# Money and Politics — Who Owns Democracy?

An Online Deliberative Dialogue: March 19 - March 30, 2001

`http://www.network-democracy.org/map/`

Final Report

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## 1. Introduction

From March 19 - March 30, 2001, Information Renaissance hosted an online Dialogue on the topic "Money and Politics—Who Owns Democracy?" The Dialogue was supported by National Issues Forums Research and adapted the format of a National Issues Forum discussion to the Internet medium. The purpose of this activity was to show how a National Issues Forum discussion can be conducted via the Internet and how an online forum of this type can involve larger numbers of people than participate in conventional in-person forums.

The online Dialogue was organized along the same lines as an in-person Issues Forum. The primary reference resource was Public Agenda's Issue Book on Money and Politics. An experienced NIF moderator, guided the discussion and a reporter provided daily summaries of contributed comments. Participants were asked to complete pre- and post-Dialogue questionnaires similar to those used in the conventional forums.

The online Dialogue differed from conventional Issues Forums in terms of its scope. Two hundred and thirty people from 35 states participated in the online Dialogue over a two-week period. Because the Dialogue lasted for 14 days, and because all the participants had access to the Internet, more background material was provided to participants than is typically made available for a brief in-person event.

The online configuration followed a model that Information Renaissance has developed in the course of producing a number of National Dialogues over the last five years. This model provides an indexed message forum, online surveys and background materials, all housed in a uniform searchable Web site.

Feedback from Dialogue participants and from the event's moderator and reporter indicate that the Internet does provide a viable way for large numbers of citizens to discuss and deliberate together. Of those completing the post-forum questionnaire, 44% said they were now thinking differently about the topic. The same percentage felt they saw new ways for people to approach the issues under discussion. Over two-thirds wanted to participate in Dialogues on other policy issues, and nearly as many expressed an interest in future online events.


## 2. Recruiting

## 2.a. Participants

Information Renaissance began recruiting participants on February 19, 2001, with the opening of the project Web site `http://www.network-democracy.org/map/`. We distributed announcements widely over the Internet, with mailings to the following organizations, including the American Library Association, the League of Women Voters, the National Civics League, the National Council for Social Studies and the following electronic mailing lists:

> Civic Education for the Next Century (apsa-cived)
>    http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~cived/
> DigitalGovernance.org

mailto:pubpol-l@tc.umn.edu
Net-happenings  (K-12 Educators)
http://listserv.classroom.com/archives/net-happenings.html

We also contacted the print media, sending electronic announcements to the Society of Professional Journalists, Investigative Reporters and Editors and *Roll Call*. As people began to register for the event, additional notices were sent to newspapers in states targeted to improve the demographic distribution of the participants. We also distributed flyers at a San Francisco town meeting on campaign finance reform that featured Senators McCain and Feingold**.** Most participants joined the discussion in response to the electronic announcements.

## 2.b. Demographics

Demographics of the 230 people who registered for the event are summarized below.

**Total:** **231**

**Age**

| | |
|---|---|
| No Answer | 11% |
| 17 or younger | 12% |
| 18-28 | 15% |
| 30-49 | 23% |
| 50-64 | 29% |
| 65 or older | 11% |

**Schooling**

| | |
|---|---|
| No answer | 10% |
| 6th - 8th grade | 0% |
| Some high school | 17% |
| High school graduate | 3% |
| Some college | 5% |
| College graduate | 19% |
| Graduate School | 45% |

**Ethnicity**

| | |
|---|---|
| No answer | 13% |
| African American | 2% |
| Asian American | 4% |
| Hispanic | 3% |
| Native American | 0% |
| White | 73% |
| Other | 5% |

**How participants heard about this Dialogue**

| | |
|---|---|
| No answer | 2% |
| E-mail announcement | 38% |
| Friend or colleague | 35% |
| Newsletter article | 0% |
| Posting on a Web site | 3% |
| The media | 2% |
| Other | 20% |

**Gender**

| | |
|---|---|
| No answer | 9% |
| Female | 47% |
| Male | 44% |

**In how many National Issues Forum events have you previously participated?**

| | |
|---|---|
| No answer | 2% |
| None | 60% |
| 1-3 | 23% |
| 4-6 | 1% |
| 7 or more | 14% |
| Not sure | 0% |

### 2.c. Geographic Distribution of Participants

The map below displays the geographic distribution of the registered participants.
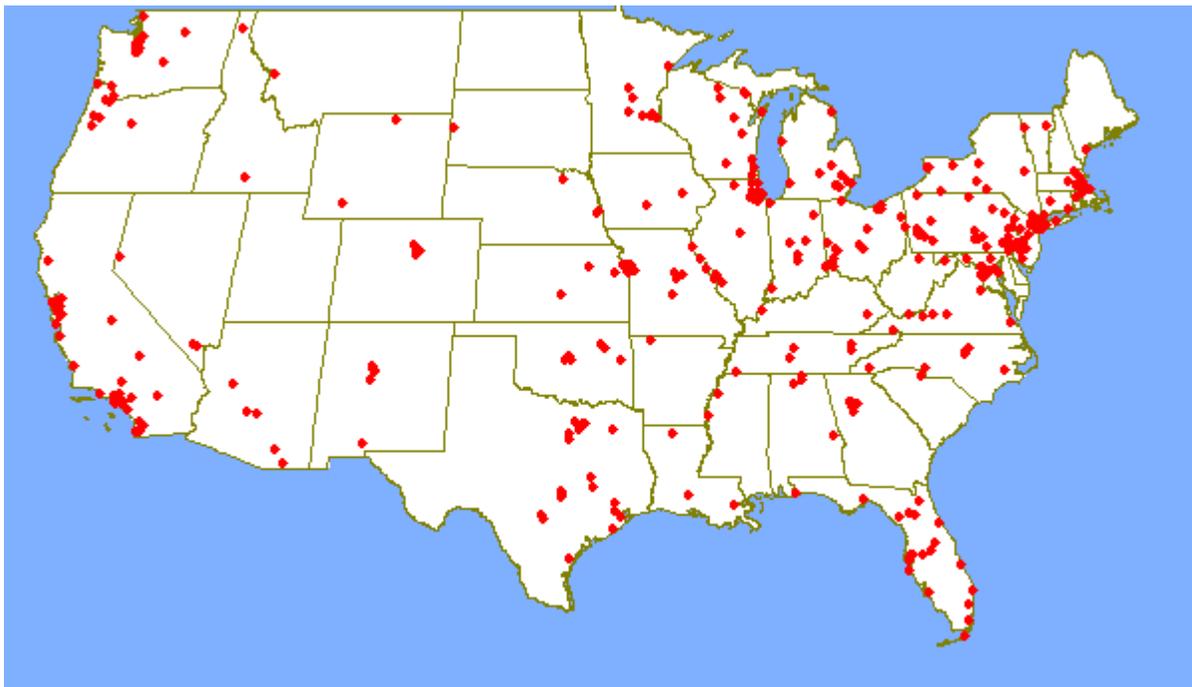


