

### A Shared Challenge

**Kent County needs an inclusive, equitable conversation about transportation, access, and infrastructure. Voices from the inner city to the outlying townships are not being heard.**

Our community is in the midst of a conversation about the future. From downtown to the townships, residents will be affected by the results of planning projects such as GR Forward and Vital Streets.

Local leaders desperately need to know the priorities of community members, but the voices of many are being left out of this crucial process. We cannot make decisions about our county unless every community has a seat at the table.

On this very topic, one of the GR Forward Steering Committees mandated the importance of “proactive public engagement, including strong efforts to more fully engage communities of color and historically disadvantaged communities.”

Kent County has a potential that we have not fulfilled: to build a culture of better civic education, inclusive dialogue, and effective public engagement. The topic is transit and access, but this conversation is about inclusion and equity.

Engage

Learn

Think

### An Innovative Solution

**We propose to facilitate that conversation with an effective new method of equitably gathering public judgement: the first-ever Kent County Deliberative Poll.**

Local government and civic leaders consistently need information about potential public opinion regarding policies and initiatives. But the methods we typically use – surveys and town halls – provide data of questionable quality. Survey data is representative but shallow and often uninformed. Town hall data, although better informed, tends to only gather the views of the “usual suspects” who regularly attend those gatherings. These inadequate methods can result in frustrations and fatigue over failed initiatives and the cost of collaboration.

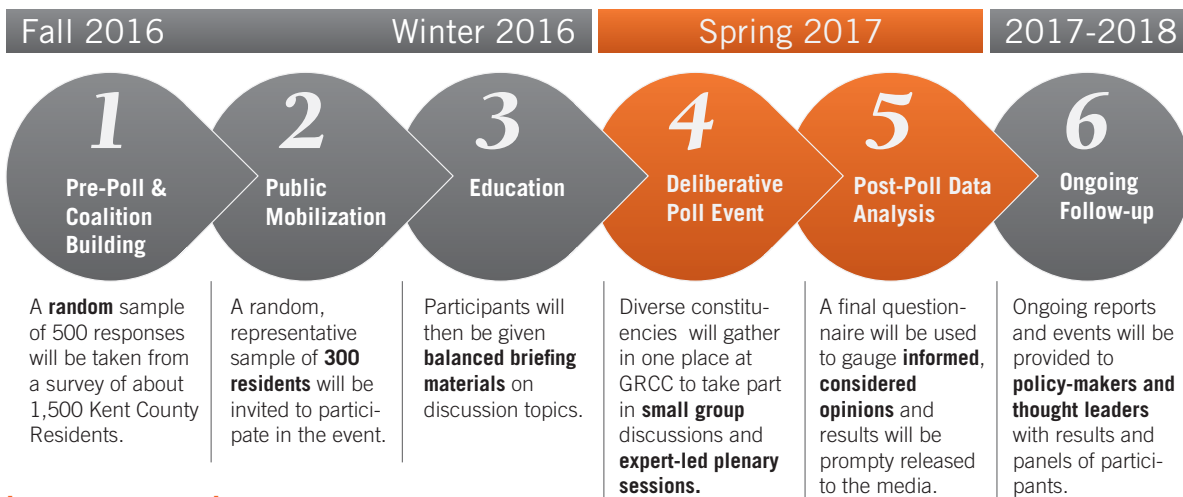
Deliberative Polling® is a breakthrough innovation in democratic practice that combines the deep, thoughtful deliberation of the jury room with the broad scientific representation of the public opinion poll. Using a method developed by Stanford University Professor Dr. James Fishkin, Deliberative Polls have been used worldwide to inform policy on crucial issues. Our inaugural Deliberative Poll event will take place at Grand Rapids Community College during 2017 under the guidance of experts from the Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy in collaboration with Aquinas, Calvin, Davenport, Ferris, GRCC, and GVSU.

Process

Deliberate

### Deliberative Polling Process

The project will use this six-step process, with concrete deliverables from each step.



Decide

Participate

# 1

## Pre-Poll & Coalition Building

**Problem:** Except for the few individuals already involved in local government, most Kent County residents feel disengaged from local decision-making processes. Although many organizations are generating positive impact in the community, there is no thorough, collaborative, and robust method for gathering public opinion and fostering a stronger political culture across the entire county.

