



# **LISTENING TO CALIFORNIANS: BRIDGING THE DISCONNECT**

**A Report to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
and  
The James Irvine Foundation**

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# Listening to Californians: Bridging the Disconnect

## Executive Summary

In the spring of 2004, Viewpoint Learning, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation, undertook a statewide research project designed to provide state and local leaders with deeper insight into the views, values and underlying assumptions of average Californians on some of the key issues and choices facing the state. The purpose was to find practical ways to build the public support needed to effectively address important fiscal and policy challenges, and to improve the relationship between citizens and state and local government.

To gain insight into citizen thinking, we conducted a series of intense, 8-hour dialogues with average Californians across the state. These *ChoiceDialogues*<sup>™</sup> focused on the kind of California participants want to see for themselves and their children: the kinds of services they expect from state and local governments and the choices, tradeoffs and costs they are prepared to support to achieve those ends. ChoiceDialogues provide insight that polls and focus groups cannot. This innovative methodology is described in more detail in Appendix A of the report.

As a starting point, participants explored two distinct scenarios for the future of the state. In developing those scenarios, we paid particular heed to the ideological split that divides those who give priority to a market-based approach from those who give precedence to community wellbeing. We wanted to learn whether and to what extent this split divides the California public. To make the discussion as concrete as possible, the scenarios were illustrated by showing how they would impact specific policy issues. Some dialogues considered issues from general policy areas (health care, K-12 education and transportation) and some focused more closely on infrastructure (water, K-12 school facilities, and transportation). These issues were not the primary focus of the project but provided a concrete way to bring to the surface the underlying values and viewpoints of Californians and to explore larger questions of governance.

The results of the ChoiceDialogues were deepened and extended through a set of *Stakeholder Dialogues* that brought elected leaders together with some of the citizens from the ChoiceDialogues creating a different kind of conversation; and through an experiment in *Proxy Dialogue*, an innovative media format designed to scale up civic engagement to a larger audience.

This Executive Summary reports the key findings of the project and summarizes what we have learned about alleviating the climate of mistrust and building the public support that will be needed to address critical issues confronting the state. The research suggests a number of constructive actions that leaders can take to that end.

## Seven Major Findings

- 1. Two competing conceptions of fairness dominate public thinking about policy issues. However, these operate beneath the surface as unstated**

**assumptions, often confusing the issue and creating the appearance of greater division than actually exists.**

Two distinct definitions of equity came into play during the dialogues, each reflecting different underlying assumptions. One view saw equity as giving more to those who have less. The other view defined equity as everyone receiving the same level of service or support regardless of his or her situation. Some of the most passionate arguments we saw during the dialogues resulted from misunderstandings between participants who held these different unstated definitions of equity: different hidden assumptions led participants to talk past each other, fostered greater misunderstanding and stirred up especially strong emotions. In the area of health care, for example, heated arguments over who should be covered (in particular immigrants) actually turned out to be about whether those in greatest need should receive more.

At the same time, significant areas of common ground lay beneath these misunderstandings (although they were often obscured by them). We found that even when divergent assumptions about equity came into play most strongly, building on common ground led to agreement to act. (For health care, that common ground included support for universal coverage and for greater personal responsibility.) On the other hand, trying to take advantage of the different conceptions of fairness with “wedge issues” led to polarization and gridlock. How diverging assumptions about equity affected participants’ approach to health care is further illustrated in Box 2 of the report (see page 24).

**2. Framing issues in terms of physical infrastructure increases support for market-based approaches.**

The dialogues consistently revealed that Californians are more likely to support market-based solutions when the issue is framed in terms of dealing with physical objects like roads and bridges – infrastructure where people assume the private sector has an advantage. In the dialogues that focused on infrastructure, participants were much more open to a strong role for the private sector and market-based mechanisms. But when participants engaged the identical issue in the context of dialogues focusing on broader policy questions, they were much less inclined to embrace market-based solutions. Instead, in that broader policy frame, they gave more emphasis to social values, stressing the importance of making sure that all Californians have access to the services they need. For example, support for the idea of making greater use of privately owned and user financed options such as toll roads and toll lanes remained unchanged during the general policy dialogues, but when this proposal was presented in identical terms during the infrastructure dialogues, support rose significantly over the course of the day. What had changed was the context or frame of the conversation, and that seemed to make all the difference. The case of transportation is discussed in more detail in Box 1 of the report (see page 22).

**3. For most Californians pragmatism wins out over ideology.**

While many participants entered the dialogues with strongly held political beliefs, they were far more interested in finding workable solutions than in adhering to a particular ideology. They demonstrated a ready willingness to mix and match elements from

differing political approaches – market-based, public sector, “conservative” or “liberal” – as long as the result was a solution that would work for themselves and their communities. Their guiding question as the day evolved was not “Does this fit into my political framework?” but “Will this work?” As a result, participants’ conclusions on specific issues had a common-sense, practical cast, gravitating toward solutions that meshed with their key values: efficiency, personal and community responsibility, value for money, and fairness.

For example, on K-12 education, when asked whether increasing parental choice (and using related market mechanisms such as vouchers) or investing more in neighborhood schools would provide the best way forward; participants consistently reframed those alternatives into a set of priorities or a sequence of steps to be followed: 1) do everything possible to improve neighborhood schools; 2) to the degree that isn’t successful, allow parents to move their children within the public system; 3) (agreed to by many, but not most) to the degree the first two steps don’t work, allow parents to move their children outside the public system using vouchers. As they worked through each of the issues, participants were surprised by the amount of common ground they were able to find. They repeatedly contrasted their common-sense approach with what they perceived to be the overly partisan stance of political leaders that often hampered efforts to find or implement solutions. In other words, the ideological divisions that preoccupy so many among political elites seem much less important to most Californians.

**4. Californians are insufficiently engaged in policy issues of great importance to them, and so have not given much thought to the tough tradeoffs that each of them requires. This creates and reinforces a striking disconnect between citizens and government.**

On most issues we found citizens engaged in a significant amount of wishful thinking at the beginning of each dialogue – for example, about the real cost of changes in transit systems, or about how much could actually be saved by reducing “waste, fraud and abuse” in government. This also reflected the degree to which Californians don’t feel they have a voice in shaping public policy, and therefore have no incentive to get engaged and to confront tough choices.

One of the most consistent and striking findings of these dialogues was the extent of the disconnect between citizens and elected leaders. Where leaders too often see a public that wants everything but doesn’t want to pay for it, the public sees tax dollars disappearing into a black box of budgeting and mysterious decision-making. Where leaders too often see an uninformed public with little to contribute to policy-making, the public sees a decision-making process completely taken over by special interests and partisan battling. Where leaders too often see an apathetic public that has little interest in being engaged, the public sees governments doing little of value to address the challenges that matter most to them.

At the same time, in both the ChoiceDialogues and stakeholder dialogues, we saw repeatedly that Californians really do want to be more deeply engaged in the issues that affect their lives. Once dialogue participants saw that their voices were being heard and taken seriously, mistrust and wishful thinking quickly turned into a constructive, problem-solving approach to the issues, and the conversation became more realistic.

Californians are not prepared, however, to take the initiative to bridge this disconnect, and conventional political involvement is out of the comfort zone of most people. Other approaches are needed.

**5. An all-pervasive climate of mistrust exists throughout the state that distorts all issues, creates gridlock, and causes citizens to restrict government freedom of action**

In every one of the 15 dialogues, and on every issue examined, profound mistrust of government and elected officials emerged as a central underlying issue shaping all other responses. This mistrust was both more intense and more persistent than expected, outstripping the levels that have been measured by polls and focus groups. In the course of the day, that level even increased somewhat as participants found their worst suspicions confirmed by others' experiences, and sharing those experiences served to reinforce their anger and frustration with government. Most participants channeled their mistrust into two clearly articulated themes: (1) a universal demand for greater accountability and transparency, and (2) increasing support for public/private sector partnerships as a means of establishing checks and balances.

While ChoiceDialogue participants frequently gained a much clearer sense of the root causes of problems over the course of the daylong dialogues, the combination of mistrust and the disconnect led them to back away from solutions that involved giving government greater discretion or latitude. In every dialogue, on every issue examined, participants cited examples of what they saw as waste, inefficiency and abuse that justified their lack of confidence in government. A number of the most frequently mentioned examples are summarized in Box 3 of the report (see page 26). As they worked through the issues, participants found that their desire for solutions could not overcome their sense that giving government any additional scope for action without the most rigorous accountability would only open the door to greater abuses. As a result, they concluded that current limitations on government (including Proposition 13, spending limits, voter mandates and supermajorities) must be strongly maintained, believing that these restrictions represent citizens' best protection against a system that cannot be trusted to act in their best interest. Citizen views on Proposition 13 are further described in Box 8 of the report (see page 31).

In other words, mistrust and the disconnect are far more than background noise. Instead, they combine to affect every issue considered in these dialogues. Until and unless these deeper issues can be addressed – bridging the disconnect and rebuilding trust – it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make far-reaching, sustainable reforms that go beyond a patchwork of temporary fixes.

**6. Californians have a clear and strongly held conviction that greater openness and accountability are needed. This demand reflects the high levels of mistrust, but openness and accountability alone will not be enough to reduce that mistrust.**

A fundamental and recurring theme throughout all of the dialogues was the need for greater accountability and transparency. This demand was the flip side of participants'

deep mistrust of government and elected officials. In particular, participants emphasized the importance of:

- Knowing more about how their tax dollars are being spent, and to have that information provided in a format that is both easily accessible and understandable (“not gobbledy-gook”).
- A much tighter connection between the taxes they pay and how they are spent, being able to follow the money more easily and hold those responsible to account, and to see real consequences for those who do not live up to their responsibilities. Box 4 describes how participants want to “follow the money” in the case of surface transportation (see page 27).
- A stronger audit and accountability system that is run or verified by third parties and provides more access for citizens.
- Greater local control, in part to make it easier to “follow the money” and strengthen accountability. Box 5 describes how participants ultimately balanced statewide standards, local control and individual accountability in the area of K-12 education (see page 28).

In all of the specific issue areas examined, participants indicated a willingness to pay more for specific outcomes, but only if they can be satisfied the money they already pay is being well spent, and that any additional money will be used to achieve those outcomes.

While strengthening transparency and accountability is a necessary part of learning to live with mistrust, more will be needed to actually reduce that mistrust.

