

INTERACTIVITY FOUNDATION

BIANNUAL REPORT

April 2022 - October 2022

Deepening Our Democratic Mission



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Prepared by Shannon Wheatley Hartman, Ph.D.

Approved by IF Fellows & Intellectual Development Committee (IDC)

DEEPENING OUR DEMOCRATIC MISSION

The previous biannual report, [Defending Democratic Principles \(October 2021 - April 2022\)](#), describes how the Interactivity Foundation has intensified its focus on designing programs that aim to strengthen democracy. The continued attacks on our basic democratic principles and institutions have reinforced our commitment to this aim. IF's mission is not simply to be an organization that fosters discussion, but one that fosters discussion in support of democratic governance. In our current crisis of rising authoritarianism, we believe we need to focus more intensively on the role that dialogue can play in supporting democracy.

In this report, we describe how we continue to sharpen our programming through a multi-level approach: personal mindset, skill development, and community exploration-- all conducted through small group, facilitated discussion. Specifically, during this reporting period we

- Continue to develop our **Community Conversation Program**, offering opportunities for everyday citizens to find their voice and practice small group, exploratory discussion in a facilitated environment. Discussants are empowered to be agents of democracy through these opportunities to discuss pressing topics and explore pathways forward together.
- Recognize that democratic citizens are not born with the skills necessary to explore and collaborate. We learn how to be creative, critical, culturally responsive, and civically-oriented collaborators. By continuing to work with educational partners and develop our **Collaborative Discussion Project**, we help to create opportunities to learn the discussion skills necessary for citizen-led democracy.
- Believe that healthy democracies also require the cultivation of certain mindsets and behaviors in citizens and leaders. We believe in the power of individuals to innovate, inspire, and care for one another. Our **Asynchronous Discussion Program** offers positive messaging and opportunities for citizens to reflect on and nurture the individual growth that are key to creating a culture of activated citizens.
- Develop **Partnerships** that engage in collaborative learning with other organizations and individuals who share our focus on meeting the crisis of democracy and can help us think through how best to resist the threat of authoritarianism.

We continue to distinguish our work from what might be described as the “bridging movement,” which sees the primary problem of our society as one of partisan polarization. This diagnosis leads to strategies that adopt a neutral perspective and that aim to decrease the distance between two sides. In contrast, we see one of the primary problems as the rise of authoritarianism against democracy. This diagnosis requires a committed stance in favor of democracy. Our approach has been to avoid reducing the differences of “both sides” to a matter of incivility and, alternatively, focus our energy on what we consider to be real threats to democracy. We continue to reimagine our work so that we can center these threats to democracy and encourage our broader community of partners to do the same.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM

<h2 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">3</h2> <p style="font-size: 24px; margin: 0;">Series</p>	<h2 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">15</h2> <p style="font-size: 24px; margin: 0;">Events</p>	<h2 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">200+</h2> <p style="font-size: 24px; margin: 0;">Participants</p>	<h2 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">1</h2> <p style="font-size: 24px; margin: 0;">Training</p>	<h2 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">1</h2> <p style="font-size: 24px; margin: 0;">Consult</p>
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FOUR FREEDOMS: THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY TODAY & TOMORROW

4-session online series, April-June, 2022 with approx. 20 participants per session. In this online series, we explored different dimensions of what freedom could mean and how these might be supported by policy possibilities. We used iconic [Normal Rockwell](#) paintings alongside updated versions by artist [Maggie Meiners](#) to spark the conversations. This online series was developed and convened in tandem with a separate in-person series on the same topic (see below).



FOUR FREEDOMS & BEYOND

4 events, including 2 group discussion sessions, 1 presentation, and 1 performance event, May-June, 2022 with approx. 30 participants per discussion session. With in-kind and partial funding support from IF, this in-person series was conceived and convened by the [Midwest Partners Foundation](#), one of our organizational partners, in the rural community of Princeton, Illinois. Working with the artist Maggie Meiners, Midwest Partners developed the concept, developed and promoted the program, and is still promoting the materials and lessons learned. You can find out more from the [Midwest Partners report](#) and from their [website](#).



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM



GRATITUDE & JOY CIRCLE

8-session series, May-December, 2022 with approximately seven participants per session. This ongoing community conversation series is organized in partnership with [IONA Senior Services](#) in Washington, D.C. and promoted through the [AroundTownDC](#) event calendar for seniors in the DC area. IF is supporting this series by facilitating the monthly discussion sessions.



