

Introduction

THE THEORETICAL LITERATURE on deliberative democracy has grown substantially in recent years, and a great many academic and theoretical propositions have been advanced for expanding the role of deliberation and dialogue in public life and problem solving. At the same time, a large and growing community of practitioners in communities across the country is working every day to deal with real issues and solve problems by talking them out. Yet the actual interface between theory and practice in this arena has been extremely limited, and considerable resistance is encountered from both theorists and practitioners to the “pracademic” ideal that theory should be informed by practice and vice versa. Throughout this volume, we have sought to bring together considerations of theory and practice.

In this final section, two additional chapters are offered that bear on this issue. In the first, coeditor Roger A. Lohmann, founding director of the Nova Institute, takes on the question of locating and marshalling the resources necessary to mount effective public deliberation or sustained dialogue efforts. While it would be premature to call this a bona fide “economics of deliberation and dialogue,” this chapter points in that direction. (Were we attempting to reach a different, more theoretical audience, in fact, this chapter would probably have the word “prolegomena” in the title; even so, it represents a very preliminary beginning.)

Finally, Jon Van Til and Dolly Ford look toward the future and offer a position of cautious optimism regarding the futures of both public deliberation and sustained dialogue.