## **7. Citizens’ mistrust is not completely impenetrable: it is a crust that covers a deep desire to find constructive solutions to the problems facing the state**

Despite the level of mistrust and concern about the direction in which California is headed, we also saw hopeful signs that it will be possible to bridge the disconnect and rebuild trust. In particular:

- The common ground identified as a result of dialogue was much greater than participants expected.
- Participants consistently expressed a willingness to make sacrifices to obtain specific outcomes if accountability is increased. This included not only a willingness to pay more, but also to change their own behavior, for example using less water, becoming more involved with local schools, carpooling and more. Box 6 summarizes some of the opportunities for citizens to change behavior and become more accountable for specific outcomes that were most frequently suggested during the dialogues (see page 28).
- Dialogue participants clearly and repeatedly expressed a desire to be more engaged and to have a voice in the future of California. Before they experienced the dialogue, the notion of being “more involved” too often conjured images of endless hearings, debate and sniping. The existence of alternative dialogue-based formats was an exciting possibility for participants.
- Mistrust and cynicism can be overcome and replaced by a constructive, problem-

solving attitude – once participants conclude that the conversation is serious and that their viewpoints are being heard.

- Engagement is a two-way street - if leaders want the public to listen, they must listen in turn. Improving the listening mechanism of government, and reducing some of its distortions, may be the highest leverage way to begin to bridge the disconnect and rebuild trust.

## **What Leaders Can Do: Breaking Through the Crust of Mistrust**

The pervasive climate of mistrust found during these dialogues is not unique to California, though it appears to be especially strong here. In the wake of a spate of corporate scandals, problems of civil society organizations ranging from the Catholic Church to the Red Cross, and growing political polarization and partisanship, the nation has been thrown into a period of mistrust. This is the third such wave of mistrust we have seen in the last century. The first coincided with the Great Depression, and the second with the cultural revolution of the 60's and 70's. Each earlier wave lasted about a decade; we don't know how long this third wave of mistrust will last.

The national climate of mistrust makes it even more difficult for California to dissipate mistrust at the state level. But California has led the way in many areas; perhaps it can lead here too. Despite a great deal of energy and excitement generated recently by the unprecedented recall of a sitting governor, Californians are no more trusting of their governments than they were before Governor Schwarzenegger took up residence in Sacramento. But at the same time we now have a new governor who has built up immense political capital that can be dedicated to improving the relationship between leaders and citizens.

The research findings reported here suggest a number of steps that leaders can take to break through the crust of mistrust, improve the relationship between citizens and state and local government and build the public support needed to address important fiscal and policy challenges. The key point is that everyday norms and ethics of self-interested behavior that may have been acceptable in the past no longer work in a climate of mistrust. In such a climate, where those in authority are less likely to be given the benefit of the doubt, leaders need to demonstrate higher standards, what might be called “stewardship ethics.” Stewardship ethics means a commitment to leave your organization, community or state better off than you found it, being clear on how your actions contribute to that end, and engaging the public in setting expectations and understanding results in that context. The following steps can help leaders move in this direction:

- **Focus sharply on accountability and tangible outcomes to rebuild confidence**

Californians are not prepared to move in a single leap to questions like changing supermajority requirements or revising Proposition 13. But they are open to a more gradual approach that focuses on specific outcomes they want to see and then takes steps to achieve those outcomes in ways that are more open and accountable. By taking these more limited steps now, elected officials can rebuild the trust needed to make bigger changes later.

For example, statewide school accountability standards put in place over the last few

years, combined with annual public report cards on each school's success in meeting them, have gained widespread public attention and support. Steps such as these have begun to rebuild confidence that the state's schools are doing their best to educate children, and we saw this view reflected in the dialogues. In the field of infrastructure, similar efforts are underway in several counties across the state to develop an annual report card on how the county is performing in eight crucial infrastructure areas.

- **Set high but achievable standards and goals, then develop and publish metrics that report success or failure in meeting them**

As illustrated in the examples of the school and infrastructure report cards, there is no better way to build credibility than by developing and publishing metrics that monitor how well leaders are doing in meeting specific objectives and standards. Keys to success include focusing on a specific policy area and on objectives the public wants to see achieved; and then setting standards and goals that are high but do not create unrealistic expectations, and reporting regularly to the public on both success and failure in achieving those standards. Setting explicit objectives and standards gives leaders a measure of control over the all-important matter of voter expectations.

Even when objectives are intangible (e.g., quality of health care) it is possible not only to reduce these to more tangible indicators (e.g., waiting times), but also — and usually more relevantly — to measure the perceptions of experts and consumers on how well intangible benefits are delivered, and use these to create useful metrics.

- **Improve government's ability and mechanisms to listen to ordinary Californians**

The improved listening mechanisms required can only partly be provided by polls and focus groups (which can be misleading on issues where people have not made up their minds). Nor can interest groups (which by definition do not represent unorganized Californians) meet this need, nor can traditional town hall meetings do so. Alternative listening mechanisms, such as those used in this project (based on forms of dialogue that encourage two-way learning and thoughtful interchange of views rather than debate), show great promise and need to be further developed and tested.

- **Take the initiative**

The unorganized public today generally does not have the resources, time, institutional capacity or access to those in authority needed to change the conversation with leaders. As a practical matter leaders need to take the first step. For example, establishing citizen tested and approved objectives and milestones and then using progress reports as occasions for public discussion, can stimulate constructive public engagement.

- **Close the loop between citizens and government: move from one-way “spin” to two-way dialogue**

Too often communication from government to citizens is conceived as a one-way, top-down effort designed to educate or persuade (“spin”) citizens to agree with a position already decided. While citizens have a lot to learn from leaders, leaders also have a great deal to learn from citizens. To be sustainable in a democracy today, any major policy

decision (especially on gridlock issues) needs to meet at least two tests: it needs to be technically feasible and it needs to reflect the underlying values of the citizenry. Only citizens (not experts, not special interests) can give leaders the input on values they need to craft sustainable reforms.

- **Scale up the conversation**

As a practical matter, 35 million Californians cannot participate in face-to-face dialogues with elected leaders but, as discussed in the report, there are other ways in which this conversation can be scaled up:

1. through the political process and the special role that political and civic leaders can play
2. through new ways of using the media

### **Conclusion: A Missing Step in the Governance Process**

The specific issues examined in this project provided a concrete way to bring Californians' underlying values and viewpoints to the surface and to explore larger questions of governance. At the same time there was not enough time to fully work through the particulars of any one issue (nor was this the purpose of this project). Each of the issues examined (and many others) could usefully be the subject of a separate ChoiceDialogue.

In our experience, participants in dialogues focused on a single policy area are able to work through the tradeoffs more fully; dialogues of this sort can provide essential input to defining measurable goals and achievable outcomes that the public will support. Engaging Californians on specific policy issues in this way will be an important part of rebuilding trust and bridging the disconnect.

Traditional notions of governance and decision-making tend to be relatively simple – issues arise, key interests advocate different responses and a decision is made. This may work well enough when the issues and the possible responses are reasonably well understood, and where those involved share similar assumptions, language, background and culture. But in California today, mistrust runs rampant and people with very different beliefs, problem-definitions, values and traditions must find common ground. The state's ability to deal with a whole range of issues – from schools, transportation and health care to immigration, welfare and the criminal justice system – now depends on addressing deeper issues: mistrust and the disconnect. To do this an additional step is needed. That is where dialogue comes in.

In today's world, we need to make room for real dialogue with the public at the front end of many of our most important decision-making processes, and to do so in a more explicit and systematic way.

# Listening to Californians: Bridging the Disconnect

## I. Introduction

Despite a great deal of energy and excitement generated recently by the unprecedented recall of a sitting governor, Californians are no more trusting of their governments than they were before Governor Schwarzenegger took up residence in Sacramento. In fact, a statewide series of citizen dialogues completed in June of 2004 revealed even more powerful mistrust and frustration among California citizens than had been seen previously. These findings may have serious implications for policy reform and governance in America's most populous state in the years to come. In such a climate, even routine policy-making is extremely difficult; innovative reform of policy or governance structures is nearly impossible.

The people of California and their governments appear to be trapped in a vicious downward spiral, in which the widening gap between citizens and their government sparks a cascade of negative consequences:

- Citizen alienation fosters support for initiatives designed to control government (by changing the tax system, mandating expenditures, limiting terms, requiring supermajorities, etc.);
- Limiting the tools that governments can use to govern and deal with important issues reduces government effectiveness;
- Reduced government effectiveness increases citizens' sense that they are not getting value for their tax dollars;
- Unrealistic citizen demands increase government's doubts about citizens' ability to make or understand difficult choices;
- Mistrust of the public encourages government and special interests to try to manage the public through spin and sophisticated political tactics (often negative);
- Spin and tactical maneuvering provide fodder for media – who sometimes reinforce spin, but more often report on the “inside game” of politics, dramatize conflict and spotlight inconsistencies between what is said and what is done;
- Such reports further alienate citizens from government, further reduce their sense that they are receiving fair value for their tax dollar and further diminish trust;
- And so on, down the spiral.

A critical step in breaking free of the misunderstanding and mistrust, and building essential public support, is to find ways that governments, and especially elected leaders, can develop deeper insight into the views, underlying assumptions and values of unorganized citizens. Such insight cannot be provided by interest groups, which by definition do not represent the views of unorganized citizens. Nor can they be fully provided by polls and focus groups, which can be misleading when citizens have not made up their minds. (Our research findings suggest that Californians have not made up their minds on the vast majority of important policy issues facing the state.) Under these conditions people's surface opinions are highly unstable. Polls and focus groups (which take snapshots of opinions) provide little

sense of how those opinions are likely to evolve as people learn, or of the kind of leadership initiatives that can help accelerate this learning process.

ChoiceDialogues™ were developed to deal with issues where people have not yet made up their minds – to engage citizens in working through their views on complex, gridlock issues. ChoiceDialogues provide an innovative and tested way to compress the “working through” process, in which dialogue participants come to understand the pros and cons of various policy options, struggle with the necessary trade-offs of each, and come to a considered judgment – all in the course of a single eight-hour day. These dialogues offer unprecedented insight into how and why people’s minds change as they learn. And when conducted with a representative sample, they provide both a basis for anticipating how the broader public will resolve issues once they have the opportunity to come to grips with them, and insight on how best to lead such a learning process on a larger scale. (For additional detail on the ChoiceDialogue methodology, see Appendix A.)