### 2.d. Congress

In the weeks preceding the Dialogue Information Renaissance contacted 30 members of Congress, eighteen Senators and twelve House members, including all the current members of Congress who have participated in the Public Voice program. All declined our invitation to participate in the Dialogue on Money and Politics.

In a previous Dialogue on Social Security Reform, Information Renaissance was more successful in gaining Congressional participation. But in that project we were

working with a sister organization that had ongoing contacts with Congress and full-time staff dedicated to media relations and contacts on Capitol Hill.

Two factors may have discouraged Congressional participation in the present project. We invited members of Congress to participate only as ordinary citizens, not as subject experts or legislators. Members of Congress normally play a visible role in public policy discussions, and participation without prominence is probably an unrealistic expectation. Secondly, the online discussion was held during the same two-week period that the United States Senate debated the McCain/Feingold proposal for campaign finance reform. While this was a plus in terms of public interest, it meant that Senate staffers were totally pre-occupied with the demands of the ongoing debate. As Senator McCain's press person put it, "Its crazy here."

In the Recommendations section we offer some suggestions on how to gain Congressional participation in future online events. Such involvement will clearly be an asset in terms of public interest and public involvement.

## 3. Structure

### 3.a. Web Site

The Money and Politics Web site was opened to the public on February 19, one month prior to the beginning of the discussion. The Web site provided background information on the project and deliberative dialogue, text from the Money and Politics Issue Book, additional resource material, specific expectations from participants, a registration form, information on the moderator and reporter, a discussion agenda and a site search tool. This material remains available online at the Internet address `http://www.network-democracy.org/map/`.

### *Organization*

The Web site is organized around the following areas:

- *Welcome.* This is the project's "home page." It contains a brief description of the project and links to other sections. Before the online discussion began, this page contained a prominent invitation for people to register. Once the discussion was going on, the welcome page was changed to provide a link to the day's agenda.

- *About this Event.* This section contains information on the Dialogue, its sponsoring organizations and project participants. A picture and brief biography of the moderator and reporter and descriptions of their roles in the Dialogue were also included.

- *Join the Discussion.* Before the event began, this section provided registration materials and information on the topic. After the start of the discussion, this page provided a direct link to the day's discussion. In the course of the Dialogue the message archive grew to include 546 individual messages.

- *Briefing Book.* This section contains background materials for project participants. The primary reference is an online version of Public Agenda's Issue Book, *Money and Politics: Who Owns Democracy?* We have collected links to a number of resources of value to project participants, including

  - Legislation pending before the 107th Congress and Congressional Research Service Reports on the McCain/Feingold, Hagel/Landrieu and Shays/Meehan bills
  - Existing federal legislation and regulations
  - Key United States Supreme Court decisions—Buckley v. Valeo and Nixon v. Shrink
  - Background information from non-partisan organizations
  - Other online resources, including sites that advocate reforms along along the lines of Choices 1, 2 or 3, as described in the Issue Book
  - Links to sites that advocate other approaches to campaign finance reform
  - Current articles, editorials and opinion pieces

- Search engine. This feature enables readers to search through material on the site, including both the background material and the discussion itself

## Usage

The project Web site was the central coordinating point for all project activities—background materials, moderator's and reporter's messages, individual messages and participant feedback. Thus a good way to evaluate participation in the project is to examine usage, or network traffic, on the Web site.

There are several ways to describe traffic on the Web site. Standard measures include "hits" and "page views." The first figure is a technical measure of the number of requests received by the Web server; the second reflects more accurately the number of Web pages read by users of the Web site. From March 10 through April 7, 2001, the Money and Politics Web site had 74,100 hits and 35,740 page views.

The Web server keeps track not only of overall traffic but also of usage of individual sections of the site. Thus we were able to record 1,483 page views of materials in the NIF Issue Book and 2,526 page views of materials in other sections of the Briefing Book.

By counting the number of different computers that accessed the site, we can estimate how many different individuals made use of materials on the site. That figure is 1,430, indicating that for every registered participant, another 5 people looked at the materials online. This number will increase as time goes on, since the Web site remains accessible, and it has by now been incorporated in the indices of all of the major online search engines.

Dividing the number of page views by the number of individuals who accessed the site, we can deduce a measure of how intensively people used materials on the site. On average, each person who visited the project Web site looked at approximately 25 pages of information—either messages in the discussion, supporting material in the

Briefing Book or instructions and scheduling information. This suggests that even those people who did not register for the Dialogue took a serious and active interest in the materials provided.

### 3.b. Dialogue

The two-week discussion followed the general format of in-person National Issues Forums. Two days were allotted to each of the five main topics: Introduction, Choice 1, Choice 2, Choice 3 and Conclusion. The agenda, with brief descriptions of each discussion topic, was posted on the Web site. Links to the daily summaries, comment forms and questionnaires were linked from the agenda.

Individuals wishing to participate in the discussion completed a registration form and a pre-Dialogue questionnaire. The two forms contained the information that is requested in in-person Issues Forums. In addition, registrants provided brief statements about their interest in campaign finance reform, and a page containing these statements was made available on the Web site for others to review.

