

INTERACTIVITY FOUNDATION

BIANNUAL REPORT

April 2021 - October 2021

Maintaining Momentum Through Uncertain Times



Photo by Craig Chitima on Unsplash

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Approved by IF Fellows & Intellectual Development Committee (IDC)

IMPROVING DEMOCRACY THROUGH DISCUSSION

The mission of the Interactivity Foundation (IF) is to strengthen democracy by improving the quality of discussions we have about societal concerns. Our approach is to advance generous conversations aimed at avoiding a rush to solutions or prioritizing consensus. We focus on expanding public imagination by offering exploratory discussions that help to complicate rather than simplify our understanding of potential public policy options. We believe that the skills and habits of mind needed to engage in these types of discussions are learned through intentional design, practice, and reflection. To that end, we believe in educating for more engaged and civically-oriented citizens.

Interactivity Foundation

Maintaining Momentum through Uncertain Times

Community Conversations at a Glance

April 2021 - October 2021

Events



Series



Participants



Education at a Glance

April 2021 - October 2021



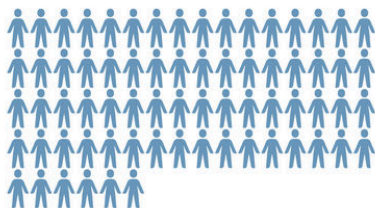
20

New Collaborative Discussion Coaches



10

New Certificate Programs (19 total)



70

Certificates in Collaborative Discussion Awarded (250 total)

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

What's New?

With roughly **40 distinct discussion events**, most of them grouped into multi-part series, this was a very active period for our community conversation initiative. All of our discussions are facilitated, small-group discussions, which means that each event typically requires multiple facilitators.

Key observations:

- Sustained relationships with partners continue to draw in people, many of whom become repeat participants.
- The quality of our discussion plans, guides, and execution of events continue to improve as we work together through sustained programming.
- Our programming continues to reach new geographical areas within the U.S. and abroad.



REIMAGINING THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

3-part monthly series, March - May (Approx. 20 participants per event)

This series explores different dimensions of how the pandemic is, or might be, changing our society, as well as different visions of what might be desired changes for creating a “new normal.” In partnership with IONA.



LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

2-part series, March & June (Approx. 7 participants per event)

This series explores what the pandemic has revealed about loneliness and social isolation in our communities and society at large and what we can do to address these concerns.



WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

6-part weekly series, March - April (Approx. 20 participants per event)

This series advances from a broad exploration to generating different policy possibilities for creating and sustaining “welcoming communities.” In partnership with the Center for Lifelong Learning at Leisure World.



SPRINGHOUSE DISCUSSIONS

16-part weekly series, April - July (Approx. 4 participants per event)

This series employs IF Guidebooks as the content for community conversations. It has been a longstanding program and currently paused while we initiate discussions with new leadership. In partnership with the Springhouse Senior Living Community.

“I found it a very supportive and great environment. I’d call it a safe environment, where I could listen to thoughts that did not necessarily align with what my thoughts were, to be invited to better understand those thoughts. And if I still did not agree, I did not feel compelled to counter them. It wasn’t a debate, it was a real dialogue and real discussion--and that is a rare occurrence (at least it’s a rare occurrence for me.) I appreciate it very much.”

Jim Burke, Virginia

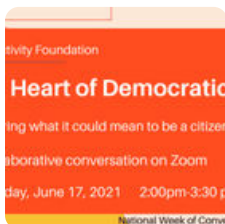
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



CELEBRATING DADS!

Single event, June (Approx. 20 participants)

This event was the first hybrid/indoor event since February 2020. The discussion explores experiences of fatherhood. In partnership with Friends of India Association of Leisure World.



HEART OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Single event, June (Approx. 20 participants)

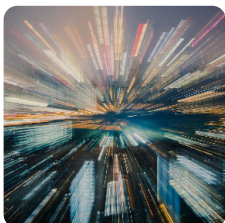
This event allowed participants to explore different visions of what “the office of citizen” entails in a healthy democracy. In partnership with Listen First and part of the National Week of Conversation.



TECHNOLOGY & DEMOCRACY

3-part series, June - July (Approx. 10 participants per event)

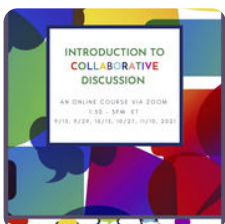
This series explores different ways that technology intersects with democracy, including possibilities for diminishing or enhancing democracy.