### **Project overview**

In the spring of 2004, Viewpoint Learning, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation, undertook a statewide research project designed to:

- Provide key decision makers with insight into how Californians are likely to resolve the difficult choices and tradeoffs facing the state in the years to come,
- Engage unorganized citizens and bring their thoughtful views into the policy process
- Test a new form of two-way dialogue that brings together elected leaders with the “average” citizens they represent, creating a different kind of conversation
- Test innovative uses of the media in “scaling up” civic engagement to the broader public

The project consisted of four closely related components:

1. *ChoiceDialogues on California’s Future.* Through a series of nine ChoiceDialogues with representative samples of Californians (30-40 per session), we explored the kind of California citizens want to see in the future, in particular the services they expect from state and local governments and the tradeoffs they are prepared to support to achieve their vision. The dialogues used three major policy areas as cases in point: K-12 education, health care, and transportation. These dialogues took place in three key regions: the Central Valley, the Inland Empire and the Bay Area.
2. *Stakeholder Dialogues.* The ChoiceDialogues were followed by a set of “Stakeholder Dialogues” that brought together some citizens from the earlier dialogues with elected and civic leaders from that area. Participants looked for common ground between the vision and tradeoffs the citizens defined, and the realities and future the leaders see, and developed practical action plans.
3. *Proxy Dialogue.* An edited and highly produced version of the ChoiceDialogues and Stakeholder Dialogues was broadcast on PBS stations statewide (on *California Connected*). This experiment with an innovative television format called Proxy Dialogue was designed to scale up the conversation to a much wider audience.

4. *ChoiceDialogues on California's Infrastructure.* We also conducted a second set of ChoiceDialogues that built in part on the first set of general policy dialogues. Conducted in conjunction with the Public Policy Institute of California's *California 2025* project, these dialogues focused specifically on how citizens resolve tradeoffs required to improve California's infrastructure. In these dialogues, participants considered transportation, water and K-12 school facilities as cases in point.

## **II. ChoiceDialogues: Understanding Citizen Priorities**

### **A. How the dialogues were conducted**

A total of 15 ChoiceDialogues were conducted across the state.<sup>1</sup> Each ChoiceDialogue brought together 30-40 randomly selected participants representing a cross section of the public in the area. In all, more than 500 Californians participated in the daylong dialogues. As a starting point, participants used a specially designed workbook, in a tested format, constructed around two distinct scenarios or choices for the future of the state:

1. **Emphasize the Market and Individual Choice.** The first scenario is to encourage individuals and businesses to make California more innovative, competitive and productive, providing greater opportunities for Californians to excel and improve their standard of living. It is a California where competition in every sphere keeps prices low and increases consumer choice. In this California, individuals take greater control over all aspects of their lives and success or failure is their own responsibility. In this scenario taxes are lower and government provides only those services that the market cannot.
2. **Emphasize Fairness and Community Wellbeing.** The second scenario is to make California fairer and more community-minded, providing help to those most in need so that no one is left behind. It is a California where we give greater priority to the wellbeing of the community. In this California, state and local governments have greater responsibility and accountability for improving the quality of life of the community as a whole, enforcing community standards, and ensuring that effective programs and services are available for everyone. In this scenario taxes are higher and government provides more services.

In developing those scenarios, we paid particular heed to the ideological split that divides those who give priority to a market-based approach from those who give precedence to community wellbeing. We wanted to learn whether and to what extent this split divides the California public. To make the discussion as concrete as possible, the two scenarios were illustrated by means of case studies of how they would impact specific policy issues within the state's major spending categories. These specific issues were chosen based on interviews with a range of state and local leaders, both elected and civic. Nine of the dialogues approached the scenarios by considering examples from general policy areas (health care, K-12 education and transportation). The other six dialogues focused more closely on infrastructure (water, K-12 school facilities and the same information on transportation as in the general policy dialogues).

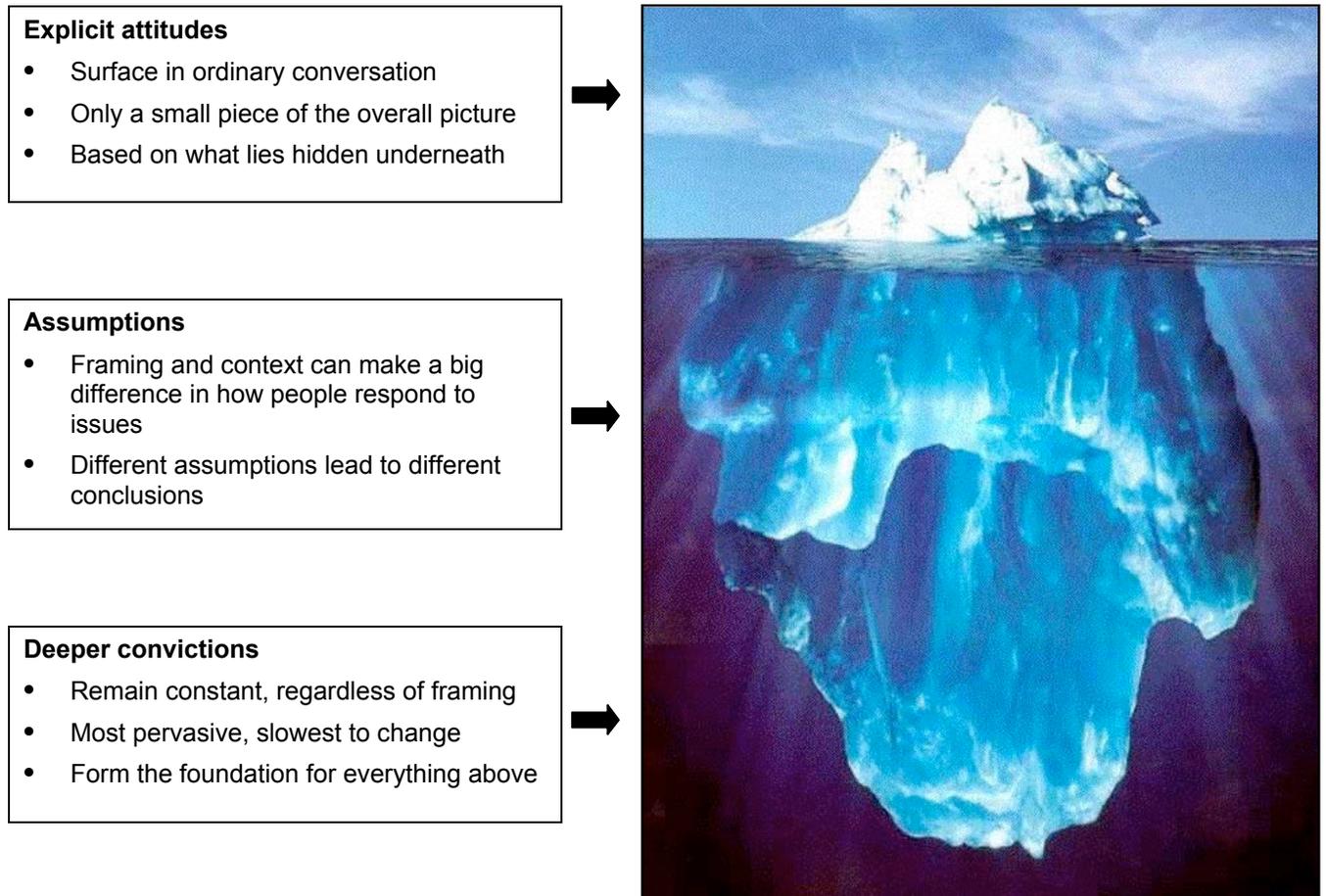
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<sup>1</sup> A list of dates, locations and topics covered at each of the individual dialogues can be found in Appendix B.

\B: Key findings and implications

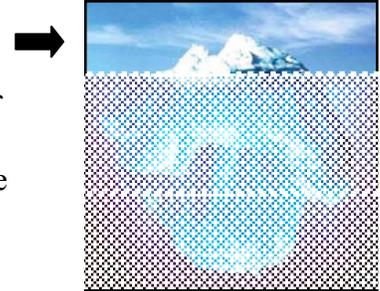
As the dialogues progressed and citizens began to work through difficult choices and tradeoffs, deeper values and underlying perspectives began to emerge more clearly. Citizens' attitudes on the specific issues we probed (education, health, water, etc.) were, in a sense, the tip of the iceberg, and those attitudes were founded on much deeper layers of tacit assumptions and frameworks that lie hidden beneath the surface. ChoiceDialogues help reveal these underlying layers and how they interact with and shape what lies above.

*The "iceberg" of citizen views revealed in the dialogues*



## 1. Explicit Attitudes: The Tip of the Iceberg

This project focused on the kind of California participants want to see for themselves and their children – in particular the kinds of services they expect from state and local governments – and the choices, tradeoffs and costs they are prepared to support to achieve those ends.



While many participants entered the dialogues with strongly held political beliefs, they were far more interested in finding workable solutions than in adhering to a particular ideology. They demonstrated a ready willingness to mix and match elements from differing political approaches – market-based, public sector, “conservative” or “liberal” – as long as the result was a solution that would work for themselves and their communities. Their guiding question as the day evolved was not “Does this fit into my political framework?” but “Will this work?” As a result, participants’ conclusions on specific issues had a common-sense, practical cast, gravitating toward solutions that meshed with their key values: efficiency, personal and community responsibility, value for money, and fairness. As they worked through each of the issues, participants were surprised by the amount of common ground they were able to find. Participants repeatedly contrasted their common-sense approach with what they perceived to be the overly partisan stance of political leaders that often hampered efforts to find or implement solutions.

The specific conclusions participants reached on each issue are summarized in this section of the report. While valuable in themselves, it is important to keep in mind that these specific issues were not the primary focus of this project, but rather provided a concrete way to bring Californians’ underlying values and viewpoints to the surface, and to explore larger questions of governance. What we found at those deeper levels of the iceberg will be described in the subsequent sections of this report.

*Participant Comment.<sup>2</sup>*  
*For many of us it seems like the major political parties are more interested in blaming each other for things than they are in solving any problems.*

### a. Transportation

The issue of transportation was presented using identical materials in both the general policy dialogues and the infrastructure dialogues. The following is based on the results from all 15 dialogues.

Participants’ support for public transit increased over the course of the day as they worked through the possibility of creating a better and different kind of public transit. What became clearer as the dialogue progressed was that people did not want to simply add funding for public transit as it currently exists. Instead they wanted to see more integrated, reliable, safe and comfortable systems – systems that would appeal to everyone *including* those who currently rely on cars. They realized that this would be expensive, but agreed they would be willing to pay more in taxes if it would result in a system that met their requirements.

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<sup>2</sup> Inset boxes present quotes from ChoiceDialogue participants. These verbatim comments represent views commonly expressed across all dialogues.

- This finding was consistent across the state. In all 15 dialogues, support for investing more in public transit started high (a mean of 7.0 out of 10) and it increased over the course of the day (to 7.4, with 43% increasing support while 28% reduced support).<sup>3</sup>

Participants also called for increased public education about public transit. If public transit is going to make a real difference, they concluded, Californians need to change deep-seated attitudes, and any viable plan for improving public transit must include effective outreach and education efforts.