The online discussion was organized so that participants could read messages in five different ways: by topic, date, author, subject and discussion thread. A summary of message traffic on the project Web site is given in the following table.

|  | Intro | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Wrap-up | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Messages** | 155 | 173 | 77 | 73 | 64 | **546** |
| **Participating Individuals** | 53 | 86 | 39 | 39 | 29 | **131** |
| **People Posting More Than One Message** | 24 | 22 | 13 | 13 | 13 | **80** |

In the course of the Dialogue we sent messages to people who did not post any message and asked them how they were following the discussion. Their responses are discussed in the section on Participant Feedback below. Overall the participation rate was relatively high for an online event. This was particularly noteworthy, given that the volume of messages made for a great deal of reading.

### 3.c. Moderator and Recorder

The moderator and recorder worked together closely to guide the conversation. A project facilitator, whose duties are described in more detail below, coordinated their work. The moderator, Taylor Willingham, framed opening questions for each discussion topic and followed up with frequent questions to draw the participants into the discussion. She kept the agenda moving and encouraged the participants to listen to

each other and explore opposing viewpoints thoughtfully. Participants rated her as a very effective coordinator in survey forms administered at the end of the Dialogue.

Private e-mail and telephone conversations between the moderator, recorder and facilitator helped the team determine what direction to take as the discussions evolved.

Each evening the reporter, Patty Dineen, prepared summaries of the day's discussion. Overall, the summaries struck the right balance in recording briefly the plethora of thoughts and ideas that came up during the discussion. This material was posted on the Web site each evening, and a reminder note was e-mailed to all registrants, inviting participants to review the day's discussion and visit the project Web site. The summaries also provided a good overview for those who were unable to visit the discussion for a few days. A private message from one participant describes the value of these messages to the group:

> *"I find the summaries useful, I always go to the link and read them, it sort of helps me to 'digest' the material. It's helpful to see how a third person sums up the daily discussion and highlights the salient points covered."*

### 3.d. Administrator and Facilitator

Two additional individuals helped keeps the discussion flowing smoothly. A Dialogue administrator reviewed each message prior to posting. The administrator returned to the author only a few partially formed or erroneously sent "private" messages. The discussion facilitator worked with the moderator and recorder, as described above, and contacted participants by e-mail to ask for feedback regarding how they viewed the discussion. There was a good response to the facilitator's messages both in terms of percentage of individuals replying (27%) and the information they shared in their responses. Selected quotes from these e-mail messages are given in Appendix A.

### 4. Discussion

The Dialogue was organized around three perspectives as defined in the Public Agenda Issue Book: Choice 1—Reform the Campaign Fund-Raising System; Choice 2—Rein in Lobbyists and Politicians and Choice 3—Publicize Political Donations, Don't Regulate Them. The online discussion began with two days of introductions and then discussed each of the three choices, with two days of discussion per choice. The final two days of the Dialogue provided a conclusion for the group—Finding a Public Voice.

### *Introduction*

During the first two days of the discussion Taylor Willingham asked participants to offer their first-hand experiences with the present campaign finance system. In addition, she asked the registrants to explain why they were concerned about money and politics, to reflect on what aspects of this issue were most important to them and to listen to what others were saying in the discussion.

Numerous themes developed in response. Many participants were concerned that money is too dominant a factor in the electoral system and that special interests donate with the expectation of receiving something in return. Others were worried that qualified candidates of modest means can't compete. Some posited that the problem may be incurable and that the negative effects of a "cure" may prove to be worse than the disease. Others expressed the conviction that public apathy and disengagement are at the heart of the problem and that money and special interests are just filling the vacuum.

### *Choice 1—Reform the Campaign Fund-Raising System*

On Wednesday, March 21, Taylor Willingham began the discussion of Choice 1 by asking the participants to identity what they liked about this approach and what its drawbacks were. By the end of the second day over half of the registered participants had posted a comment on this topic.

Participants who endorsed Choice 1 thought that limiting contributions could limit the influence of money and inject more competition into the political system. Many thought that public funding would level the playing field and that free airtime was a logical use of the public airwaves. Others saw reform as allowing lawmakers to spend more time doing their jobs and less time raising campaign funds.

The critics saw limits on spending as a restriction of free speech rights and that more regulations diminished liberty. Others were concerned about how to implement a free airtime provision fairly. Some thought that any new reform would be full of loopholes and would not accomplish its objectives. Others thought that a more level playing field might just produce more mediocre candidates rather than better ones. Discussants also wrestled with trade-offs such as giving up some freedoms for the "good of society."

### *Choice 2—Rein in Lobbyists and Politicians*

On Friday the discussion turned to lobbying restrictions, initiatives, referenda and recall as options for reform. Taylor Willingham again asked the participants to identify what they thought would work and what they would be hesitant to adopt.

Many saw the need to increase public engagement but were concerned about adopting measures that made it too easy to by-pass representative government. Some favored restrictions on private meetings and gift giving by lobbyists.

Many participants supported lobbying as a time-honored way for groups and individuals to persuade elected officials about the merits of their positions. Others disliked ballot measures because they are too often co-opted by sham grassroots groups that front for special interests. Some observed that ballot measures were often too numerous and too complex for voters to understand.

### Choice 3—Publicize Political Donations, Don't Regulate Them

On the second Tuesday Taylor Willingham asked the participants to address Choice 3, which would repeal all limits regulating the flow of money to candidates and substitute a system of prompt and full disclosure. She again asked the registrants to identify what they liked about this approach and what they thought the pitfalls were.

Advocates saw a disclosure-based system as the way to produce more competitive elections. They thought that any reform will be riddled with loopholes and would unfairly constrain the rights of the public to donate to the candidates of their choice. Others saw this as a way to break down the two-party monopoly of the political system.