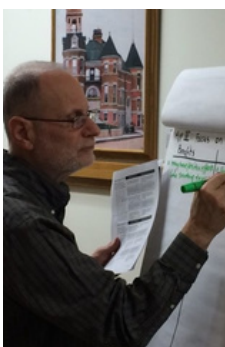
THE INVASION OF UKRAINE-WHAT IT MEANS FOR DEMOCRACY

3-session series, March, 2022 with approx. 20 participants per session. The discussion sessions for this series were completed in late March. In April, we completed our discussion summary of the content developed by the participants in the third and final session, including their ideas for how this conflict might end.



INCLUSIVE DUBUQUE FACILITATION TRAINING

2-part training, August 29 & November, 2022 with 36 volunteer facilitators. As in 2015, IF is again helping to train volunteer facilitators in Dubuque, Iowa. Working in teams, these volunteers will facilitate 30-40 separate community discussions over the next seven months to engage citizens. Their input will help to update the community's Equity Profile. This large scale project is being coordinated by [Inclusive Dubuque](#), an initiative of the [Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque](#).



AWARE AND ACTIVE CITIZENS (AAC) OF MERRILL, WI

Starting in March and continuing through this summer, IF has helped in planning and facilitating planning discussions for a [citizen group](#), which was formed in response to an IF-facilitated community conversation series in 2016-17 ("[Building Merrill Together](#)"). With that help, this grassroots organization has now completed their initial and strategic planning and is beginning to explore further partnerships and possibilities for improving and sustaining ongoing community-based discussions.

"I feel that this type of program makes us think about important things, and that's good that we can think about what is good, what is bad, what we should do, what we should not do. This type of program makes us think. That's what I like."

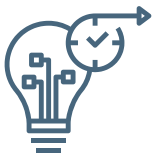
Ashish

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM



KEY INSIGHTS

- In framing the topics for our community conversations, we continued to focus more closely on avoiding both outright falsehoods and “both-sides-ism” while yet retaining an emphasis on openness and exploration of multiple and diverse ideas and perspectives that is central to our collaborative discussions.
- Working with an organizational partner, we successfully experimented with both a new topic, “Four Freedoms,” and a new format, using artistic images, for catalyzing exploratory discussion.
- We successfully framed and conducted a discussion series that engaged everyday citizens in thinking about a complex and highly volatile topic of international relations.
- We continued to work with and learn from various organizational partners to support their efforts to engage citizens in exploratory discussion, including training facilitators and advising on program design.



LOOKING AHEAD

- We are exploring the possibility of a sustained, international discussion series on fostering democratic resilience.
- We are continuing support for projects that have potential for ongoing and outward growth, like the Four Freedoms project.
- We are updating Community Conversation documents for sharing and public use. This ongoing effort will produce shareable versions of our facilitation plans on individual discussion topics *and* our basic “how to” guidance for planning, organizing, and facilitating discussion series. The goal is to have shorter documents that can be readily shared with and used by others to plan, organize, and facilitate exploratory discussions on a variety of topics.
- We are in the early stages of relaunching our sustained discussion program. Our first project may focus on democracy building or anti-authoritarianism.

“This is a forum that I really appreciate because we feel, as citizens, especially people like me who are first-generation immigrants, we feel a part of the country.”

Daulut

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROJECT

In May 2021, IF launched the [Collaborative Discussion Project](#) (CDP) in partnership with a team of educators and dialogue and deliberation practitioners. The project includes an open access [Toolkit](#) designed to support creative, critical, culturally responsive, and civic collaboration skills. The activities in the toolkit can be used independently or combined to offer a curated learning experience as part of an [IF Certificate Program](#), offered by Collaborative Discussion Coaches in classrooms, communities, and in the workplace. Participants who earn certificates in collaborative discussion will

- Improve their practice and understanding of essential collaborative discussion skills
- Develop collaborative discussion habits and support these habits in others
- Recognize and address collaborative discussion challenges and help groups move forward together productively
- Address concerns and harness opportunities with others that will help shape public decisions and improve community

The IF Collaborative Discussion Project is an on-going experiment aimed at supporting the skills necessary to function in democratic societies. Like all skills, they improve over time through practice and with directed reflection and feedback.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This summer, we offered our fourth Collaborative Discussion Coach Training.
- Offered a Toolkit Workshop for the second year at the [NCDD Summer Learning Springboard](#).
- Launched [applications for Mini Awards](#) to support new certificate programs.
- Launched [6 new assessment tools](#).
- Worked with our second Wabash College Intern who focused on the advancement of the Collaborative Discussion Project.



COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROJECT



KEY INSIGHTS

- Participation in the CDP operates in waves with the summer being a time of recruitment and training and the fall and spring focusing on new certificate programs.
- We continue to learn how to build a community of practice that offers valuable insights, materials, and opportunities to connect and co-lead the program.
- Our training teams and materials have become fine-tuned after multiple implementations and revisions.



LOOKING AHEAD

- Focus on expanding our certificate program beyond higher education classrooms. This might include community and workplace workshops as well as partnering with K12 classrooms and extracurricular clubs.
- Connect collaborative discussion participants with our community conversation programs as an opportunity to practice skill development.
- Build our assessment and evaluation loop to support an evidence-based approach to our programming.
- Offer adaptations to advance neurodiverse inclusivity as well as online adaptations.
- Create a regular, monthly opportunity to connect with community members and regular 1-hour webinars or workshops for various levels of entry or skill building.
- We are imagining the possibility of offering new badges for participants who "level up" their skills through sustained discussion practice and/or facilitation training.



"The Interactivity Foundation's training program has brought a wealth of new tools and perspectives to our school programming. The sequence of modules provides concrete directions, key steps, clear concepts, and evaluative measures for easily integrating collaboration into your classes or curricula."

Don Waisanen

ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM

The following discussion series were facilitated on the LinkedIn discussion platform. Each series was conducted asynchronously and convened weekly with the expectation of regular contributions throughout the week. Most series included the possibility of earning an IF Badge upon successful completion. These discussion series offer an alternative space for citizens to build the mindsets necessary for a healthy democracy.



CHANGE

12-session series, Spring 2022 with 12 participants per session. This discussion series focuses on the various challenges that bring about change. Participants are recent Industrial Engineering students from WVU who have graduated over the past 5 years.



INNOVATION LEADERSHIP

12-session series, Spring & Fall 2022 with a total of 27 participants who represent the Society of Women Engineers (but not exclusively). The discussions explore innovation leadership experiences of women from centuries ago to the present, with a focus on what it takes for women to become innovation leaders.



COLLEGE TO CAREER

12-session series, Spring & Fall 2022 with approx. 60 participants who are enrolled in the College to Career class. These discussions involve an exploration of the "soft skills" employers find lacking in recent college graduates.



TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

12-session series, Spring, Summer, & Fall 2022 with approx. 80 participants who are enrolled in the Technology Entrepreneurship class. These discussions explore the personal traits needed in an entrepreneurial career.



FOSTERING HOPE

12-session series, Summer 2022 with 16 participants. These discussions were around the ability to foster hope in yourself and others. Fostering hope is a leadership trait that is important to bringing about change.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

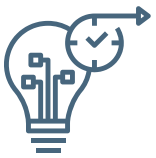
12-session series, Fall 2022 with 13 participants. This discussion series is designed to rejuvenate participants as they explore how they can discover their own purpose and reflect on what makes a meaningful life.

ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM



KEY INSIGHTS

- Participants were open to sharing their feelings. The prompts triggered serious personal reflections.
- The diversity in age and experience made for wonderful cross-generational sharing. The asynchronous structure broadened the participant pool.
- The start-up of a discussion requires considerable work. Tip: encourage one participant to kick-start the discussion by posting early and leading the way, playing the role of "bell cow."



LOOKING AHEAD

- We will launch the tentatively named website [Perspectives for Living](#) this fall, which will serve as an archive for over 750 messages used as discussion catalysts in the asynchronous discussion program. The messages are organized by theme with examples of how they might be used in the classroom, workplace, family, or with broader communities.
- We continue to experiment with cross campus dialogues and hope to advance more of these in the coming year.
- Possible topics for future asynchronous discussion series include: Inspiring Others, Purposeful Living, Courage, & African American Innovators.

About This Site

IN THE SPRING OF 2019...

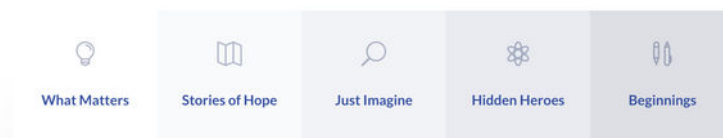
I was finishing up the semester when I discovered I had cancer. While I had taught 50 years at the time, I did not want to have my teaching career end at that time. As I progressed through the cancer treatment, I realized that my days of in-class teaching were over, but I could still teach online. I continued to teach throughout my treatment (2 surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy).