As they worked through the issue, participants also concluded that improving public transit would require closer coordination between transportation planning and planning for housing, land use and environmental protection. To help accomplish this, they expressed growing support for the development of stronger regional authorities that could make and coordinate transportation and land use decisions, but only on condition that these authorities would be directly accountable to their communities, engage the public in their work and not add layers of bureaucracy to the system.

Dialogue participants recognized that automobiles will remain an essential part of our transportation system, and that roads and highways need to be maintained and improved. How participants felt that this should be accomplished, however, varied significantly depending on the context of the discussion.

- During the infrastructure dialogues there was a strong increase in support for encouraging greater private sector investment. In these dialogues participant support for such approaches (including private investment and operation, user fees, toll roads and toll lanes) increased by 3:1. 61% of participants increased their support and 22% reduced support, while the mean score for this choice rose from 5.4 to 6.7.
- In the general policy dialogues, by contrast, levels of support for these approaches remained essentially unchanged throughout the day, moving only from 5.5 to 5.6, with 37% increasing support and 36% decreasing support.

This difference underlines the power of framing and context. When operating in the context of an infrastructure conversation, participants found a strong role for the private

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<sup>3</sup> In each ChoiceDialogue, participants were surveyed twice, once at the beginning of the day and again at the end. They were asked to rate their response to each scenario independently on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being totally positive and 1 being totally negative. They also were asked a series of questions designed to rate their responses to specific cases in point. Quantitative results are expressed in terms of *means* and *shifts*.

- **Means:** The initial mean for each scenario indicates participants' average rating of the choice in the morning; the final mean represents participants' average rating of the same scenario at the end of the dialogue.
- **Shifts:** The "shifts" measure how widespread opinion change is within the group, as well as the direction of that change, by comparing individual participants' ratings of each scenario at the beginning and the end of the day. This provides a measure of the percentage of a group that increased its support for a particular approach over the course of the day, and also the percentage who decreased their support for that approach

In addition to these quantitative measures, detailed qualitative analysis was done of why views changed over the course of the day (based on analysis of videotapes of each session, along with notes from facilitators and trained observers, and flip charts produced by the participants during the dialogues).

sector and market/price mechanisms more legitimate and desirable. In the context of a broader policy discussion, however, social considerations became more important. (We will return to this finding in more detail in the following section – see page 21ff.)

We found strong support across the state for encouraging greater public-private partnership in building and maintaining transportation systems and encouraging more efficient use of transportation infrastructure (for example through carpooling, flextime and telecommuting). There were also calls to work with industry to encourage more rapid development of technologies that reduce vehicle emissions and increase fuel efficiency. This support for more public-private partnerships was also seen in all of the other infrastructure areas tested.

In both sets of dialogues, participants repeatedly expressed concern that taxes and fees that are supposed to be used for transportation may be used for other purposes, and called for a better accounting of how these dollars are spent.

### ***b. K-12 Education***

The general policy dialogues focused on broader questions of improving K-12 education, while the infrastructure dialogues focused more specifically on issues of K-12 school facilities.

In both sets of dialogues participants strongly supported the objective that every child should have access to a high quality education in a local neighborhood school.

- In the general policy dialogues, support for investing more in neighborhood schools increased over the course of the day from an already very high mean score of 7.1 (on a scale of 10) to 7.5, the highest score recorded on any of the choices measured during the dialogues.

When asked whether increasing parental choice (and using related market mechanisms such as vouchers) or investing more in neighborhood schools would provide the best way forward; participants consistently reframed those alternatives into a set of priorities or a sequence of steps to be followed:

1. Do all you can to improve neighborhood schools
2. To the degree that isn't successful parents should be able to move their children within the public system
3. Some, but not most, were willing to take a third step: to the degree that the first two steps aren't successful parents should be able to move their children outside the public system (through vouchers). This last step was very controversial and was not resolved during the dialogues. Those who supported this most strongly expressed high levels of mistrust and even cynicism about the public school system, and strongly doubted that any reforms within that system could succeed.

Dialogue participants recognized the need for statewide standards and wanted the state to establish and financially support a stronger framework of educational goals designed to make California's public education system the best in the nation once again; but they also wanted to see more local control in deciding how to meet those standards. In working through how this might be accomplished, they called for:

- Improving community-based mechanisms for the governance and accountability of schools, including making greater use of public report cards and of school site governance teams that include parents, teachers and administrators
- Greater parental responsibility and more actively involving parents in their children's education
- Strengthening the relationship between parents and teachers through greater use of parent volunteers, funded parent-teacher conferences, special help to communicate with parents who do not speak English, outreach programs and more.

Overall, dialogue participants emphasized that all parties – governments, communities, administrators, and teachers, as well as parents and students – need to take on more responsibility and accountability for ensuring students get a quality education.

Participants in the infrastructure dialogues saw schools playing a central role in their communities and generally supported making greater use of school facilities as community centers. (In San Francisco and Fresno this support was mitigated by concerns for child safety.) We found broad support across the state for using school facilities year-round and generally for making better use of these facilities.

In the infrastructure dialogues we also saw strong and growing support for outsourcing non-educational functions to the private sector, and also for greater private sector involvement in the building and maintenance of school facilities, with the savings to be reallocated to the classroom.

- In the course of the day infrastructure dialogue participants increased their support for greater business involvement in these functions by about 5:3 (with 51% increasing their support while 28% reduced support). This result again reflects the importance of framing: citizens see a greater role for the market and for business as more legitimate and desirable when the issue is framed in terms of infrastructure and non-educational services.

Participants in both sets of dialogues were very concerned that educational dollars are being wasted. A strong and recurring message – repeated in dialogue after dialogue across the state – was that participants wanted to see more clearly how the education budget is being spent, to have more funds go to the classroom and less to administration, and to make decision-making on these issues more transparent and accountable.

***c. Water:***

This issue was considered only during the infrastructure dialogues.

There was strong and growing support throughout the day for making greater use of market/price mechanisms to encourage water conservation and more efficient use, including block rates (a sliding scale of rates based on usage), having rates cover more of the real cost of water, and using increased water revenues from these user fees to fund water projects. Participants understood that this approach would require individuals and businesses to pay more for water, and they were willing to do so. At the same time participants expressed a clear view that water is too important to be left to the marketplace alone, and there was growing support for effective government regulation of both water quantity and quality.

- Support for making greater use of market/price mechanisms for water increased by about 2:1 during the day (with 51% increasing support while 26% reduced support), while that for more effective regulation increased similarly (with 49% increasing support compared to 27% who reduced support).

By the end of the day dialogue participants also concluded it would make sense to reallocate excess water from farming to residential use, but only if this could be done in ways that neither harm the agriculture industry nor create windfall profits for farmers.

Strong interest was expressed in pursuing desalination even if financing those projects would require significant increases in water rates. Not surprisingly, this support was strong and consistent along the coast but not inland. Generally, though, participants gave priority to measures to conserve existing resources and use them more efficiently, rather than to major new water projects.

Dialogue participants repeatedly expressed a desire for greater transparency in how water is allocated and how water fees and taxes are used; along with support for increased public education on questions of water conservation and more efficient use.

#### ***d. Health Care***

This subject was addressed only in the general policy dialogues

As they began to connect the dots between their individual experiences and the larger picture of health care in California, dialogue participants came to see health care as far more than a personal issue. They commented repeatedly on how shortsighted and wasteful it is when millions of uninsured Californians must rely on emergency rooms – and that we all pay in the end. By the end of the day there was strong support for (and a willingness to invest in) ensuring that all Californians have access to basic, affordable health coverage (universal coverage).

Dialogue participants defined “all Californians” to mean all citizens and legal residents, but they remained split on coverage for illegal immigrants. Basic health care, as participants saw it, should include preventive care and medically necessary treatment, but there was not sufficient time to explore the extent of this coverage in greater depth.

In the course of the dialogues it became clear that much of the disagreement was based on two different assumptions about equity that participants were making: some defined equity as giving more to those most in need, while others saw equity as everyone receiving the same support from government regardless of his/her circumstances. We will return to this result in more detail in the following section (see page 23ff).

Participants wanted to see greater emphasis placed on health education and prevention. This was very strongly supported. They believe that everyone has a responsibility to take better care of their own health, and should be given information and support to help do so. There was also growing support for providing greater incentives or rewards for those who adopt healthier lifestyles (in the form of lower health insurance premiums for example). By investing more in promoting wellness now, they concluded, we will save a lot in disease and treatment costs later.

When they turned to the question of how universal coverage should be provided, participants expressed mistrust of both government and the private sector to provide the

sort of health care system Californians want and need. Two approaches that were specifically tested during the dialogues (a policy based on tax credits, and a policy based on an employer mandate) received limited support. Participants did not think that either of these approaches would be adequate, and in the time available could only indicate they wanted to explore alternative approaches to find a better way to achieve the objective of universal coverage.<sup>4</sup>

Participants believed that a great deal of money is wasted in the medical care system. They cited many examples: unnecessary and duplicative procedures, drug prices and profits, the impact of malpractice suits and premiums, patients who misuse and overuse the system, profit and marketing costs for HMO's and insurance companies, and more. They called for a much better accounting of how health care dollars are spent, with greater transparency and third party oversight and verification. They wanted to see an annual report on the state of health care in California that would focus especially on how tax dollars devoted to health care are being spent. However, they also emphasized that any mechanism to establish more effective reporting and accountability must not add layers of bureaucracy to the system.

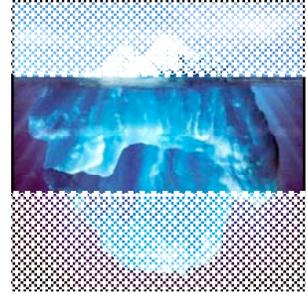
Dialogue participants consistently came to the conclusion that they would be prepared to pay more for a system of universal health coverage but only if certain conditions were met: 1) that the money be used exclusively to expand access to health coverage, 2) that no one get a "free ride", and 3) that transparency and accountability were enhanced so that citizens could "follow the money" and be satisfied that monies were being well spent.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2004, Viewpoint Learning conducted a series of ChoiceDialogues on health care reform for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In these sessions, participants concluded that their top priority was universal coverage, and that the most equitable and practical solution was a two-tiered system that makes affordable basic care available to every American with enhanced services available to those who are willing to pay for them. They also stipulated that coverage be provided by a combination of public and private sector activity. Had the participants in the general policy ChoiceDialogues been given the additional time and choices available to the participants in the health care ChoiceDialogues, it is interesting to consider whether they would have reached a similar conclusion. Nothing they told us was inconsistent with the findings in the Robert Wood Johnson project.