The critics thought that the public would never take the time to analyze who was funding a particular candidate and that clever ways would be found to disguise the true identity of the donors. Opponents also pointed out that a disclosure-based system doesn't eliminate the need for regulations and needs teeth to penalize violators. Others noted that prompt disclosure does nothing to remedy the corrupting influence of money in politics.

### Conclusion – Finding Our Public Voice

On the last two days of the Dialogue Taylor Willingham asked the participants to reflect on what they had learned and to search for common ground. Both the moderator and the reporter asked the participants to focus on commonly recurring themes in an effort to find their public voice.

Posters suggested that their common concerns were that the present system was not working well, and that a disengaged public mistrusted politicians and lobbyists. There was a concern that even with reform constant vigilance would be necessary to assure that money would not unduly influence the political process. There also was a consensus that lawmakers spent too much time raising money, and that this leads to the appearance that money buys access.

Posters also recognized that there were two competing mindsets during the forum. One group argued for less regulation and a disclosure-based system whereas the other set saw a need for effective campaign finance reform.

The reporter, Patty Dineen, was impressed by how much deliberation she saw going on. She told us that "this was quite a bit more than in most face-to-face forums." The reporter's summaries for each day's discussion may be viewed online at the project Web site.

In the post-Dialogue Questionnaire 44% of the 65 respondents stated that they were thinking differently about the issue after participating in this event. When asked to elaborate, some said that their thinking had become less dogmatic and more refined while others said that they still held firm to their original beliefs. Many commented that they now had a better understanding of the issues.

In the wrap-up Questionnaire we asked posters if they considered the perspectives of other participants in formulating their messages. 49% of the 51 respondents told us that they had done so some of the time, and 20% stated that they had evaluated alternative perspectives a great deal.

## 5. Participant Feedback

The Dialogue gathered information from participants in a registration form, pre- and post-Dialogue questionnaires, comment forms for each of the discussion topics, and a wrap-up questionnaire. During the registration process 220 individuals completed the NIF pre-Dialogue Questionnaire. At the end of the forum, 65 participants (28%) filled out the NIF post-Dialogue Questionnaire. We also asked participants to complete a wrap-up form that asked for evaluation feedback on the Dialogue process, which 51 individuals (22%) completed.

Response rates to the post-Dialogue and wrap-up questionnaires compared favorably with that for our previous online events. After an event is over participants typically move on to other tasks and responsibilities and may neglect to fill in such forms. A selection of the comments given on these forms is included in Appendix A. Summaries of responses for the pre- and post-Dialogue Questionnaires and the Wrap-up Questionnaire are given in Appendices B-D.

As a supplement to these online questionnaires the Dialogue facilitator sent participants two private e-mail messages. The first message received responses from 27% of those contacted and the second, 32%. Both provided the project with excellent feedback, selections of which are also included in Appendix A.

The first message was sent at the end of the first week. It queried participants about the usefulness of the summaries and asked if they had any ideas on variations that had occurred in the message volume. Respondents agreed that the summaries were very helpful and that receiving them by e-mail provided an effective reminder to visit the site. Respondents had opposing views on the impact that the Senate debate had on the flow of messages: some thought it increased interest, while others thought it drew attention away from the Dialogue.

After the close of the Dialogue the facilitator sent out a second message to individuals who had not posted during the discussion. She asked these "silent" participants why they had not contributed any messages and whether they felt the discussion had been worthwhile. Most reported that they hadn't enough time, often due to unplanned responsibilities at the office or at home. A number of them said they'd like to join a future discussion and some said they felt they benefited from the reading the comments even though they hadn't contributed to the conversation. For many, the Money and Politics Dialogue was the first time they had used the Internet to participate in a group discussion.

## 6. Recommendations

Information Renaissance has produced a number of online Dialogues over the last five years. Some of them were similar in size and length to the present Dialogue; and others had larger audiences and were conducted over a longer period of time. What distinguished the present event from previous work by Information Renaissance was its attempt to incorporate the ideals of deliberative discourse into the online forum. From the reactions of our participants and comments from our moderator and reporter, both of whom are familiar with in-person National Issues Forums, we believe that this primary project goal was achieved.

The marriage of deliberative discourse with online discussion techniques creates an opportunity for a qualitatively new type of public discussion. The comments in this section are directed toward how such a discussion might be structured and implemented.

### 6.a. Broaden the public audience.

Any small forum is handicapped by its lack of demographic diversity. Online events have the capability of reaching a broad geographic region, as was demonstrated in the present project. More difficult is the issue of finding a diverse audience, since Internet participation tends to be skewed toward higher incomes and higher education levels than the public at large. The present event lacked any substantial budget for publicity and recruiting; this would be necessary to attract a much larger and much broader audience to future events of this sort. More ambitious—and even more expensive—would be to recruit a representative sample of the public and then provide them with Internet access for participation from their homes.

### 6.b. Find methods to deal with a large number of participants.

With the vigorous participation that the present Dialogue attracted, it would not have been possible to deal with many more than the 230 people who registered for the event. Indeed the nearly 600 messages that were received in the course of the event were enough to tax most participants' attention span. Clearly the Internet has the potential to attract audiences that could number in the tens of thousands, if not more. How might we deal with large groups of this sort? This is an area worthy of further research. A few of the possible avenues to explore in this research are listed below:

- *Parallel discussions.* A large online group can be split into a number of parallel discussions, each with its own moderator and recorder. Consensus viewpoints from one subgroup could be passed on to other subgroups so as to permit the possibility of an overall group consensus emerging.

- *Proxy dialogue.* In *The Magic of Dialogue* Daniel Yankelovich has proposed a discussion structure in which a small number of active participants stand in for a much larger public group. Anecdotal comments from registrants for the present Dialogue who did not post any messages online suggest that some project

participants did view the conversation in this light. The Internet offers some interesting possibilities for implementing this concept on a large scale.

- *Online polling.* The present Dialogue used online surveys to try to encapsulate participants' views of each of the discussion topics. A future Dialogue could place greater emphasis on this mechanism and integrate it more fully into the project. This could provide input from many more people without the need for every participant to read the text of a very large number of posted messages.

