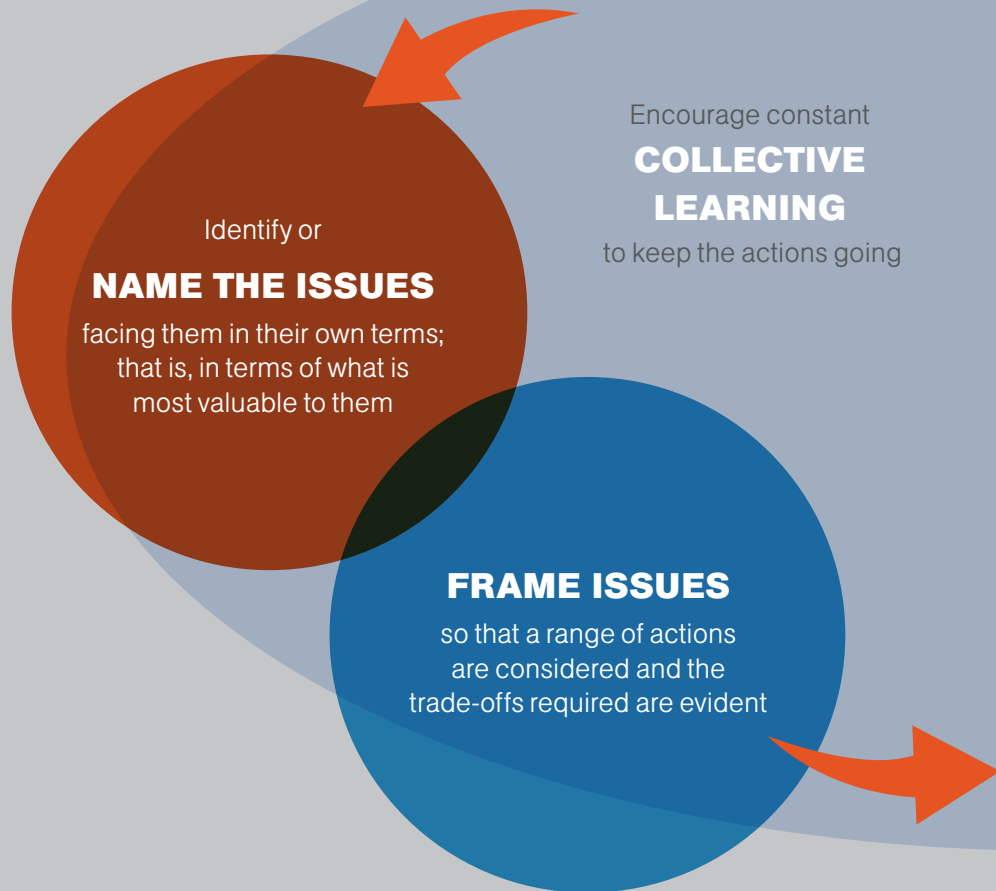


START IN THE POLITICAL WETLANDS

Political life usually begins locally and small: that is, in neighborhoods, in informal associations, and around kitchen tables. We call this arena the political wetlands.

How Do Citizens THROUGH DEMOCRATIC

CITIZENS CAN TURN EVERYDAY ROUTINES INTO DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES THAT GIVE THEM MORE CONTROL OVER THEIR FUTURE.



Work Together PRACTICES



Democratic practices are ways citizens can address problems—even when they disagree. Without them, the problems have the upper hand because people are unable to work together.

How Can Citizens Put Democratic Practices to Work?

ASKING ORDINARY QUESTIONS CAN REVEAL EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITIES

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE GROW OUT OF THE ORDINARY QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ONE ANOTHER WHEN SOMETHING THREATENS THEIR COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING.

How does this problem affect you and your family?

What do you think is the right thing to do?

What might be the consequences? If there are negative consequences to what you propose, do you think we should still do it?

What are our options?

Who else do we need to solve the problem?

What resources could we use?

Can we support one another?



WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

How Does the Foundation Do Its Work ? THROUGH JOINT LEARNING EXCHANGES

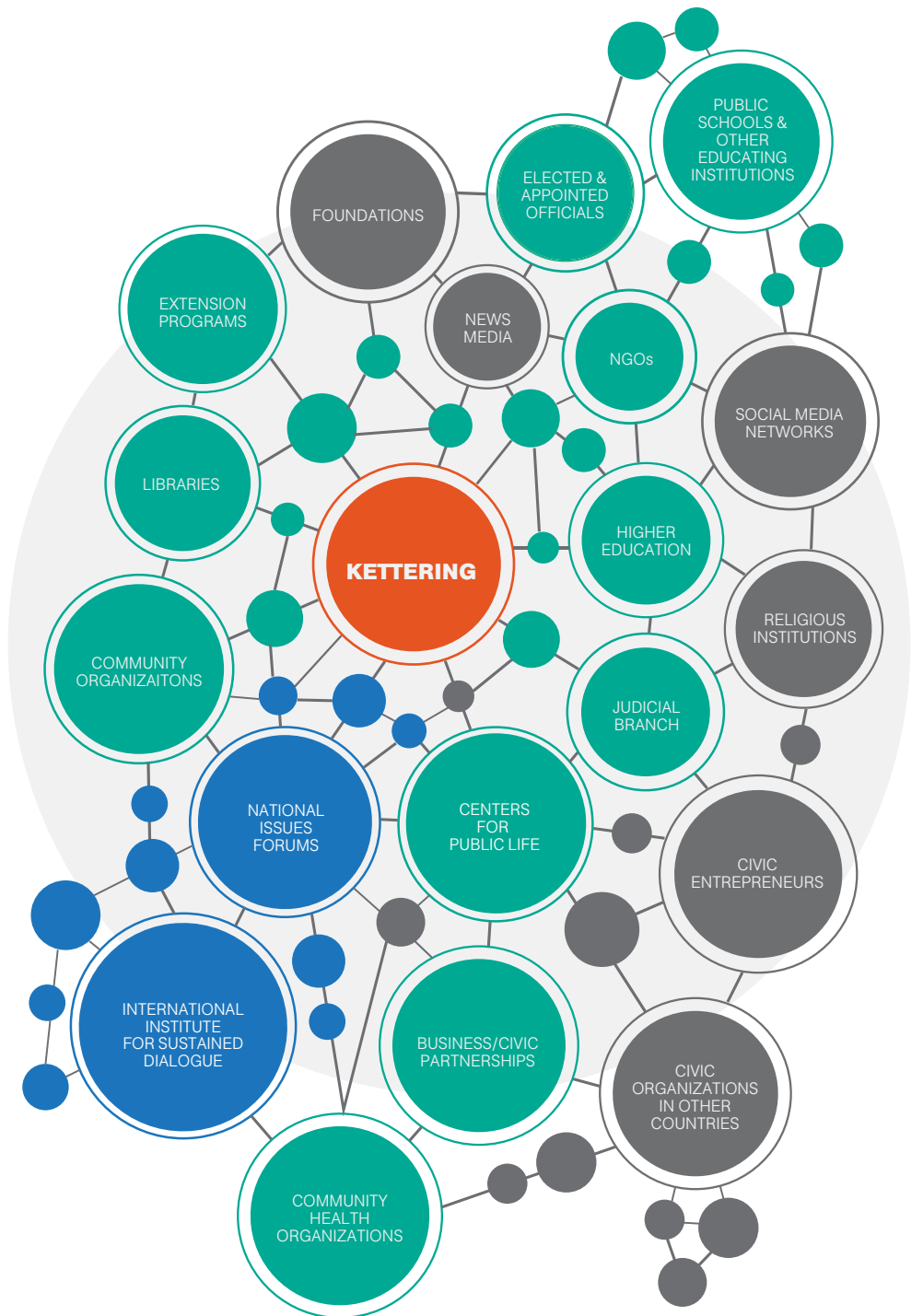
As a research institution, the Kettering Foundation works primarily through joint learning exchanges with civic organizations, communities, and institutions that are experimenting with ways to strengthen democracy. Those involved in these workshops trade their experiences for insights that Kettering has collected from past exchanges with a wide range of groups from around the world.

Joint learning exchanges focus on solving particular problems that all participants in the workshops have a stake in addressing, even if they are not from research institutions (and most aren't). Preliminary exchanges may test to see whether there is, in fact, a shared interest in a problem. Or workshop participants may assemble information from a number of sources in order to get a more complete account of a troubling issue or an unrealized potential. Other exchanges are based on comparing experiments to solve fundamental problems of, or intrinsic to, democracy.