## 2. Assumptions: Where Framing Makes a Difference

In recent years elected leaders, other policy makers and their advisors have increasingly come to recognize the importance of “framing” and to draw on its principles in their communication and engagement efforts. ChoiceDialogues provide an unusual opportunity to observe framing and its effects in action. We found that in many cases the way that citizens came to terms with issues shifted according to framing and context. There were two striking examples in particular: the role of the market, and definitions of equity.



- a. **Role of the market.** The dialogues consistently revealed that market-based solutions are more likely to be supported when the issue is framed in terms of dealing with physical objects like roads and bridges – infrastructure where people assume the private sector has an advantage. In the context of the 6 dialogues that focused on infrastructure, for example, participants were much more open to a strong role for the private sector and market-based mechanisms. But when participants engaged the identical issue (transportation was the best example) in the 9 dialogues that focused on broader policy questions, they were much less inclined to embrace market-based solutions. Instead, in that broader policy frame, they gave more emphasis to the importance of making sure that all Californians have access to the services they need. The case of transportation is discussed in more detail in Box 1.

**Box 1**

**The role of the market  
Case Study: Transportation**

As discussed in the specific findings, participants in both the general policy dialogues and the infrastructure dialogues received the same basic information on transportation. Among other proposals, participants considered the idea of using market-based mechanisms (e.g. private sector investment, user fees, toll roads and toll lanes) to improve surface transportation. Participants in both sets of dialogues started with similar attitudes toward this approach, but the different context or frame of the two sets of dialogues had a marked effect on how participants' thinking evolved.

Participants in the general policy dialogues felt much the same about this approach at the end of the day as they did at the beginning. While they felt that the private sector would bring greater efficiency to construction projects, they were concerned that a profit-driven approach to transportation would negatively affect the poor, the elderly and people in rural areas, and so their level of support for a more market based approach remained largely unchanged.

Policy dialogue participant: *The only problem with the private sector is it's profit driven. So there may be someone out in the middle of nowhere with no way of getting from A to B except using public transportation. If private industry is running it they're going to say, it's not profitable to do that so the heck with them.*

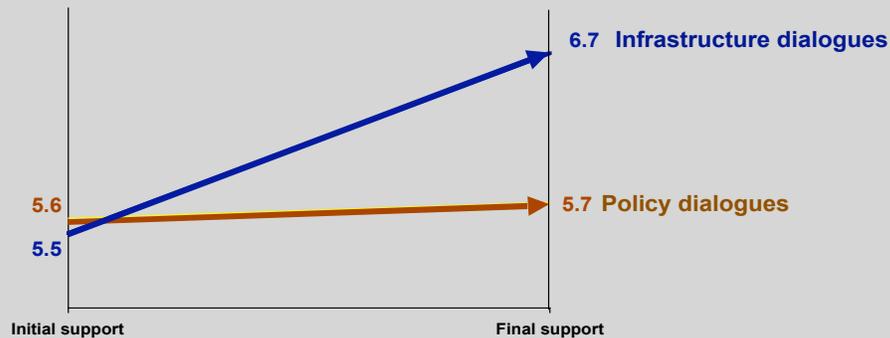
On the other hand, participants in the infrastructure dialogues increased their support for market-based approaches over the course of the day. They strongly advocated relying on user fees, toll roads/lanes and

Infrastructure dialogue participant: *The public sector can come up with blueprints and ideas, but the private sector is the one to come in and get it running at the lowest cost for us.*

(in some cases) privately run bus and rail systems to meet the state's transportation needs. Most of these participants concluded that private sector competitiveness in operating transportation would increase efficiency and consumer choice and save the state money in the long run. Infrastructure dialogue participants' ratings of this option rose from 5.4 to 6.7, with positive shifts outweighing

negative shifts by 3:1. This was the largest increase in participants' rating of a single issue in either dialogue series.

**Support for private sector involvement in transportation**



- b. **Equity.** Two distinct definitions of equity came into play during the dialogues, each reflecting different underlying assumptions. One view saw equity as giving more to those who have less. The other view defined equity as everyone receiving the same level of service or support regardless of his or her situation. Some of the most passionate arguments we saw during the dialogues resulted from misunderstandings between participants who held these different unstated definitions of equity: their different hidden assumptions led participants to talk past each other, fostered greater misunderstanding and stirred up especially strong emotions. In the area of health care, for example, heated arguments over who should be covered (in particular immigrants) actually turned out to be about whether those in greatest need should receive more.

At the same time, significant areas of common ground lay beneath these misunderstandings (although they were often obscured by them). We found that even when divergent assumptions about equity came into play most strongly, building on common ground led to agreement to act. Health care was a particularly striking example: here the common ground included increased support for universal coverage and for greater personal responsibility. On the other hand, trying to take advantage of the different conceptions of fairness with “wedge issues” led to polarization and gridlock. How diverging assumptions about equity affected participants’ approach to health care is further illustrated in Box 2.

**Box 2**

**Divergent definitions of equity  
Case Study: Health Care**

Participants in the general policy dialogues agreed strongly that Californians should have access to basic affordable health care. However, there were often sharp disagreements about who should be covered, what constitutes “basic” care and who should pay for it. In general, these differences stemmed from two different hidden assumptions about what is fair and equitable:

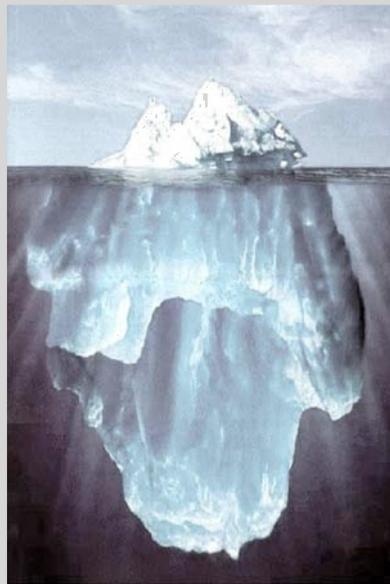
**Explicit attitudes**

- Use education and prevention to encourage personal responsibility
- Everyone in state is covered
- Basic care defined generously



**Hidden assumptions**

- Everyone is entitled to health care as a basic human right
- Equity = giving more to those with less



**Explicit attitudes**

- Use price mechanisms to encourage personal responsibility
- Illegal immigrants not covered
- Basic care more stripped down



**Hidden assumptions**

- Above a minimum threshold, health care is a market good as well as a human right
- Equity = everyone receiving equal service

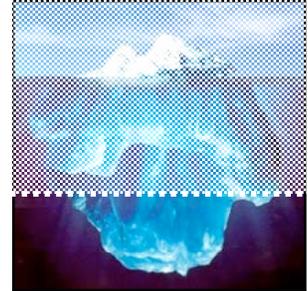


**Common Ground**

*Support for universal access to affordable health coverage*  
*Support for personal responsibility*

### 3. Deeper Convictions

While framing made a difference in how participants approached some issues, there were also deeper, more pervasive factors at work that remained constant regardless of framing or context. These attitudes, which were consistent across all 15 dialogues, shaped participants' responses to everything above them in the "iceberg" and were the slowest to change. The two most fundamental convictions revealed by these dialogues also proved to be mutually reinforcing: citizen mistrust of government; and a deep disconnect between citizens and government.



- a. **Mistrust:** In every one of the 15 dialogues, and on all of the issues tested, mistrust emerged as a central underlying issue shaping all other responses. Participants repeatedly expressed a striking and deeply ingrained mistrust of elected officials and of government as a whole. This mistrust was both more intense and more persistent than expected, outstripping the levels that have been measured by polls and focus groups. In the course of the day, that level even increased somewhat as participants found their worst suspicions confirmed by others' experiences, and sharing those experiences served to reinforce their anger and frustration with government. Most participants channeled their mistrust into two clearly articulated themes: (i) a universal demand for greater accountability and transparency, and (ii) increasing support for public/private sector partnerships as a means of establishing checks and balances.

- i. **Universal demand for greater accountability and transparency.**

Across the board, participants were convinced that waste, inefficiency and abuse run rampant in government. They cited examples in every issue area examined (see Box 3).

*It appears that some of our public officials who run organizations funded by the taxpayers don't have any fiscal responsibility or limitations on what they're spending both before and after the fact.*

**Box 3**

**Some Examples of Waste, Inefficiency & Abuse Cited by Citizens**

**Education:**

- Irrational budgeting procedures that divert money from classroom instruction to “unnecessary extras”
- Bloated administrator salaries and perks

**Transportation:**

- Cost overruns on transit projects
- Inefficient public transit systems (poor connections, inconvenient schedules) that result in poor service and depress ridership
- Transportation monies being diverted into the general fund

**Health Care:**

- Unnecessary procedures
- Endless red tape
- Price gouging by insurers, drug companies and providers

**Water:**

- Allocation methods encourage farmers to grow water-intensive crops

Participants’ response was to demand far greater accountability and transparency from state and local government. In every dialogue, participants wanted to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and to have that information provided in a format that is both easily accessible and understandable (“not gobbledy-gook”). They wanted to be able to follow the money more easily and to see real consequences for those who do not live up to their responsibilities. Most groups called for an audit and accountability system that is run or verified by third parties, and many were intrigued by innovations like the Oregon Progress Board.<sup>5</sup>

*In a budget, there’s all kinds of ways to hide all kinds of money. We do it on our own when we prepare our income tax. So why should we expect the government to be different? We need some sort of system that is independent of government and not subject to lobbying interests that would be able to report.*

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<sup>5</sup> The Oregon Legislature created the Oregon Progress Board in 1989 to develop a strategic vision for Oregon and monitor progress toward that vision using a set of measures – commonly known as *Benchmarks*. The Benchmarks are measurable outcomes like K-12 student achievement, per capita income, air quality, crime rates, employment, and infant health. The Board tracks these outcomes and also suggests targets for improvement. Thousands of Oregonians have been involved in developing and updating the strategic vision, defining the Benchmarks and evaluating the results. In addition to state government, the Benchmarks have been used for planning, management and budgeting by cities and counties, as well as by businesses and community groups. The Board is chaired by the Governor and includes 12 citizen leaders.

Similarly, participants wanted to see a much tighter connection between the taxes they pay and how that money is spent. In all of the policy areas tested participants were willing to pay more for specific outcomes, on the condition that they can be satisfied that the money they already pay is being well spent, and that any additional money will be used to achieve those outcomes. They hotly criticized the idea of diverting earmarked dollars into the general fund. In general, they supported targeted taxes for special purposes, while they were far more wary of raising taxes that would simply go into the general fund. Box 4 describes how this dynamic played out in participants' discussion of transportation.

