

July 31, 2016

To: Participants in June Partner Meeting at Airlie House

From: Madison Initiative Team

Re: Reflections on your feedback

We hope this finds the summer going well for you. We certainly appreciated the chance to meet with you last month at Airlie House. Thank you again for your time and participation. By way of follow up, we wanted to share with you our reflections on the feedback you provided to us, both during the meeting on the substance of the Initiative, and afterwards on your experience of the meeting as you assessed it on the participant survey.

We will not attempt to summarize the many relevant points of feedback on the Initiative here – suffice it to say that we came away with plenty of food for thought. That said, we would like to highlight three themes that we heard across various conversations and that have prompted ongoing reflection within our team.

- ***Challenges with the statement of our goal.*** The goal of the Madison Initiative is to help create the conditions in which Congress and its members can deliberate, negotiate, and compromise in ways that work for more Americans. Several of you pointed out that a goal statement with “negotiation and compromise” at its core can come across as thin gruel, especially in the current environment where it can readily conjure up images of horse trading among self-interested elites in Washington. You wondered if there was a better way to describe the behaviors that we want to see. As we noted in the pre-read memo, we believe that negotiation and compromise are fundamental values embedded in and required for the successful operation of our constitutional system. That said, we recognize the communications challenge here and will reflect on how we might refine how we talk about our goal. Others made a related point that to legitimize our focus on the improvement of the democratic process, we may want to spell out, more than we do at present, the substantive outcomes that would result from better negotiation and compromise, i.e., we should answer the “to what end(s)?” question. We continue to think that the appropriate substantive outcomes of a democratic process need to be determined by the participants in that process rather than being stipulated in advance. That said, we do appreciate the need for a clear and more or less objective standard by which to assess whether the process is working. At present our proxy in this regard would be having more people expressing approval of and confidence in Congress than the roughly one out of ten Americans who currently do so. But we will continue to ponder whether there are better ways of gaining a purchase on this question.
- ***Need to highlight / reinforce desired behaviors.*** Members of Congress and candidates for its offices clearly have multiple incentives bidding them to behave in ways that are dysfunctional for the operation of our system as a whole. In turn, those citizens who are tracking what is happening in and around the institution do so via media that emphasize conflict, problems, and the ever-present “horse race” aspects of politics. The net effect is a pervasive and reinforcing environment of polarization and cynicism surrounding Congress and its members. Nevertheless, many politicians and groups are seeking to work through and around these barriers in order to

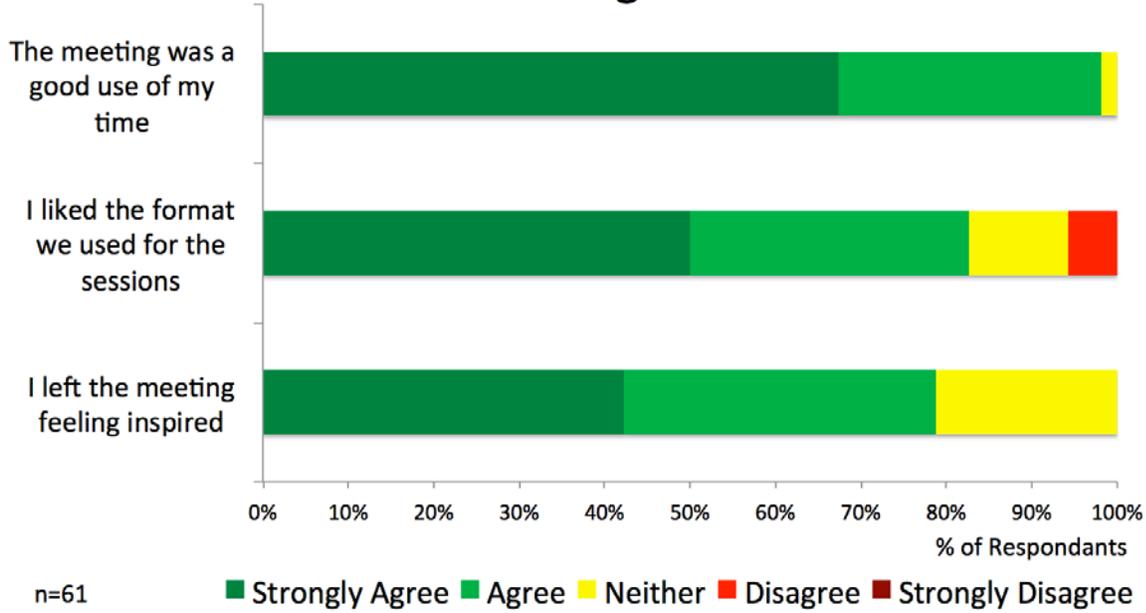
engage in more productive deliberation, negotiation, and compromise. They periodically succeed, against steep odds. Are there ways we could collectively uphold and reinforce their victories when they occur? Are there institutions and processes we can shore up that would make it easier for this to happen? If we can't eliminate the incentives pulling in the direction of dysfunction, can we help develop a countervailing set of incentives? Can we get success stories out so that both elites and citizens at large would have a better appreciation of what is (and is not) possible within the institution, the ways in which it can be realized, and how they could help bring it about? These are really good questions. We don't have any clear answers to them yet, but we left Airlie feeling compelled and inspired to develop some.

- ***Building a platform for communication and collaboration in the network.*** Multiple people remarked on how helpful it was to gather with like-minded leaders and organizations and that you would be interested in keeping in closer touch with them between meetings like this. You want to stay on top of what others in the network are up to so that you can learn from and / or join forces with them when opportunities for doing so present themselves; you also want to keep others apprised of your work as it unfolds so that they can do likewise. At present the links between different organizations and / or subgroups working in different areas that might enable this communication and collaboration are often weak and spotty. We agree that a clearinghouse or platform that would enable interested participants to stay more actively connected with each other would be a welcomed addition to the network. We don't think that we at the foundation are practically in a position to do this – not least because of the funder/grantee hub and spoke dynamic we seek to avoid. However, we are interested in helping to develop this functional capacity out in the network. We are currently talking with sister programs working in fields where this has organically developed to understand how it occurred and what we could do as a funder to help cultivate it. Please stay tuned for more on this possibility (and in the meantime, by all means let us know if you have any additional ideas for how to proceed with it).

Finally, we wanted to take stock of the feedback you provided on the meeting itself in the post-meeting participant survey. We had a 77% response rate to the survey, which is terrific – thank you for the follow up! The key data from the survey are presented in charts on the next page. We were pleased to see improvement relative to our prior meeting in Baltimore on questions about the extent to which participants found the meeting to be a good use of their time, liked the meeting format, and left feeling inspired. Your candid feedback during and after the meeting in Baltimore set the stage for our improved collective experience at Airlie.

As we reflect on the most recent feedback and look ahead to future meetings, we are considering some additional refinements. One is hosting the partner meeting every 12 months vs. the 20 that passed between the Baltimore and Airlie meetings to help keep participants in the network connected. When we do meet, we may experiment with investing more time to identify and develop collective and concrete next steps on mission critical projects that would support the work of multiple participants. We'd welcome any additional feedback you might have about whether / how to proceed along these lines, as well as on the substance of the Initiative. Until we meet again, thank you for your continued engagement!

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:



To what extent were our objectives achieved?