**Action:** The Center for Social Research builds a coalition of experienced and involved advisors to support and guide the Deliberative Poll preparation. Research design, fundraising, event planning, and educational material preparation then sets the stage for a preliminary survey of 1,500 Kent County residents regarding important local issues.

**Outcome:** This preparation lays the groundwork for the main Deliberative Poll event, creates a broad advisory coalition and community support for the concept (listed on page 4) that guides the process of the Deliberative Poll, and helps to unite the efforts of local organizations. The preliminary survey later serves as the baseline in comparison to the data collected during the Deliberative Poll event.

**Problem:** Current methods of gathering public opinion are inadequate, as they either provide the informed but not representative opinions of those already involved in local government, like Town Halls, or they gather the representative but not informed opinions of the general population, like traditional polling methods.

**Action:** A random, representative sample of 1,500 Kent County residents receives a pre-event survey. Those who indicate interest in participating in the main event are resampled with demographic weights to select 300 residents who will accurately represent the county's economic, ethnic, and geographic makeup.

**Outcome:** This inclusive sampling method ensures that a genuinely diverse and representative sample of residents is recruited for the event, including those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to actively participate in political or civic conversations.

# 2

## Public Mobilization

# 3

## Education

**Problem:** Kent County residents are relatively uninformed regarding local governmental, design, and planning efforts, resulting in a stagnant civic and political culture.

**Action:** Deliberative Poll preparation produces balanced, evidence-based, accessible materials on relevant local topics vetted by a broad advisory group and academic team. Participants use the materials to inform their discussions and opinions during the main event.

**Outcome:** In addition to informing poll participants in order to determine informed public opinion, these materials are made readily available for other public education, and will be used by leaders and stakeholders to provide a data-driven image of the county's broader issues.

# 4

## Deliberative Poll Event

**Problem:** The people of Kent County feel disengaged from local decision-making processes. Residents have difficulty empathizing with leaders and struggle to relate to others of differing race, geographic location, or class. Traditional polling methods fail to incorporate a deliberative and informative methodology, gathering opinions based on snap judgments rather than reasoned conclusions based on evidence, argument, and expert input.

**Action:** Diverse constituencies come together in one room at Grand Rapids Community College to engage in an informed, practical discussion about how to improve our community. Participants are randomly assigned to small deliberative groups that pose questions to experts during plenary sessions. The Stanford University team facilitates an open dialogue and trains 20 local residents to moderate deliberative events.

**Outcome:** The resulting opinions and views distill a representative vision for the county. The innovative process of public engagement strengthens the county's civic culture by helping to build critical mutual understanding between residents and leaders. Some participants and moderators recognize a dormant political or civic vocation and through increased engagement positively affect their communities.

# 5

## Post-Poll Data Analysis

**Problem:** Local leaders only have access to measures of public opinion that represent, in general, the opinion of residents who have not had the opportunity to learn about issues or engage opposing perspectives. These measures are not typically comprehensive, readily available, or easy to use for leaders and the general public.

**Action:** A final questionnaire gauges the participants' informed, considered opinions, the results of which are analyzed by local research institutes in comparison to the pre-poll baseline results.

**Outcome:** Full results are promptly released to the media in an intelligible and in-depth format to be used by leaders to inform policy decisions. Interactive charts and searchable transcripts are made available online for investigation by all interested leaders, educators, activists, and the general public.

**Problem:** Kent County is poised to build a more inclusive and innovative political culture that harnesses the dynamic and forward-thinking character of our community, but that potential must be intentionally realized to take effect.

**Action:** Leaders continue to analyze and use results. Rigorous follow-up through gatherings with participants, moderators, and community members supports and fosters rising leaders. Public judgment continues to influence local civic and political culture. Venue space has been offered for these events at Steelcase University Prep, DeVos Place, GRCC, and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum.

**Outcome:** The success of the first event leads to annual Deliberative Polls™, developing a culture of productive communication between residents and leaders. Kent County leads West Michigan with a new, inclusive, and effective method of engaging the public and informing local government.