*I believe there should be public access to [information about] how money is being spent. It shouldn't be so hidden. A lot of what our tax dollars go to is hidden. We'll never be able to find out what is really happening. And if it was open so that we can go online and see where every dollar is going, I think leaders would be more [likely] to do the right things for fear of public awareness.*

#### **Box 4**

##### **Following the Money Case Study: Surface transportation**

Participants recognized that private automobiles would continue to be a central part of California's transportation picture, and they agreed that state's roads will need to be maintained and improved over the coming decades.

On the whole participants were much more willing to pay for major transportation infrastructure if the funds are earmarked and there are clear expectations for how long a project will take and how much it will cost. Many felt that targeted state and local bonds for "big-ticket" projects make most sense and give citizens the ability (and a stronger motivation) to keep track of where their tax money goes.

Participants advocated paying for ongoing road maintenance and improvements out of transportation-related revenues like gas taxes, tolls and DMV fees – and in all cases participants wanted to see stronger and more transparent links between these funding streams and the specific uses to which they are put. They indicated that they would not support measures that do not include such safeguards, and they saw any diversion of transportation money to other purposes as a betrayal of trust.

This desire to follow the money led many participants to demand greater local control, so that they could more easily see how much money came in and what sort of tangible results it was buying. As they worked through the need for local control and accountability, participants gravitated towards a vision in which the state sets standards but local entities have a great deal of discretion in determining how those standards should be met. Box 5 describes how participants ultimately balanced statewide standards, local control and individual accountability in the area of education.

### Box 5

#### Local Control and Individual Accountability Case study: Education

In both sets of dialogues participants strongly supported the goal that every child should have access to a high quality education in a neighborhood school. Participants recognized that statewide standards would be essential to achieving this goal, and they wanted the state to establish and financially support a stronger framework of educational goals designed to make California's public education system the best in the nation once again.

While they concluded that the state should oversee curriculum design, establish measures to gauge student performance and determine consequences for schools failing to meet standards, they felt strongly that deciding how to meet those standards should be left more to local communities, not to the state.. Many participants wanted the state and local school districts to strengthen community-based mechanisms for school governance and accountability, including greater use of public report cards and of school site governance teams that include parents, teachers and administrators.

*There are statewide standards that have to be met, but the community and local governments are there to [determine] how they are met. They are responsible for making sure that [standards] do get met and that the programs they feel the community needs get implemented.*

As their discussion progressed, participants came to emphasize that local control and accountability must extend to include greater parental involvement and accountability as well. They saw increased local control and parental involvement, and increased local and parental accountability, as essential elements in providing every child with access to a quality education.

As the dialogue continued, participants demanded greater accountability not only from government, but also from themselves. This emphasis on the responsibility that citizens have to help address the challenges facing the state was seen in all of the specific issue areas examined. Some of the ways that participants suggested they and their fellow citizens could be more accountable are listed in Box 6.

### Box 6

#### Some opportunities for greater citizen accountability suggested by participants

**Education:**

- Volunteerism and greater parental involvement

**Transportation:**

- Carpooling, telecommuting, and riding public transit

**Health Care:**

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle; pay a premium for unhealthy lifestyle choices like smoking or obesity

**Water:**

- Conservation, recycling – restrictions on watering lawns and other steps to reduce usage
- Individuals should pay more of the real cost of water

*Everybody should be accountable: people, governments, everybody. We all have to be accountable for what we do.*

## ii. Support for public/private partnerships

While they did not trust government to bear the full responsibility for solving the challenges facing the state, participants also had concerns about relying on the private sector too much. Instead, participants gravitated toward solutions involving public/private partnerships, where each sector would provide checks and balances on the other. Participants felt that government's strengths lay in its ability to provide services fairly to all, regardless of income, its huge purchasing power and its powerful regulatory authority to protect the public interest. At the same time, they valued private sector efficiency, flexibility and responsiveness, as well as its ability to find innovative solutions and cut waste. Participants suggested many specific arenas where public/private partnerships could be especially fruitful, some of which are listed in Box 7.

*If the public and private are put together, ... [that] would give us better transportation and it's cheaper. It's a win/win situation.*

### Box 7

#### Promising arenas for increased public/private partnerships suggested by participants

##### Education:

- Building and maintenance of school facilities
- Non-curricular school functions (e.g. food service, facilities management)

##### Transportation:

- Construction and operation of transportation systems (e.g. roads, bridges, rail lines)
- Promoting more efficient use of transportation infrastructure (e.g. employee vanpools, flextime, and telecommuting)

##### Health Care:

- Programs to enhance wellness (e.g. diet and fitness, smoking cessation, health management)
- Developing new arrangements that combine the strengths of each sector to provide the kind of health coverage required (neither sector alone can be trusted to do the job)

##### Water:

- Developing new technologies for water desalination and reclamation
- Making greater use of market mechanisms and the pricing system to spur innovation and conservation

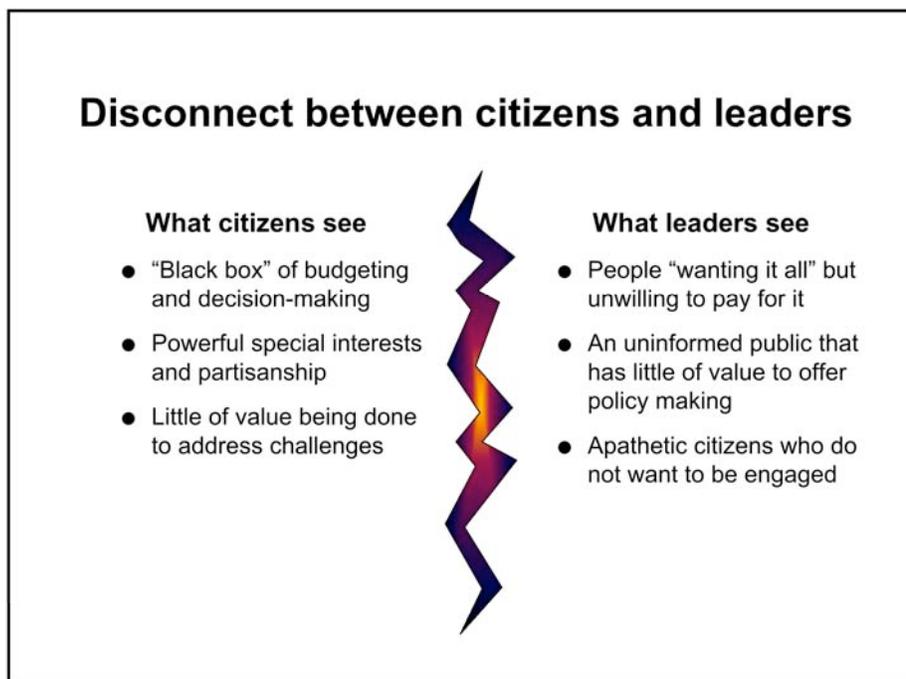
## b. A disconnect between citizens and elected leaders:

On most issues we saw a significant amount of wishful thinking on the part of citizens at the beginning of each dialogue – for example, about the real cost of changes in transit systems, or about how much could actually be saved by reducing “waste, fraud and abuse” in government. This also reflected the degree to which Californians feel they have no voice in shaping public policy, and therefore no incentive to get engaged and to confront tough choices.

One of the most consistent and striking findings of these dialogues was the extent of the disconnect between citizens and elected leaders. Where leaders too often see a public that wants everything but doesn't want to pay for it, the public sees tax dollars disappearing into a black box of budgeting and mysterious decision-making. Where leaders too often see an

uninformed public with little to contribute to policy-making, the public sees a decision-making process completely taken over by special interests and partisan battling. Where leaders too often see an apathetic public that has little interest in being engaged, the public sees governments doing little of value to address the challenges that matter most to them.

### *The Disconnect between Citizens and Leaders*



While ChoiceDialogue participants frequently gained a much clearer sense of the root causes of problems over the course of the day, the combination of mistrust and the disconnect led them to back away from solutions that involved giving government greater discretion or latitude. They did not trust elected officials, had little sense of responsibility or ownership for what those officials were doing, and were not willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. This pattern surfaced repeatedly in the dialogues. As they worked through the issues, participants found that their desire for solutions could not overcome their sense that giving government any additional scope for action without the most rigorous accountability would only open the door to greater abuses. As a result, they concluded that current limitations on government (including Proposition 13, spending limits, voter mandates and supermajorities) must be strongly maintained, believing that these restrictions represent citizens’ best protection against a system that cannot be trusted to act in their best interest. Participants’ conclusions regarding Proposition 13 are summarized in Box 8.

**Box 8**

**Proposition 13 and Restrictions on Government**

Participants were not prepared to move in a single leap to consider changing supermajority requirements or revising Proposition 13. While many were open to the idea of removing Proposition 13 protections from commercial property or the strong voice it gives Sacramento in determining how local property taxes are spent, they backed away from such suggestions, because they did not trust elected officials to limit changes to that area alone. If any of Proposition 13's provisions were reopened, participants feared, elected officials would try to remove *all* of the measure's protections.

Because of this mistrust, participants for the moment were very clear that at this point they want:

- Proposition 13 to be protected
- Supermajorities required to pass new taxes or bond measures maintained
- State and local governments to operate within strict spending limits
- Voter mandates on how the state is allowed to spend general fund dollars (for example, Proposition 98) to remain fully in force.

In other words, mistrust and the disconnect are far more than background noise. Instead, they combine to affect every issue considered in these dialogues. Until and unless these deeper issues can be addressed – bridging the disconnect and rebuilding trust – it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make far-reaching, sustainable reforms that go beyond a patchwork of temporary fixes.

### **III. Bridging the Disconnect: Two Experiments**

We conducted two experiments aimed at building on the ChoiceDialogues results to bridge the disconnect and start scaling up the conversation.

#### **A. Stakeholder Dialogue**

As a first step in addressing the disconnect and mistrust, we conducted experimental “Stakeholder Dialogues” in the Inland Empire and the Bay Area. These dialogues brought together some of the citizens who participated in the earlier ChoiceDialogues with elected and civic leaders from their region to further explore the results of the ChoiceDialogues, find common ground and develop action plans.