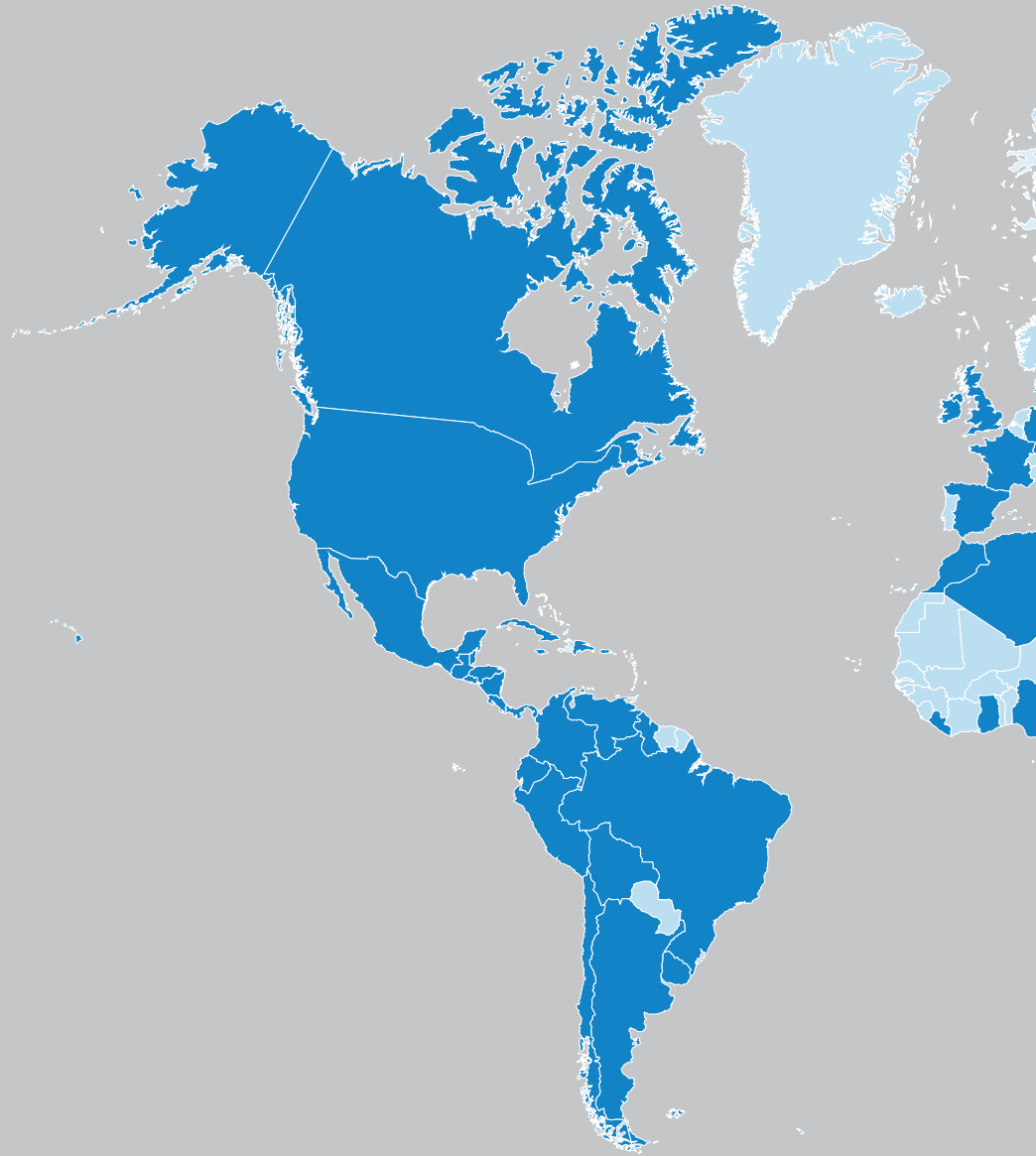
These experiments may or may not be successful; the objective of an exchange isn't to praise or blame but rather to share what participants struggle with and hope to learn more about. Insights from past exchanges and other Kettering research will be on the table to test against participants' experiences. Some exchanges can be completed in one meeting; others may require gathering over several years.



Who Does the Kettering Foundation Do Collaborative Research With NETWORKS



Worldwide Civic



NETWORKS



Kettering has exchanged research with citizens from *countries shaded in dark blue*.

Who Does the Kettering Foundation

Work For **?**

CITIZENS WHO
WANT A STRONGER
HAND IN SHAPING
THEIR COLLECTIVE
FUTURE



HOW CAN WE COME TOGETHER AS
A COMMUNITY
TO REBUILD OUR COMMUNITY?

Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental research foundation rooted in the American tradition of invention.

The foundation does not make grants.



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