[Learn More](#)



Topics

Click a topic below to browse our messages.



[All Messages](#)

PARTNERSHIPS

NEW PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT: HORIZONS PROJECT

The Horizons Project is a nonprofit at work on the interconnections between promoting social justice and defending democracy against authoritarianism. IF partnered with the Horizons Project to convene a discussion event, Bridging Against Authoritarianism, that brought together experts on authoritarianism, representatives of organizations working on citizen-centered democracy, and representatives of civil discourse organizations. IF played a leading role in the event, introducing three key questions:

- What if the core problem is not partisan polarization but the threat of authoritarianism? In other words, what if the problem is not one of reducing the distance between two sides but of making sure the right side, democracy, wins?
- How do civil society organizations address the apparent paradox of being non-partisan and neutral facilitators and yet also being partisans for democracy—especially when a major U.S. political party has embraced authoritarianism?
- How do we make sure that our practices within civil society organizations are not doing harm? For example, what if neutral, civil dialogue organizations end up legitimizing and spreading all sorts of antidemocratic positions (such as including the Big Lie as a valid perspective in civil dialogue events)?

Among the approximately 25 invited attendees there was a great deal of enthusiasm for continuing these discussions. IF plans to explore how to partner with some of these organizations to continue these discussions about how we might best stem the tide of authoritarianism and support the cause of democracy.

KETTERING FOUNDATION (KF)

We continue our ongoing relationship with the KF, which shares IF's focus on citizen-centered democracy. We participate in Civic Connectors Exchanges and Emerging Issues Forums. These have been valuable opportunities to learn from and with others working in our field and to bolster IF's network connections. New leadership within the KF seems to indicate renewed interest and focus on supporting democracy and opposing the authoritarian tide.

BRIDGE ALLIANCE (BA)

We continue to explore how we might make the most of IF's membership in this network, especially in terms of amplifying the reach of IF activities, via the BA platform Citizen Connect (where we post announcements and registration links for IF discussion events), and in terms of clarifying IF's core mission of promoting citizen-centered democracy via civil dialogue.

PARTNERSHIPS

LISTEN FIRST COALITION (LFC)

LFC is a network of civil dialogue organizations. The network is currently pooling efforts to boost the America Talks event and the connected National Week of Conversation. It helps to amplify member announcements and is currently coordinating efforts to develop assessment tools to measure impacts of civil dialogue experiences.

PHILANTHROPY FOR ACTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT (PACE)

PACE continues to serve as a useful partner for collaborative learning about the work of promoting civil democracy. PACE's various meetings, in small and large groups, have proven helpful for our articulation of IF's mission-related activities and for expanding IF's connections within the civil democracy sector.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR DIALOGUE AND DELIBERATION

The NCDD remains a valuable and supportive home network for the DD community. It plays a vital role as a convener for collaborative learning opportunities. IF Fellows regularly take part in, and benefit from, these opportunities.

DC MARYLAND VIRGINIA DEMOCRACY LEARNING COMMUNITY

This is a nascent collaborative effort spearheaded by a DC-area nonprofit called Learning Life. Through online panel discussions convened as "Democracy Dinners," they are attempting to grow a local movement focused on expanding deep engagement and collaboration among a broad base of citizens for citizen-centered democracy.

SUSTAINED COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTNERSHIPS

- IONA Senior Services (Washington, D.C.)
- Diversity Relations Council at Leisure World (Silver Spring, Maryland)
- D.C. Public Library (Washington, D.C.)
- Guy Mason Community (Washington, D.C.)
- Capitol Hill Village (Washington, DC)
- Midwest Partners Foundation (Princeton, IL)

SUSTAINED EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

- Wabash Democracy and Public Discourse Initiative (Crawfordsville, IN)
- Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue at James Madison University (Harrisburg, VA)
- West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV)
- Wesleyan College (Macon, GA)
- Colorado State Library System (Denver, CO)
- Nassau Community College/SUNY (Garden City, NY)
- Emory University (Atlanta, GA)
- State University of New York at Plattsburgh (Plattsburgh, NY)
- Penn State University, (State College, PA)
- University of Shkoder, Albania