##### ***What are Stakeholder Dialogues?***

Stakeholder Dialogues differ dramatically from what usually passes for “dialogue” between the public and leaders. The “town hall meeting,” for instance, too often becomes either a photo-op, or else a “venting” session that political leaders understandably prefer to avoid. An alternative, dialogue-based format – a format specifically designed to build trust – can facilitate genuine communication between citizens and leaders. A small number of successful political leaders have conducted similar dialogues with constituents in the past with very positive results, but the model is not yet well known or well understood, and so is not now easily replicable. The Stakeholder Dialogue aspect of the project was intended to develop and model such a replicable process for building trust and understanding between government leaders and citizens.

Each Stakeholder session conducted for this project consisted of about 20 people – half of them citizen participants from the ChoiceDialogues sessions and the other half a mix of elected officials and civic leaders. These groups used specialized materials that built on the results of the ChoiceDialogues and included both the materials used and the conclusions drawn by the citizen groups.

Participants took as their starting point the vision defined by citizens in the ChoiceDialogues and the tradeoffs they were willing to accept. In the morning, they worked in small groups and in plenary to refine that vision and to find the common ground between it and the future leaders saw. In the afternoon, participants focused on creating a series of realistic and actionable steps that could help achieve their shared vision.

### ***Results of Stakeholder Dialogues***

One of the largest hurdles faced in this experimental format was recruiting leaders for the daylong sessions. In large part this was an indicator of the enormous demands on the time of elected officials: simply finding a day (especially on a weekend) when several leaders could attend was at times an enormous challenge. However, the difficulty in recruitment might also be a sign of how little leaders feel can be accomplished by engaging with the unorganized public in the traditional ways: accustomed to the venting and “usual suspects” activism all too typical of many community meetings, some leaders may have felt that their energies could be more productively spent elsewhere.

The two stakeholder dialogue sessions presented all parties with a very different kind of experience than they might have expected. By the end of the morning in both sessions, the citizens and elected leaders found a great deal of common ground on the future they wanted to see across the range of issues tested. While that common ground often elaborated and clarified points made in the earlier citizen dialogues, in the end it was very consistent with the ChoiceDialogue conclusions.

In the afternoon sessions of both Stakeholder Dialogues, the participation of the civic and elected leaders enabled the groups to go further in developing specific and practical action plans to implement their shared vision than the citizens had been able to accomplish alone. The citizen participants commented repeatedly on how much they had learned in this process, not only about the issues and what might be feasible ways forward, but also about what civic and elected officials already were doing or trying to do to deal with these issues.

Trust creeps in. Perhaps the most striking result of this stakeholder dialogue process was the relationship that developed between citizens and elected leaders.

*It was nice to know that – even though they are trying to help – that they get mired down too.  
[Citizen]*

In particular, citizens were struck by the sight of their elected and civic leaders openly struggling with the same sort of tradeoffs that they themselves had faced in the earlier dialogues, not pretending to certainty or to having the answers to all questions. By the end of the dialogues citizens who had earlier expressed strong mistrust of elected officials were expressing much higher levels of trust, as well as greater appreciation for the difficult task facing their elected representatives. They also indicated their determination to learn more about the issues and what was being done, and to become more involved in civic affairs.

Decision makers also found they gained a new perspective on citizens. They appreciated the level of engagement and the quality of the conversation, and were struck by the amount of common ground that such diverse groups were able to uncover. Overall, these stakeholder dialogues demonstrated a different kind of conversation between citizens and leaders, which led to a constructive problem-solving atmosphere that left participants (leader and citizen alike) feeling that real progress had been made toward finding workable solutions. This experiment demonstrated that a dialogue-based format can make substantial progress toward dissipating citizen mistrust and establishing a climate in which reform is possible.

*What's surprising for me is how easy it is for people with very different perspectives to come to some level of agreement when they have the facts. [State Senate staffer]*

*When I was invited here I was a little wary of the process, but I was extremely pleased to find that the finding of common ground didn't just reduce everything into some drone-like groupthink. [Elected official]*

## **B. Proxy Dialogue**

As a practical matter, only a tiny fraction of the population could ever participate in face-to-face dialogues, so it is important to develop other methods of scaling up these conversations to include many thousands (even millions) of citizens. The most obvious place to begin is through the media, which already reaches into the lives of most Californians on a daily basis, but rarely if ever engages people in an active process of working through issues and tradeoffs. Instead, the imperatives of balance (and ratings) lead the media to feature the most polarized views on a given issue, or else to simply present the talking points that experts, politicians or special interest groups shout the loudest. The voice of average citizens is almost inaudible in the din, and many viewers and readers find it extremely difficult to connect with the opinions or perspectives expressed in such starkly polarized and ideological terms.

To address this challenge, we conducted a second experiment; this time with a media-based form of dialogue we call "Proxy Dialogue" that shifts the focus from top-down instruction to engagement. Proxy Dialogue gives viewers the opportunity to watch people like themselves working through issues about which they are uncertain. Real people working through real problems and coming to grips with tradeoffs form the core of any Proxy Dialogue, and viewers, identifying with participants, can accomplish some of the working through themselves.

*California Connected*, a public television program produced in collaboration by four of California's largest public television stations, partnered with us in this effort. In May of 2004 *California Connected* aired a segment edited from two ChoiceDialogues, one Stakeholder Dialogue and interviews with participants. It was the longest single segment the program had ever aired, and their website featured a revised version of the workbook materials from the ChoiceDialogues so that viewers could work with the scenarios themselves.

Because of the limited time available and the complexity of the conversations, the segment itself did not follow the process sequentially and in depth, as was originally envisioned. While participants' conclusions on specific issues did not surface clearly in the segment, what emerged instead was a clear picture of the level of mistrust, the disconnect and the need for (and possibility of) having different kinds of conversations between citizens and elected leaders. The piece focused in some detail on the concept of citizen engagement and

presented the project as a powerful new method for citizens to bridge the disconnect with their elected officials and vice versa. As the segment progressed, it became evident that trust was developing among participants, that people with vastly different ideological perspectives could find common ground and that a different kind of conversation was both possible and essential.

This experiment provided some important guidance for future efforts to use the media to engage viewers in complex issues more effectively. Some of the ideas include:

- “Cast” the dialogues, using real citizens who hold different views, can effectively express those views on camera and with whom viewers can identify
- Follow participants (on camera) in their everyday lives, highlighting stories that drive home the connections between the policy matters being discussed and their everyday lives
- Interview participants before, during and after the process to get a sense of change
- Focus on one very specific issue rather than several in one dialogue
- Interview leaders before and after
- Develop a video “workbook” that can be used both for broadcast purposes and as a discussion starter
- Create built-in opportunities for viewers to get involved, via phone lines, Internet surveys, etc.

The segment that aired on *California Connected* created a strong sense of optimism that a new kind of conversation is possible, but reported on the process rather than creating a new format itself. The next step is to use the media to create the space and the context for dialogue, rather than reporting on the dialogue that occurred. This experiment provided a number of valuable insights on how to move this concept forward.

## **IV. Conclusions: Bridging the disconnect and rebuilding trust**

### **A. Reasons for hope**

Despite the level of mistrust and concern about the direction in which California is headed, we also saw hopeful signs that it will be possible to bridge the disconnect and rebuild trust. In particular:

- The common ground identified in the dialogues was much greater than participants expected.
- Participants consistently expressed a willingness to make sacrifices to obtain specific outcomes if accountability is increased.
- Participants clearly and repeatedly expressed a desire to be more engaged and to have a voice in the future of California. Before they experienced the dialogue, the notion of being “more involved” too often conjured images of endless hearings, debate and sniping. The existence of alternative dialogue-based formats was an exciting possibility for participants.

- Mistrust and cynicism can be overcome and replaced by a constructive, problem-solving attitude – once participants conclude that the conversation is serious and that their viewpoints are being heard.
- Engagement is a two-way street - if leaders want the public to listen, they must listen in turn. Improving the listening mechanism of government, and reducing some of its distortions, may be the highest leverage way to begin bridging the disconnect and rebuilding trust.

## **B. What can leaders do?**

The pervasive climate of mistrust found during these dialogues is not unique to California, though it appears to be especially strong here. In the wake of a spate of corporate scandals, problems of civil society organizations ranging from the Catholic Church to the Red Cross, and growing political polarization and partisanship, the nation has been thrown into a period of mistrust. This is the third such wave of mistrust we have seen in the last century. The first coincided with the great depression, and the second with the cultural revolution of the 60's and 70's. Each earlier wave lasted about a decade; we don't know how long this third wave of mistrust will last.

The national climate of mistrust makes it even more difficult for California to dissipate mistrust at the state level. But California has led the way in many areas; perhaps it can lead here too. The upheaval of the recent gubernatorial recall has not made Californians any more trusting of their governments than they were before Governor Schwarzenegger took office. But at the same time we now have a new governor who has built up immense political capital that can be dedicated to improving the relationship between leaders and citizens.

The research findings reported here suggest a number of steps that leaders can take to break through the crust of mistrust, build the public support needed to address important fiscal and policy challenges, and improve the relationship between citizens and state and local government. The key point is that everyday norms and ethics of self-interested behavior, that may have been acceptable in the past, no longer work in a climate of mistrust. In such a climate, where those in authority are less likely to be given the benefit of the doubt, leaders need to demonstrate higher standards, what might be called “stewardship ethics”. Stewardship ethics means a commitment to leave your organization, community or state better off than you found it, being clear on how your actions contribute to that end, and engaging the public in setting those expectations and understanding the results in that context. The following steps can help leaders move in this direction:

- **Focus sharply on accountability and tangible outcomes to rebuild confidence**

Californians are not prepared to move in a single leap to questions like changing supermajority requirements or revising Proposition 13. But they are open to a more gradual approach that focuses on specific outcomes they want to see and then takes steps to achieve those outcomes in ways that are more open and accountable. By taking these more limited steps now, elected officials can rebuild the trust needed to make bigger changes later. It is no secret to Californians that the governance system is broken: they just don't know who they can trust to fix it.

For example, statewide school accountability standards put in place over the last few years, combined with annual public report cards on each school's success in meeting

them, have gained widespread public attention and support. Steps such as these have begun to rebuild confidence that the state's schools are doing their best to educate children, and we saw this view reflected in the dialogues. In the field of infrastructure, similar efforts are underway in several counties across the state to develop an annual report card on how the county is performing in eight crucial infrastructure areas.

- **Set high but achievable standards and goals, then develop and publish metrics that report success or failure in meeting them**

As illustrated in the examples of the school and infrastructure report cards, there is no better way to build credibility than by developing and publishing metrics that monitor how well leaders are doing in meeting specific objectives and standards. Keys to success include focusing on a specific policy area and on objectives the public wants to see achieved; and then setting standards and goals that are high but do not create unrealistic expectations, and reporting regularly to the public on both success and failure in achieving those standards. Setting explicit objectives and standards gives leaders a measure of control over the all-important matter of voter expectations.