## 6.c. Use the Internet to enrich the presentation.

The remarkable scope of the Internet can, in effect, to bring the whole world into a single room. The present Dialogue used this capability in small ways, expanding the Briefing Book beyond the Public Agenda Issue Book and linking to more diverse viewpoints, more in-depth analyses and more current opinion and news on the topic under discussion. This is only part of what can easily and inexpensively be achieved in online events. We would recommend including the following features in future online policy discussions:

- *Background materials.* These could include pointers to online resources, as were used in the present Dialogue and issue summaries prepared by a range of different interest groups. Such materials conveniently extend the type of broad summary given in the Public Agenda Issue Book.

- *Roundtable discussions.* Information Renaissance has used a roundtable structure to involve subject experts in previous online policy discussions. This mechanism works well in terms of focusing the discussion while allowing extensive interaction between the subject experts and the public audience.

- *Political participation.* The roundtable mechanism has proved effective in attracting legislators to the discussion. As with the subject experts, this is a mechanism that provides a platform from which the politicians can comfortably take part in the discussion and interact with members of the general public.

- *Access to experts.* In previous National Dialogues Information Renaissance staff have interacted with subject experts to obtain clarification of the points under discussion. These experts are available to answer participants' questions and to help identify key points as they come up in the discussion. They provide useful focus for elements such as the daily discussion summaries. We believe that the present project would have been strengthened had such expertise been available.

## 6.d. Explore other applications of the techniques.

While online Dialogue can be an effective adjunct to in-person Dialogue, this is not the only possible application of Internet discussion techniques to explorations of public policy. The same techniques may be valid in the formative stages of such explorations. For example, when NIF begins to formulate the outline of a policy

discussion, they solicit input from a broad range of groups. That solicitation could be carried out online by means of an online Dialogue similar to the present one.

The online roundtables that Information Renaissance has used differ in structure from a National Issues Forum in that the subject experts and politicians play a role that is different from that of ordinary citizens. The Internet could allow for a hybrid event, which retains the flat and democratic structure of a National Issues Forum in an online discussion which could follow a roundtable of subject experts and politicians. Such a hybrid event would of necessity last longer than the type of Dialogue that we have just concluded, but it would certainly allow for more in-depth analysis of the issues.

Issue-framing lends itself to the use of online tools other than simple messages or survey forms. Information Renaissance is presently exploring the development of such tools, which facilitate group decision-making and parallel selection structures.

**Appendix A**

**Quotations from the Participants**

### Welcomed useful new mechanism

- *"It is a wonderful program, and how great that, through the magic of the computer, you can reach so many. I can probably do better the next time."*

- *"This was an excellent forum. I wish I could come up with suggestions to improve it but can't. Lets do it again, soon!"*

- *"I'm keenly interested in deliberative democracy on-line as a tool for social sector reform and want to learn a lot more about it."*

***Wanted more information***—Some participants said they would have liked more information on documents, legislation and laws that relate to money and politics and that provided background information on our democracy.

- *"A text that in retrospect would have been handy is a treatment of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution for those of us who missed Civics or forgot as this topic took on some of the aspects of both documents."*

- *"There seems to be a lot of misinformation surrounding the issue of money and politics. Many of the comments, including my own, were not well informed."*

- *"I wonder about the connection between money and speech. I understand that the courts have said that the ability to spend money in this way is a form of free speech. But what are the limits of my free speech?"*

- *"I thought that the first amendment issue should have been explained better. Many contributors confused the issues. I think the discussion was dumbed down by not explaining the Buckley v. Valeo decision. As a result I think many participants remained ill-informed about the basic policy framework."*

- *"The [Senate] debate was more informative/compelling than the dialogue."*

### Questioned the value of the discussion as it was framed

- *"I think the Kettering format needs some revision. I like Roger Fisher's approach better, in Getting to Yes. He doesn't start with 'Solutions' - he starts with values and criteria for success. Leading with 'Solutions' pits people against one another. Starting with 'Needs' (Values, principles - they're all ways of characterizing Success Criteria) is less divisive."*

- *"As I see it, the choices being considered could alter the beneficiaries of money in politics but I doubt if any of them will alter the culture. Therefore, we seem to be wasting time that could be spent on other matters."*

- *"I don't see that we will resolve anything regarding influence peddling in politics but the discussion has been worth while in helping me understand how others view the problem."*

***Wanted links to lawmakers***—In the discussion and in messages to the facilitator participants expressed interest in linking the discussion and its outcome to policy makers.

- *"Will the summaries or some compilation of our discussions here be made available to the Senators discussing this topic and or anyone else on the Hill?"*

- *"If the dialogue had been tied in somehow with the S.27 debate on C-Span (March 19 - March 28), it would have been extremely helpful… Wouldn't it be great to be able to ask questions about what's happening on the Senate floor and or to discuss the previous day's amendments, etc. via Internet with experts?…I went to the C-Span Campaign Finance Reform chat room during the debate but the quality of the chat there was not always respectful or informative. I very much wanted to talk with people about the debate."*

- *"[S]ince this is being done at the same time the Congress is at it... it might be interesting to find some way to connect their deliberations with 'ours.' … Perhaps at the end, see if you can get someone for a "real time" conversation linking what we have done with what they are doing..."*

- *"I do wonder how many participants feel the discussion is behind the curve of congressional debate on the issue, i.e. that the window is nearly closed for our discussion to reach any of the policy makers already in a process of acting."*

- *"It'd be nice to have some sense of how the discussion will be useful and make a difference."*


***Gained New Perspectives***—In the Post-Dialogue Questionnaire, 44% of the 65 respondents said that they were thinking differently about the issue after participating in this event. When asked to elaborate, some said that their thinking had become less dogmatic and more refined. Many commented that they now had a better understanding of the issues.