# 6

## Ongoing Follow-Up

**Deliberative Polling: A Globally Tested Innovation in Politics and Research**  
**The Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD) has conducted over 70 Deliberative Polls around the world, including a 2009 statewide Michigan event.**

**Michigan**

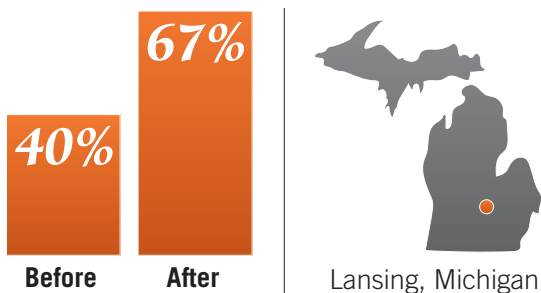
In November 2009, PBS' "By The People" series conducted a Deliberative Polling® event with 314 Michigan residents from throughout the state. Sampled residents met in Lansing to discuss "Hard Times, Hard Choices" about how to fund public services with declining tax revenues.

Support for increasing the sales tax rose by fourteen points from 37% to 51%. Similarly, support for increasing the income tax went up by 18 points from 27% to 45%. Support for increasing the beer and wine tax was high both before and after deliberation (increasing from 66% to 68%). People were willing to shoulder new burdens they could feel.

By contrast, support for cutting the business tax rose by 27 points from 40% to 67%. More generally, "supplying tax incentives for companies to move to Michigan" had high levels of support both before and after (moving only from 74% to 78%).

After deliberation, participants were interested in certain tax cuts that might stimulate jobs, but they were willing to accept the pain of tax increases that might help the state's finances.

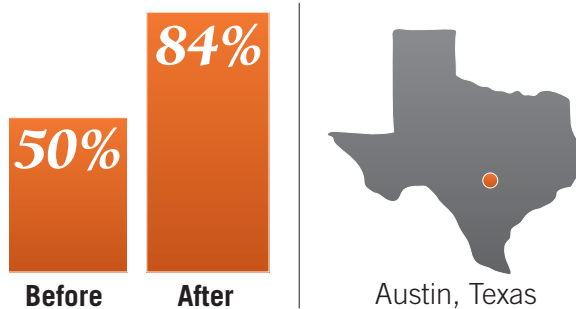
Support for Cutting the Business Tax Before and After Deliberation



**Texas**

In 1996, Texas used eight Deliberative Polling® events to establish energy priorities for the state. The resulting data showed an increase from 50% to 84% in the proportion of residents who would be willing to pay more on their monthly bill to support wind power. The documented findings of these polls substantially played into the legislature and Public Utility Commission, which in turn helped Texas move from last to first in the usage of wind power among the fifty states.

Support for Increased Wind Energy Before and After Deliberation



**European Union**

A diverse sample of citizens from all 27 countries in the European Union came together in June of 2009 to deliberate in 21 languages about the upcoming elections for European parliament.

**Bulgaria**

A 2007 Deliberative Polling® project catalyzed a major shift in the Bulgaria's public schooling policy regarding the segregation of Roma children from the general population of students. Support for desegregation of the schools dramatically increased from 42% to 66% amongst participants through the Deliberative Poll process, and the Prime Minister emphasized the Deliberative Poll's role in informing legislation.

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**Guiding the Deliberative Poll**

To ensure the Kent County Deliberative Poll® delivers research based on a broad, balanced view of Kent County local governments and public services, we are engaged in ongoing recruitment of advisors. Advisory group members make no major commitments; they have offered their names to indicate their support for the project, and they have offered, when convenient, to ensure the fairness, veracity, and clarity of our work.

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\* Academic research and advisory team

**Your Role in the Poll**

**Financial or In-Kind Support** Provide 501(c)(3) charitable donations or in-kind resources such as hospitality, design, publicity, publishing, transportation, media production, participant incentives, and more.

**Expertise** The event will incorporate the expertise of officials, activists, scholars, journalists, moderators, interviewers, deliberation experts, and more.

**Student Mentoring** Help mentor our Deliberative Poll Student Ambassador Team in areas of research, writing, publicity, event planning/management, and media.

**Advisory Group** Add your name to the low-commitment advisory group, listed in full above.