Even when objectives are intangible (e.g., quality of health care) it is possible not only to reduce these to more tangible indicators (e.g., waiting times), but also – and often more relevantly – to measure the perceptions of experts and consumers on how well intangible benefits are delivered, and use these to create useful metrics.

- **Improve the government's ability and mechanisms to listen to ordinary Californians**

A critical and under-appreciated cause of the disconnect between citizens and elected officials is the degree to which the listening capabilities of government are not attuned to the voice of ordinary citizens. Improving the listening mechanism, and reducing some of its distortions, may be the highest leverage way to begin to bridge the disconnect. The improved listening mechanisms required can only partly be provided by polls and focus groups (which can be misleading on issues where people have not made up their minds); nor can interest groups (which by definition do not represent unorganized Californians, and do not even represent the full range of their members' views) meet this need; nor can more traditional forms of town hall meetings do so. As long as citizens continue to believe (and to see) that their voice is not being heard, the disconnect will continue and worsen. Alternative listening mechanisms, such as those used in this project (based on forms of dialogue that encourage two-way learning and thoughtful interchange of views rather than debate), show great promise and need to be further developed and tested.

- **Take the initiative**

The unorganized public today generally does not have the resources, time, institutional capacity or access to those in authority needed to change the conversation with leaders. As a practical matter leaders need to take the first step to reach out to ordinary Californians; it is also part of what they are in office to do. For example, establishing citizen tested and approved objectives and milestones and then using progress reports as occasions for public discussion can stimulate constructive public engagement. When citizens are asked why they do not vote or otherwise engage in the process of governance, the most common responses are that they do not believe it will make a difference, that politicians really are not interested in their views, and that special

interests will always dominate. When leaders take the initiative to engage citizens in a serious way, though, that alienation and mistrust is quickly replaced by a constructive, problem-solving attitude.

- **Close the loop between citizens and government: From one-way “spin” to two-way dialogue**

Too often communication from government to citizens is conceived as a one-way, top-down effort designed to educate or persuade (“spin”) citizens to agree with a position already decided. Participants in the dialogues repeatedly emphasized their resentment at being spun or manipulated, and that repeated experience clearly undermined trust in government and elected officials. Instead of one-way spin, the challenge is to develop better two-way mechanisms that foster dialogue and learning between citizens and government. While citizens have a lot to learn from leaders, leaders also have a great deal to learn from citizens. To be sustainable in a democracy today, any major policy decision (especially on gridlock issues) needs to meet at least two tests: it needs to be technically feasible and it needs to reflect the underlying values of the citizenry. Only citizens (not experts, not special interests) can give leaders the input on values they need to craft sustainable reforms.

- **Scale up the conversation**

As a practical matter, 35 million Californians cannot participate in face-to-face dialogues with elected leaders, but there are other ways in which this conversation can be scaled up.

- i) The first is **through the political process**, by providing leaders with insight based both on direct participation in dialogues with representative samples of the public and on briefings on the results of ChoiceDialogues and similar methods that go beyond what polls and focus groups can provide. Civic leaders can also play a role as a bridge between unorganized citizens and elected officials. These steps can help leaders to hear and understand the voice of the unorganized public, frame issues in ways that will make sense to citizens, and lead a public learning process around these issues on a broader scale that will find common ground.
- ii) The second involves **new ways of using the media** – television, print, Internet and radio – to engage many more people, and help them work through issues and make up their own minds. This requires a format that focuses on dialogue rather than debate, on learning rather than expert or partisan spin. Real people working through real problems and coming to grips with real tradeoffs forms the core of such a format, and viewers, identifying with the participants, can accomplish some of the working through themselves.

### **C. A missing step in the governance process**

The specific issues examined in this project provided a concrete way to bring Californians’ underlying values and viewpoints to the surface and to explore larger questions of governance. At the same time there was not enough time to fully work through the particulars of any one issue (nor was this the purpose of this project). Each of the issues examined (and many others) could usefully be the subject of a separate ChoiceDialogue.

In our experience, participants in dialogues focused on a single policy area are able to work through the tradeoffs more fully; dialogues of this sort can provide essential input to defining measurable goals and achievable outcomes that the public will support. Engaging Californians on specific policy issues in this way will be an important part of rebuilding trust and bridging the disconnect.

Traditional notions of governance and decision-making tend to be relatively simple – issues arise, key interests advocate different responses and a decision is made. This may work well enough when the issues and the possible responses are reasonably well understood, and where those involved share similar assumptions, language, background and culture. But in California today, mistrust runs rampant and people with very different beliefs, problem-definitions, values and traditions must find common ground. The state’s ability to deal with a whole range of issues – from schools, transportation and health care to immigration, welfare and the criminal justice system – now depends on addressing the issues at the deepest level of the iceberg: mistrust and the disconnect. To do this an additional step is needed. That is where dialogue comes in.



Dialogue is the step we can take in the governance process before decisions are made, to uncover assumptions, share and broaden perspectives, and find common ground. Dialogue does not replace debate, advocacy, negotiation or decision-making; it precedes them. Dialogue creates the shared language and framework, the mutual trust and understanding that enable subsequent debate, negotiation and decision-making to be more productive. While we once could afford to ignore this step or take it for granted, we can do so no longer. In today’s world, we need to make room for real dialogue with the public at the front end of many of our most important decision-making processes, and to do so in a more explicit and systematic way.

## Appendix A

### **ChoiceDialogue™: The Methodology**

ChoiceDialogue methodology differs from polls and focus groups in its **purpose, advance preparation, and depth of inquiry**.

- **Purpose.** ChoiceDialogues are designed to do what polls and focus groups cannot do and were never developed to do. While polls and focus groups provide an accurate snapshot of people's current thinking, ChoiceDialogues are designed to predict the future direction of people's views on important issues where they have not completely up their minds, or where changed circumstances create new challenges that need to be recognized and addressed. Under these conditions (which apply to most major issues), people's top-of-mind opinions are highly unstable, and polls and focus groups can be very misleading. ChoiceDialogues enable people to develop their own fully worked-through views on such issues (in dialogue with their peers) even if they previously have not given it much thought. By engaging representative samples of the population in this way, ChoiceDialogues provide unique insight into how people's views change as they learn, and can be used to identify areas of potential public support where leaders can successfully implement policies consonant with people's core values.
- **Advance Preparation.** ChoiceDialogues require highly trained facilitators and (above all) the preparation of special workbooks that brief people on the issues. These workbooks formulate a manageable number of research-based scenarios, which are presented as a series of values-based choices, and they lay out the pros and cons of each scenario in a manner that allows participants to work through how they really think and feel about each one. This tested workbook format enables people to absorb and apply complex information quickly.
- **Depth of Inquiry.** Polls and focus groups avoid changing people's minds, while ChoiceDialogues are designed to explore how and why people's minds change as they learn. While little or no learning on the part of the participants occurs in the course of conducting a poll or focus group, ChoiceDialogues are characterized by a huge amount of learning. ChoiceDialogues are day-long, highly structured dialogues – 24 times as long as the average poll and 4 times as long as the average focus group. Typically, participants spend the morning familiarizing themselves with the scenarios and their pros and cons and developing (in dialogue with each other) their vision of what they would like to have happen in the future. They spend the afternoons testing their preferences against the hard and often painful tradeoffs they would need to make to realize their values. To encourage learning, the ChoiceWork methodology is based on dialogue rather than debate – this is how public opinion really forms, by people talking with friends, neighbors and co-workers. These 8-hour sessions allow intense social learning, and both quantitative and qualitative measures are used to determine how and why people's views change as they learn.

## **Steps in a ChoiceDialogue Project**

- 1) Archival analysis of polls (or conducting a special one) and other research to provide a baseline reading on what stage of development public opinion has reached;
- 2) The identification of critical choices and choice scenarios on the issue and their most important pros and cons, and the preparation of a workbook built around those scenarios in a tested format for use in the dialogues;
- 3) A series of one-day dialogue sessions with representative cross-sections of the population. Each dialogue involves about 40 participants, lasts one full day and is videotaped. A typical one-day session includes the following:
  - Initial orientation (including the purpose of the dialogue and the use to be made of the results, the nature of dialogue and ground-rules for the session, introduction of the issue and some basic facts about it);
  - Introduction of the choice scenarios on the issue, and a questionnaire to measure participants' initial views;
  - Dialogue among participants (in smaller groups and in plenary) on the likely good and bad results that would occur as a consequence of each choice if it were adopted, and constructing a vision of the future they would prefer to see;
  - A second, more intensive round of dialogue among the participants (again both in smaller groups and in plenary) working through the concrete choices and tradeoffs they would make or support to realize their vision;
  - Concluding comments from each participant on how their views have changed in the course of the day (and why), and a questionnaire designed to measure those changes.
- 4) An analysis of how people's positions evolve during the dialogues. We take before and after readings on how and to what extent people's positions have shifted on each choice as a result of the dialogue. This analysis is both quantitative and qualitative.
- 5) A briefing to leaders to make sense of the results. The briefing summarizes what matters most to people on the issue, how positions are likely to evolve as surface opinion matures into more considered judgment, the underlying assumptions and values that shape that evolution, and the opportunities for leadership this creates.

**Appendix B**

**Dates and Locations of Dialogues**

**General policy dialogues**

- Feb. 21: Bay Area (Oakland)
- Feb. 28: Bay Area (San Francisco)
- Feb. 29: Bay Area (San Francisco)
- Mar. 6: Inland Empire (Riverside)
- Mar. 20: Central Valley (Sacramento)
- Mar. 20: Inland Empire (Riverside)
- Mar. 21: Inland Empire (Coachella Valley)
- Mar. 27: Central Valley (Fresno)
- Mar. 28: Central Valley (Fresno)

**Infrastructure Dialogues**

- May 15: So. California (San Diego)
- May 22: Bay Area (San Francisco)
- Jun. 5: Inland Empire (Riverside)
- Jun. 12: So. California (Los Angeles)
- Jun. 12: Central Valley (Fresno)
- Jun. 13: Central Valley (Fresno)

**Stakeholder Sessions**

- Apr. 24: Inland Empire
- Jun. 26: Bay Area

<b>Specific Issue Areas Covered in the ChoiceDialogues</b>		
<b>Issue Area</b>	<b>General policy dialogues</b>	<b>Infrastructure Dialogues</b>
Health care	X	
K-12 Education	X	
Transportation	X	X
General Role of Government	X	X
Water		X
K-12 School Facilities		X