- *"My perspective has widened. I have a lot of related issues to think about."*

- *"I am even more aware of how complicated the issue is and that unwanted consequences could very well happen with any of the choices."*

- *"I believe that I now have a better understanding of the nature of the problem but not so with the cure."*

- *"I see a greater premium than ever on the education of our citizenry."*

- *" I have a more expanded understanding of the complexity of the issue of CFR, that I lacked at the time we began. I have heard others' viewpoints, and this has helped to shape my understanding. I have heard opposing viewpoints, and have come to understand the motivations behind these viewpoints."*

- *"I'm better informed about some of the other views and proposed solutions to the problem and the arguments behind them."*

- *"It was good to see the issues from other points of view, rather than what I see in the papers and on the news. I liked the personal touches each person was able to add."*

- *"[W]ith the dialog between all that participated, it may mean we better understand the factors that impact on the issue. If we better understand these factors, then we can make more informed decisions concerning the complex issue. This helps me see different ways to solve the issue or at least approach the issue."*

- *"I definitely have a better understanding about what is happening with campaign finance reform."*

- *"It gets me thinking more deeply about the different possibilities as well as the wider choices and responsibilities that we as voters have."*

***Challenged by discussion and discussants***—In personal messages to the facilitator participants said they were challenged by the topic and by others in the discussion.

- *"Bottom line? One must care about the issue and be willing to do a bit of work to engage with others about it. Sounds remarkably like criteria for citizenship, doesn't it?"*

- *"I think the drop off [in message traffic] is because you are (rightly) forcing us to draw some conclusions"*

- *"I am frankly intimidated by the literacy of several of the participants. That is not to say I think my contributions are not worthwhile, I just don't express myself as admirably."*

- *"This is really sad, but I felt a bit lacking when I read the verbose comments of others!"*

***Others spoke for them***—A few people in private messages and over one-half of the people completing the wrap-up form indicated that when they didn't post a message it was because others had already made their point.

- *"[S]ome participants state things so well that they sap the need of others to comment."*

- *"I did find that most if not all of my feelings were represented in the postings that were made." [message from a non-poster]*

- *"I felt most of the points had been made."*

***Interested in other online Dialogues***—Participants seemed enthusiastic about joining future online dialogues. 71% of the 51 individuals completing the wrap-up questionnaire said they'd like to participate in another Dialogue online, and 33% indicated they'd like to do so in person. Seven of the 21 individuals who had responded to the facilitator's message to non-posters independently expressed an interest in participating in future online dialogues.

- *"I'd like to see more of this kind of monitored dialogue. Could we do one on the budget, for example, an area where it is not just a matter of opinion but where learning about the subject is needed."*

- *"Include me in future dialogues."*

- *"'I thought that this was an excellent experience and discussion. I felt it was positive and would enjoy participating in any other discussions that might be present."*

- *"I'd be willing to participate in other discussions on this topic. I will explore several of the novel ideas put forth during the discussion."*

**Suggested smaller discussion groups**—A number of the commenters felt the volume of messages was overwhelming. A few people suggested that the discussion be broken down into smaller groups.

- *"Probably the biggest factor in participation is the time it takes to read the comments and then evaluate and then respond."*

- *"The dialogue has been awesome, but a bit overwhelming. It's a challenge to track ideas throughout the messages."*

- *"I am finding it worthwhile but it is/was very time consuming -particularly in the beginning when there were so many messages to read (and I felt compelled to read them all)."*

- *"There needs to be some way to make interaction between participants more accessible and personal. I'd suggest thinking about breaking the larger group into smaller discussions between groups of 15-20."*

- *"Find some way to break the overall group into smaller subgroups limited to 15-20. That may make it easier for participants to keep up with the flow of ideas. The volume is daunting. It's hard for a busy person to keep up. Maybe the dialogue should be run in a Breakout Group format, rather than a plenary format."*

**Pre-Dialogue Questionnaire**

Total Registrants Completing: 220
Response Rate: 96%

1. Which statement best describes what you think should be done about money and politics?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | 1% | [No Response] |
| 22 | 10% | I am not at all sure what should be done. |
| 140 | 64% | I have a general sense of what should be done. |
| 55 | 25% | I have a definite opinion about what should be done. |

2. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

a. High campaign costs discourage good people from running for office.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | 1% | [No Response] |
| 115 | 52% | Strongly agree |
| 78 | 35% | Somewhat agree |
| 11 | 5% | Somewhat disagree |
| 10 | 5% | Strongly disagree |
| 3 | 1% | Not Sure |

b. Current election laws favor those who already hold office.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | 1% | [No Response] |
| 108 | 49% | Strongly agree |
| 78 | 35% | Somewhat agree |
| 13 | 6% | Somewhat disagree |
| 1 | 0% | Strongly disagree |
| 17 | 8% | Not sure |

c. Lobbyists for special interests have too much power with public officials.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 114 | 52% | Strongly agree |
| 69 | 31% | Somewhat agree |
| 8 | 4% | Somewhat disagree |
| 3 | 1% | Strongly disagree |
| 22 | 10% | Not sure |

d. Candidates depend too heavily on large campaign gifts from wealthy donors.

```
  4      2%     [No Response]
117     53%     Strongly agree
 73     33%     Somewhat agree
 10      5%     Somewhat disagree
  7      3%     Strongly disagree
  9      4%     Not sure
```

e. Restricting political donations infringes on the free speech of citizens.

```
  5      2%     [No Response]
 17      8%     Strongly agree
 34     15%     Somewhat agree
 75     34%     Somewhat disagree
 74     34%     Strongly disagree
 15      7%     Not sure
```

f. Complex rules makes it too hard for ordinary citizens to put issues on the ballot.

```
  5      2%     [No Response]
 37     17%     Strongly agree
 83     38%     Somewhat agree
 45     20%     Somewhat disagree
 16      7%     Strongly disagree
 34     15%     Not sure
```

