

Let's Talk Alaska

Next Let's Talk Alaska Dialogue – Wednesday, April 11 from 6 to 8 pm in the Moose Room at the Loussac: Saving Democracy: What can we do?

The purpose of this dialogue is to answer the question: What can we do to save democracy? The focus of discussion is our role as citizens; what is required of us for a democracy to work. The determinates of our behavior—our capabilities—requires an understanding of the latest research on the psychology of choice making and how our membership in groups affects the decisions we make. We may not be the rational beings we think we are.

Come to the Loussac Library, for a facilitated discussion on what you are thinking and feeling.

Updated document for this discussion: [Saving Democracy Lite 3.17.18](#)

[Saving Democracy](#) – This is the entire background document for this series. Part I was discussed on February 14th. Part II will be discussed on March 14th. Part III will be discussed on April 11th. Please join us for all or just part of this series.

[Saving Democracy Part I](#) – The Political Problem. This was the discussion on February 14th.

Let's Talk Alaska typically meets on the second Wednesday of each month at Loussac.

What is LTA?

Let's Talk Alaska is a library based program of community dialogue. Its purpose is to enrich community and strengthen democracy by engaging citizens in conversations that build

trusting relationships. You – the participants – will choose the topics you wish to explore. The only requirement is that they address the program purpose of Doing Democracy and can be discussed in terms of the following questions:

1. What about this topic makes me Happy? Worried? Confused?
2. How does this topic fit with the founding values of our nation as set forth in our Constitution?
3. What can we do about this topic that upholds the values we hold dear?

Who does it serve?

You and all other Alaskans who care about the future we are creating for our children and grandchildren.

How does it work?

It is an evolving program. Public Libraries in participating communities provide space for people to gather and converse. Program support includes community volunteers working with library staff.

Let's Talk Anchorage was formed as a volunteer collaboration presently composed of Alaska Common Ground, the Anchorage Library, and a volunteer Coordinating Committee. We describe it as "an open association of individuals and organizations working to increase the use of public libraries as centers for democratic dialogue." Our goal is to be open and responsive to all individuals and organizations in the community that have a need or interest in dialogue and deliberation.

The LTAnch Coordinating Committee provides direction and support for the Anchorage program as the experiential base for development of a larger statewide network. Its members also provide facilitation skills and services, event design expertise, and marketing support.

Alaska's Fiscal Crunch – [Discussion guide](#) .

What's a Fiscal Crunch? Why should we care? What can we do about it?

A dialog was held on January 28th on this topic. [You can download the handout here.](#)

Who are we?

The LTAnch Coordinating Committee presently consists of the following individuals:

- Bill Hall: Alaska Common Ground
- Rayette Sterling: Anchorage Public Library
- Karen Hunt: Citizen Volunteer
- Dick LaFever: Citizen Volunteer
- Mia Oxley: Citizen Volunteer
- Libby Roderick: UAA
- Peg Tileston: Alaska Common Ground
- Kitty Farnham: Citizen Volunteer
- Janet Bidwell: Alaska Common Ground
- Laurie Evans-Dinneen: Alaska Humanities Forum

Others who have contributed include:

- Nancy Clark: Anchorage Public Library
- Elizabeth Moreau-Nicolai: Anchorage Public Library
- Travis Gilmour: Alaska Public Media
- Susan Klein: Citizen Volunteer
- Kari Gardey: Alaska Common Ground
- Patricia Linville – Seward Community Library & Museum
- June Pinnell-Stephens: Fairbanks: Retired
- Jessica Ieremla: Petersburg Public Library
- Patricia Brown: Haines Public Library
- June Sobocinski: United Way of Anchorage
- Cesar Martinson: UAA Student

History

Let's Talk Alaska is the result of over 6 years of work that was originally funded by a \$5,000 research contract from the [Kettering Foundation](#). The first contract was awarded to Alaska Common Ground in October of 2006 for the purpose of facilitating the organization of a Public Policy Institute (PPI) in Alaska as part of the [National Issues Forums Network](#) (NIFI). It also required a research report that would document our successes and failures in organizing and operating a PPI.