INNOVATION & GENDER PILOT SERIES

4-part weekly series, July - August (Approx. 20 participants)

This was an asynchronous, text-based series, that used the LinkedIn platform to explore themes around innovation and gender.



INTRODUCTION TO COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION

5-part series, September - November (Approx. 20 participants per event)

This series introduces IF's Collaborative Discussion Toolkit and is an experiment in adapting it for use in a non-academic context. It is being conducted as a course in partnership with the Diversity Relations Council at Leisure World-Maryland.



FILMS & CONVERSATIONS: THE HUMAN CONDITION(ED)

5-part series, September - November (Approx. 20 participants per event)

This series explores different forces of social connection and disconnection in contemporary society as well as ways to address these forces. The series uses short films as discussion catalysts.

“I really appreciated this opportunity to sort of hear people think out of the box and be free to do that myself and maybe connect some dots that have been lingering in my mind in different forms...I just really appreciated being able to participate and really think of some WHAT IFs, and hear some great ideas. I feel in a way relieved that I finally got to say some things that have been cobwebs in my brain for a long time.”

Cheryl, Community Conversation Participant

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES & POSSIBILITIES

- **Resilient Communities** is a possible international discussion series that we are exploring with a partner in Spain. The parameters are not yet determined. It might be an exploration of the various factors and concerns that play into the resiliency of our towns and cities in light of growing challenges like climate change. Alternatively, it might be a broader exploration of different dimensions that go into creating and sustaining “resilient communities.”
- **Capitol Hill Village** is a new partner interested in using the film and conversation model for a possible series on sex and gender.
- **Photography and Conversations** is a possible discussion series in partnership with Rick Brooks, Voices from the Prairie, who has expressed interest in bringing a Chicago-based photographic artist to Princeton, IL. This series would convene discussions around the themes in her photographs (which would be publicly displayed at a local gallery). Her photographs are artistic updates of the Norman Rockwell Collection.

INSIGHTS

- Asynchronous online discussions can work well if they are
 - conducted with a selected, closed group
 - actively facilitated, including individual responses to participant comments
 - the right subject matter (i.e. closely related to group interests)
- There seems to be great interest with partners in selecting topics related to “cultural competency” and “consciousness raising” around race, sex/gender, etc. We need to communicate that our work is rooted in the exploratory development space and less in the space of delivering pre-existing content and advocacy work.
- We have a small but growing group of repeat participants. They generally have great enthusiasm for our approach to discussions. They also have internalized this approach, showing that their skills are improving over time.

"It was a wonderful mental exercise. It was nice being in a group who were thinking about a particular topic that I hadn't particularly thought about. And we explored it in many different ways and that stretched my brain a bit and got me back into thinking. Cause after 15 months of not 'talking to myself' exactly, listening to sort of canned stuff, it was really nice talking to live people who had ideas."

Marsha Goldberg, Washington, D.C.

EDUCATION

What's New?

We've launched our Collaborative Discussion Website and have been offering trainings in collaborative discussion. We have trained 20 Collaborative Discussion Coaches who are now offering their own certificate programs. Our new cohort of coaches are helping us to improve our learning activities, reach new audiences, and gain recognition for our work.



COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION TOOLKIT & WEBSITE

We launched the [Collaborative Discussion Project Website](#) in May 2021 (a month ahead of schedule). As an open access resource, the Collaborative Discussion Toolkit offers educators and community members **50+ learning activities**. Each activity is created through collaboration with educators and practitioners in the field of dialogue and deliberation. The website is also a resource for individuals or organizations interested in our **Collaborative Discussion Certificate Programs**. To date, the website has had 242 unique visitors and 691 site sessions.



COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION SUMMER TRAININGS

We offered **2 Trainings in Collaborative Discussion this summer**. Both trainings offered 5 days of multi-process interaction. The trainings resulted in:

- 20 trainees earning Collaborative Discussion Coach status
- 20 unique Collaborative Discussion Certificate Program Designs
- Multiple referrals for our next Collaborative Discussion Training
- Increased and deepened partnership with educational partners, community leaders, and organizations



NCDD SUMMER SPRINGBOARD WORKSHOP

In June, we offered a workshop that introduced the Collaborative Discussion Toolkit at the NCDD Summer Learning Springboard. We had over **40 participants** engaged for 2 hours. Outcomes of this workshop include:

- New applicants for our Collaborative Discussion Trainings
- Potential program partnership with the Colorado State Library System
- New curriculum collaborators for the toolkit

The Interactivity Foundation has created the Collaborative Discussion Certificate to be focused yet flexible. The certificate focuses on different modules, with activities to suit a variety of demographics in settings such as education, community, non-profits, and leadership development. Being trained in the Collaborative Discussion Certificate has offered me a valuable tool for my work with the community."

Sara Drury, Director of the Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse

EDUCATION

Metaphorically Speaking

By: Jack Byrd, Jr.

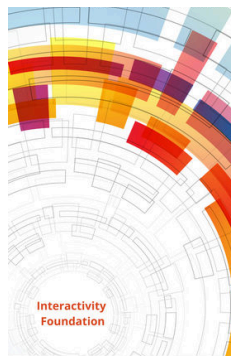


Photo by Brett Anderson

Caroline Janosik began her class by saying, "I need you to prepare students for the soft skills that employers are looking for. This course is not required in any program and may not count for credit."

EDUCATION BLOG ("THINK ABOUT..." SERIES)

This blog series by Jack Byrd has become a reservoir of resources for educators committed to discussion-centered learning. The blog posts cover a wide area of expertise, including: course design, facilitation, student feedback, discussion strategies and practices. The weekly blog posts are designed to share resources and strengthen our network of educators through sustained communication. We published 26 posts between April and October 2021.



COLLABORATIVE
DISCUSSION
CERTIFICATE

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Between April and October, we have helped to develop and support the following IF Certificate Programs in Collaborative Discussion:

- Wabash Liberal Arts Immersion Program, summer program by Sara Drury
- Sociology of Trauma, fall course by Megan Smith
- Democratic Deliberation, fall course by John Gastil
- The Experience of Loneliness, summer course by Megan Smith
- Collaborative Discussion Certificate at NCC, staff training by Susan Cushman
- Collaborative Civic Partner & Leader, community training by Leslie Garvin
- Facilitating Public & Organizational Engagement, fall course by Lori Britt
- People, Power, Change: Leadership as a Practice, fall course by Taiyi Sun



INNOVATION LEADERSHIP SERIES

This is a 12-week discussion series. Four discussions were held during this reporting period. The participants are members of the Society of Women Engineers at WVU. This is our first sustained series of asynchronous discussions. Participants will be awarded an electronic badge for completion. 17 women are participating.



EDUCATION SUMMER INTERNSHIP

We hosted our first summer internship in partnership with the Wabash Summer Internship program. Our intern was selected from a pool of candidates. The first 8 weeks of this hire were supported by Wabash College and we extended his employment for another 4 weeks. The intern focused on supporting our education work with a particular focus on co-planning and co-facilitating our summer trainings.

"Seeing you all openly sharing the collaborative discussion toolkit that you have worked so hard on was awesome, but what was most impressive to me was that every opportunity to share with the community was not an opportunity to boast and show what you have done but rather a time to gather feedback and improve the product. I love this mindset and it really showed me that to bring the best product forth requires a community effort where everyone brings valid feedback."

Noah Miller, IF Summer Intern (Wabash College Senior)

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES & POSSIBILITIES

- We are in the process of planning a 2-part discussion series titled "Healing our Communities" that will serve as a model exploratory discussion for Wesleyan College faculty and Macon, Georgia community leaders. We have been in developmental discussions with IF Partner and Education Advisory Team member, Melanie Doherty, about supporting this program which is part of a larger Mellon Grant collaboration.
- To better recognize long-term consultants and partners, we have created an Education Advisory Team which includes Lori Britt (JMU), Tim Shaffer (KSU), Melanie Doherty (Wesleyan College), and Taiyi Sun (Christopher Newport University).
- We are in developmental discussions with the state of Colorado Library System to offer Collaborative Discussion Training to librarians located in rural areas throughout the state.
- We are in the process of developing LinkedIn badges to accompany certificates. Our first badge will be to recognize the sustained online discussions in Innovative Leadership.