3. Are there other things that trouble you about the role of money in politics? Please explain. *Text not included.*

4. Do you favor or oppose each of the actions listed below?

a. Lift restrictions on campaign fund-raising to ensure that all candidates have a chance to win.

```
  7      3%     [No Response]
 23     10%     Strongly favor
 26     12%     Somewhat favor
 47     21%     Somewhat oppose
 84     38%     Strongly oppose
 33     15%     Not sure
```

b. Strictly limit the amounts of money that citizens and special interests can give to political causes.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3% | [No Response] |
| 88 | 40% | Strongly favor |
| 78 | 35% | Somewhat favor |
| 23 | 10% | Somewhat oppose |
| 14 | 6% | Strongly oppose |
| 11 | 5% | Not sure |

c. Forbid lawmakers from accepting gifts and favors from lobbyists.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3% | [No Response] |
| 134 | 61% | Strongly favor |
| 51 | 23% | Somewhat favor |
| 18 | 8% | Somewhat oppose |
| 4 | 2% | Strongly oppose |
| 7 | 3% | Not sure |

d. Require radio and TV stations to give free airtime to candidates.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | 3% | [No Response] |
| 103 | 47% | Strongly favor |
| 61 | 28% | Somewhat favor |
| 18 | 8% | Somewhat oppose |
| 16 | 7% | Strongly oppose |
| 15 | 7% | Not sure |

e. Let candidates raise as much money as they want, but strictly enforce disclosure laws.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3% | [No Response] |
| 29 | 13% | Strongly favor |
| 55 | 25% | Somewhat favor |
| 40 | 18% | Somewhat oppose |
| 64 | 29% | Strongly oppose |
| 26 | 12% | Not sure |

f. Make it easier for voters to recall elected officials.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 37 | 17% | Strongly favor |
| 75 | 34% | Somewhat favor |
| 43 | 20% | Somewhat oppose |
| 27 | 12% | Strongly oppose |
| 33 | 15% | Not sure |

# Appendix C
## Post-Dialogue Questionnaire

Total responses: 65
Response rate: 28%

1. Do you favor or oppose the actions listed below?

   a. Reduce the power of special interests by using public funds to finance elections EVEN IF that would cost taxpayers more money.

   | 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
   |---|---|---|
   | 24 | 37% | Strongly favor |
   | 18 | 28% | Somewhat favor |
   | 8 | 12% | Somewhat oppose |
   | 9 | 14% | Strongly oppose |
   | 5 | 8% | Not sure |

   b. Curb the power of lobbyist for special interests EVEN IF that means reducing the power of interest groups that speak for you.

   | 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
   |---|---|---|
   | 13 | 20% | Strongly favor |
   | 28 | 43% | Somewhat favor |
   | 9 | 14% | Somewhat oppose |
   | 11 | 17% | Strongly oppose |
   | 3 | 5% | Not sure |

   c. Remove restrictions on political donations EVEN IF that means that some candidates will have much more money than their opponents.

   | 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
   |---|---|---|
   | 8 | 12% | Strongly favor |
   | 4 | 6% | Somewhat favor |
   | 12 | 8% | Somewhat oppose |
   | 36 | 55% | Strongly oppose |
   | 4 | 6% | Not sure |

2. Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?

   a. Lift restrictions on campaign fund-raising to ensure that all candidates have a chance to win.

| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 15% | Strongly favor |
| 8 | 12% | Somewhat favor |
| 15 | 23% | Somewhat oppose |
| 28 | 48% | Strongly oppose |
| 3 | 5% | Not sure |

   b. Strictly limit the amounts of money special interests can give to political causes.

| 2 | 3% | [No Response] |
|---|---|---|
| 34 | 52% | Strongly favor |
| 17 | 26% | Somewhat favor |
| 4 | 6% | Somewhat oppose |
| 6 | 9% | Strongly oppose |
| 2 | 3% | Not sure |

   c. Forbid lawmakers from accepting gifts and favors from lobbyists.

| 3 | 5% | [No Response] |
|---|---|---|
| 45 | 69% | Strongly favor |
| 11 | 17% | Somewhat favor |
| 2 | 3% | Somewhat oppose |
| 2 | 3% | Strongly oppose |
| 2 | 3% | Not sure |

   d. Require radio and TV stations to give free airtime to candidates.

| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
|---|---|---|
| 31 | 48% | Strongly favor |
| 20 | 31% | Somewhat favor |
| 3 | 5% | Somewhat oppose |
| 5 | 8% | Strongly oppose |
| 5 | 8% | Not sure |

e. Let candidates raise as much money as they want, but strictly enforce disclosure laws.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | 5% | [No Response] |
| 11 | 17% | Strongly favor |
| 13 | 20% | Somewhat favor |
| 12 | 18% | Somewhat oppose |
| 25 | 32% | Strongly oppose |
| 1 | 8% | Not sure |

f. Make it easier for voters to recall elected officials who are not serving the public interest.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | |
| 19 | 29% | Strongly favor |
| 15 | 23% | Somewhat favor |
| 10 | 15% | Somewhat oppose |
| 14 | 22% | Strongly oppose |
| 6 | 9% | Not sure |

3. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?

a. High campaign costs discourage good people from running for office.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 41 | 63% | Strongly agree |
| 21 | 32% | Somewhat agree |
| 1 | 2% | Somewhat disagree |
| 0 | 0% | Strongly disagree |
| 1 | 2% | Not sure |

b. Current election laws favor those who already hold office.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 48 | 74% | Strongly agree |
| 16 | 25% | Somewhat agree |
| 0 | 0% | Somewhat disagree |
| 0 | 0% | Strongly disagree |
| 0 | 0% | Not sure |

c. Lobbyists for special interests have too much power with public officials.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 36 | 55% | Strongly agree |
| 20 | 31% | Somewhat agree |
| 4 | 6% | Somewhat disagree |
| 2 | 3% | Strongly disagree |
| 2 | 3% | Not sure |

d. Candidates depend too heavily on large campaign gifts from wealthy donors.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 37 | 57% | Strongly agree |
| 21 | 32% | Somewhat agree |
| 3 | 5% | Somewhat disagree |
| 1 | 2% | Strongly disagree |
| 2 | 3% | Not sure |

e. Restricting political donations infringes on the free speech of citizens.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 6 | 9% | Strongly agree |
| 9 | 14% | Somewhat agree |
| 24 | 37% | Somewhat disagree |
| 23 | 35% | Strongly disagree |
| 2 | 3% | Not sure |

f. Complex rules makes it too hard for ordinary citizens to put issues on the ballot.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2% | [No Response] |
| 8 | 12% | Strongly agree |
| 27 | 42% | Somewhat agree |
| 15 | 23% | Somewhat disagree |
| 5 | 8% | Strongly disagree |
| 9 | 14% | Not sure |