"Public Policy Institutes" were renamed "Centers for Public Life" to reflect the primary purpose of the organizations as community based sponsors of public dialogue. There are over 50 such centers, most of which are associated with universities or colleges. Together they constitute the National Issues Forums network which focuses on national issues using a model of dialogue defined in "Issue Guides" they publish.

Our efforts in Alaska were supported by a total of 3 research contracts over a 6 year period totaling \$15,000. Kettering also paid for attendance at conferences and training workshops that a number of Alaskans attended.

The research approach to organizing an Alaskan Center for Public Life was useful in that it permitted us to experiment with different organizational approaches. We attempted a variety of both organizational and public dialogue options that led us to our present model of public library based center for civic dialogue using a collaborative organizational approach. Let's Talk Alaska is our name for a statewide network of programs of which Let's Talk Anchorage is a part. We have introduced our work to other communities through presentations delivered at the annual conferences of the Alaska Library Association and have worked with libraries in Petersburg, Haines, and Seward.

What have we done?

In addition to our *Dialogues in Democracy* program, we have held many meetings and a few civic dialogues including a recent experiment in open dialogue called [Socrates Café](#). Early efforts used NIFI issue books on:

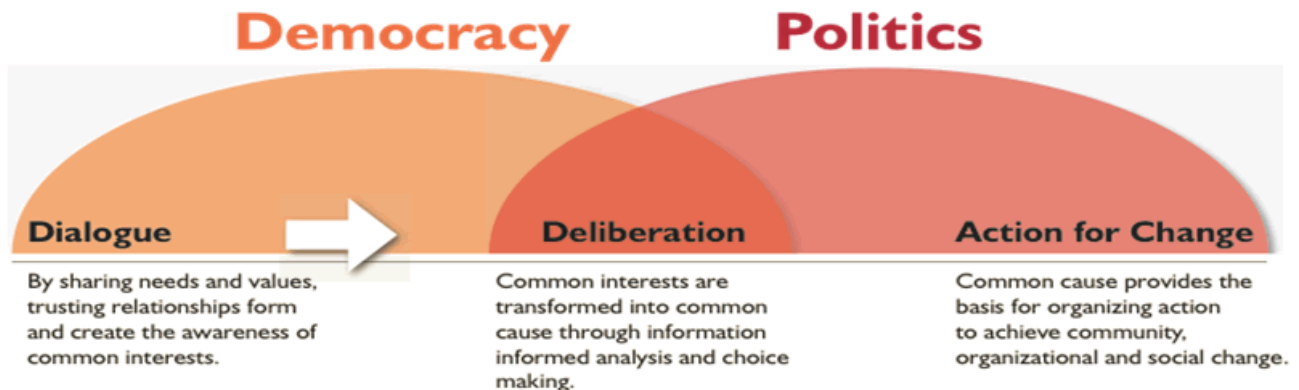
- Money & Politics: Who Owns Democracy?
- Democracy's Challenge: Reclaiming the Public's Role
- Social Security: How can we afford it?, and
- The Energy Problem: Choices for an Uncertain Future.

We also organized our first community conversation in December of 2011; *The Occupy Movement: What is it?* Our most recent event held on April 25 of this year was a *Community Conversation on Civic Dialogue*. Over 25 individuals attended and provided information on 20 organizations that use dialogue in their work.

Theory & Practice

Our work is organized around the following construct which distinguishes between dialogue and deliberation as two distinct, but connected, activities that can lead to social action – or not.

Hall Construct for Communicative Action



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Let's Talk Alaska focuses on the first two of the three-part construct and attempts to explicitly design events as either dialogues or deliberations. We also value the resources provided by the [National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation](#).