INSIGHTS

- There is a clear demand for what we are offering. There was greater than expected interest in our collaborative discussion training and certificate programs and the skills development offered.
- It is essential to have faculty or community partners in planning and delivering our training. Lori Britt was our faculty partner this summer and she really helped to elevate and offer external validation of this work.
- We are addressing a critical need in our society. To address the messy problems that we face as an interdependent society, we must develop collaboration skills.
- Our asynchronous, online discussions exhibited genuine sharing and connection. This type of platform, and the time permitted to reflect, allows for thoughtful engagement. It also allows for bonding that may not happen for all people in other types of discussions. Diversifying our discussion platforms is a way to be more inclusive and responsive to different engagement styles.
- We are recognizing phases of development: marketing -- recruitment -- training -- follow-up -- nurturing a community of practice. We are learning how to transition and support each phase.

"For years, I struggled to identify the most effective ways to teach and allow students to practice collaboration. I wanted to teach a number of concepts as well as content, but only had background in my subject matter and some instructional design experience to draw from. I have found that the Collaboration Toolkit had an amazingly positive influence on students' experiences and perceptions of collaboration skills. What is typically seen as a negative aspect of the classroom, is now seen through the new and exciting lens of the powerfully positive effect and outcome of working with others. I have incorporated the model three times in different types of courses, both graduate and undergraduate, and have received rave reviews every time."

Megan Smith, UNC-Charlotte Lecturer

PARTNERSHIPS & OUTREACH

BRIDGE ALLIANCE (BA)

In January 2021, the Bridge Alliance (BA) transformed into a dues-supported membership organization focused on 1) fostering collaboration across the field, and 2) amplifying the members' activities.

LISTEN FIRST COALITION (LFC)

Listen First Coalition is a dialogue and deliberation network that can help IF expand the number and diversity of participants in IF activities. The current focus of the LFC is centered on the America Talks event and the National Week of Conversation. America Talks is intended to connect people to discussion programming offered by Coalition members such as IF.

PHILANTHROPY FOR ACTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT (PACE)

PACE, of which IF is a dues-paying member, continues to serve as a useful forum for collaborative learning about civic engagement. PACE serves as a vital resource for making connections within the democracy field to further expand IF's reach. It also serves as a forum for collaborative learning regarding the substance of IF's mission.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR DIALOGUE AND DELIBERATION (NCDD)

The NCDD continues to be a valuable resource for IF's learning and for outreach with collaborative partners. One current focal point for the NCDD is a summer '21 online learning exchange, at which IF offered an introduction to the Collaborative Discussion Toolkit.

KETTERING FOUNDATION (KF)

KF shares IF's focus on a citizen-centered democracy and on the centrality of collaborative discussions. KF events are a valuable opportunity for networking and raising IF's profile among others working in the broader democracy field.

DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE (DMNS)

The DMNS continues to be an interested partner, especially in looking at how to bring collaborative discussions into the space where science meets public policy. The DMNS included IF's collaborative discussion agreements as guidance for the Symposium participants.



PARTNERSHIPS & OUTREACH

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTNERS

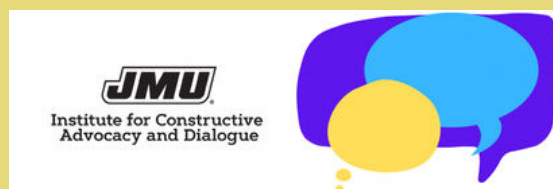
Partner organizations recruit and register participants from their networks and IF leads discussion programming. Discussion events have served as opportunities to develop new partnerships and expand outreach. Partners during this time period include:

- IONA Senior Services (Washington, D.C.)
- Friends of India at Leisure World (Washington, D.C.)
- Diversity Relations at Leisure World (Silver Spring, Maryland)
- DC Public Library (Washington, D.C.)
- Guy Mason Community (Washington, D.C.)
- Springhouse Senior Living Community (Boston, MA)
- Capitol Hill Village (Washington, DC)
- Voices From the Prairie (Princeton, IL)

EDUCATION PARTNERS

The IF Education Team continues to expand outreach and build capacity through partnering with educators who have expertise and interests in dialogue and deliberation as well as civic engagement. Partner organizations during this period include:

- Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse Initiative (Crawfordsville, IN)
- Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue at James Madison University (Harrisburg, VA)
- College Unbound (Providence, RI)
- West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV)
- Wesleyan College (Macon, GA)



DC Public Library