4. Which statement best describes what you think should be done about money and politics?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0/63 | 0% | I am not at all sure about what should be done |
| 37/63 | 59% | I have a general sense of what should be done. |
| 26/63 | 41% | I have a definite opinion about what should be done. |

5. Which principles or deeply held beliefs should guide our approach to money and politics? Please explain:
*Text not included.*

6. Are you thinking differently about the issue of money and politics now that you have participated in the forum? If yes, please explain.
*Text not included.*

    28/64   44%       Yes
    36/64   56%       No

7. Do you see ways for people to work on this issue that you didn't see before? If yes, please explain.
*Text not included.*

    26/61   43%       Yes
    35/61   57%       No

8. What, if anything, might you do differently as a result of this forum?
*Text not included.*

9. What else about money and politics, if anything, still needs to be addressed? Please explain.
*Text not included.*

**Appendix D**

**Wrap-up Questionnaire**

Total number of responses: 51
Response rate: 22%

1.  How much did you learn about the issue of money and politics?

|     |     |            |
| --- | --- | ---------- |
| 2   | 4%  |            |
| 15  | 29% | Very much  |
| 31  | 61% | Some       |
| 3   | 6%  | A little   |
| 0   | 0%  | Not at all |

2. Would you like to participate in other Dialogues about policy issues in the future?

|       |     |                              |
| ----- | --- | ---------------------------- |
| 35/49 | 71% | Yes, online                  |
| 16/49 | 33% | Yes, in-person               |
| 31/49 | 63% | Tell me when they are available |
| 7/49  | 14% | Not sure                     |
| 8/49  | 16% | No                           |

3. How did you view the communication in the discussion?

|     |     |                                 |
| --- | --- | ------------------------------- |
| 2   | 4%  | [No Response]                   |
| 5   | 10% | Mostly moderator-to-participants |
| 5   | 10% | Mostly participant-to-moderator |
| 15  | 29% | Mostly participant-to-participant |
| 24  | 47% | An even mix                     |

4. During which weeks did you participate?

|     |     |               |
| --- | --- | ------------- |
| 4   | 8%  | [No Response] |
| 16  | 31% | The first     |
| 5   | 10% | The second    |
| 26  | 51% | Both          |

5. About how many times did you visit the Dialogue Web site each week?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | 6% | [No Response] |
| 15 | 29% | 1-2 times |
| 17 | 33% | 3-4 times |
| 8 | 16% | 5-6 times |
| 8 | 16% | 7 or more times |

6. On the days you visited the Dialogue, about how much time did you spend?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 4% | [No Response] |
| 6 | 12% | Less than 15 minutes |
| 27 | 53% | 15 - 30 minutes |
| 14 | 27% | 30 - 60 minutes |
| 2 | 4% | More than an hour |

7. In total, about how many messages did you send to the group?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 4% | [No Response] |
| 3 | 76% | None |
| 18 | 35% | 1-2 |
| 21 | 41% | 3-5 |
| 4 | 8% | 6-10 |
| 3 | 6% | More than 10 |

8. If you posted messages, did you consider the perspectives of other participants in formulating your message?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | 10% | [No Response] |
| 10 | 20% | Very much |
| 25 | 49% | Some |
| 10 | 20% | A little |
| 0 | 0% | Not at all |
| 1 | 2% | I didn't post any messages |

9. When you did not send in comments what were some of the reasons why? [choose as many as you wish]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 31/47 | 66% | Too busy to formulate comments |
| 29/47 | 62% | Others had already made my point |
| 3/47 | 6% | The topic did not interest me |
| 10/47 | 21% | I prefer to read and not send in messages |
| 9/47 | 19% | Other |

10. Did it seem that participants treated each other as equals, respectfully?

    3      6%      [No Response]
  33    65%     Very much
  15    29%     Some
    0      0%      A little
    0      0%      Not at all

11. Did you exchange e-mail with other participants during the Dialogue?

    3      6%      [No Response]
    0      0%      Yes quite a bit
    7    14%     Yes, just a little
  41    80%     No

Rating of the Dialogue and Web site on a scale of 1-5. 1=very poor, 5=excellent

12. Moderator:

   0/48     0%    1
   0/48     0%    2
   6/48   12%   3
  24/48   50%   4
  18/48   38%   5

13. Suggestions for improving the role of the moderator: *Text not included.*

14. Reporter:

   0/47     0%    1
   2/47     4%    2
   4/47     9%    3
  21/47   45%   4
  20/47   43%   5

15. Suggestions for improving the role of the reporter: *Text not included.*

16. Money and Politics Issue Book:

   2/49     4%    1
   1/49     2%    2
   5/49   10%   3
  14/49   29%   4
  11/49   22%   5
  16/49   33%   Didn't use

17. Other resources in the Briefing Book:

    1/48     2%     1
    1/48     2%     2
    4/48     8%     3
    9/48   19%     4
    5/48   10%     5
   28/48   58%    Didn't use

18. Search tool:

    0/49     0%     1
    1/49     2%     2
    4/49     8%     3
   11/49   22%     4
    6/49   12%     5
   27/49   55%    Didn't use

19. Overall Web site:

    2/48     4%     1
    0/48     0%     2
    5/48   10%     3
   24/48   50%     4
   13/48   27%     5
    4/48     8%    Didn't use

20. Suggestions for improving the Web site or the resources in the Briefing Book: *Text not included.*

21. What version of the Money and Politics Issue Book did you use?

    11    22%    [No Response]
    34    67%    Online
     4     8%    Print version
     2     4%    Both