

# INTERACTIVITY FOUNDATION

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## BIANNUAL REPORT

April 2023 - October 2023

Looking Ahead: What's Next for IF?



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Approved by the Intellectual Development Committee (IDC) & IF Team

## LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT'S NEXT FOR IF?

April 2023 - October 2023

The Interactivity Foundation (IF) has been actively engaged in a phase of transition, marked by several significant events and developments:

- **Emerging from the Pandemic.** Similar to many organizations, IF is emerging from the global pandemic with a revitalized commitment to fostering partnerships, strengthening community ties, and making a positive impact on society.
- **Commitment to Democracy.** In light of the ongoing threats to democracy, IF remains steadfast in its dedication to critically examining these challenges. We are in the process of reevaluating our programs and exploring innovative ways to align our work with the current socio-political landscape, especially as we approach an upcoming election year.
- **Capacity Building.** As part of our forward-looking approach, IF is expanding its capacity by welcoming new full-time team members and exploring opportunities through project-based fellowships and apprenticeships. This transition allows us to welcome new talent, providing us with a unique opportunity to review and enhance our internal practices and reaffirm our mission.

In this report, we are pleased to highlight how IF is dedicating renewed energy and a heightened sense of purpose to its mission and activities. We are positioning ourselves to confidently face the future. Our faith in the power of discussion for citizen-centered democracy remains steadfast. Internally, we are working through difficult discussions so that we can continue:

- building new programs while refocusing some of our older ones
- exploring our theory change with a renewed emphasis on impact
- improving external communication, including updating our mission statement and website,
- developing dissemination strategies,
- reorienting internal meetings and working teams to be more effective,
- designing new content and resources for greater accessibility,
- expanding capacity with traditional and new team building measures

In this transition phase, we acknowledge both external and internal pressures. However, we remain committed to moving forward collaboratively and making necessary adjustments as we go. We invite our board of trustees, partnering organizations, colleagues, new and longtime friends to work with us as we continue to explore: What's Next for IF?

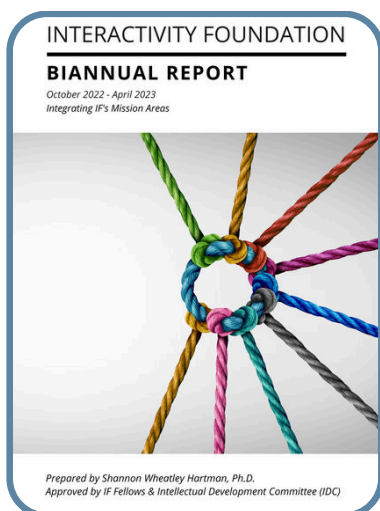
# LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT'S NEXT FOR IF?

April 2023 - October 2023

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For a comprehensive understanding of our journey and programmatic developments, we invite you to review our previous reports:



[Integrating IF's Mission Areas.](#)  
[October 2022 - April 2023](#)



[Deepening Our Democratic Mission.](#)  
[April 2022 - October 2022](#)



[Defending Democratic Principles.](#)  
[October 2021 - April 2022](#)

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM

October 2022 - April 2023

Community Conversations are facilitated small group discussion events where participants are engaged in exploration of a

topic of public concern. In the past several years, IF's Community Conversations have focused on the exploration of topics essential for a healthy democracy by concentrating on areas where democracy is at risk or under direct challenge. IF's Community Conversations aim to raise awareness about these areas where democracy is being threatened and to expand participants' thinking about what it takes to strengthen democratic possibilities in regard to those topics.

1  
Series

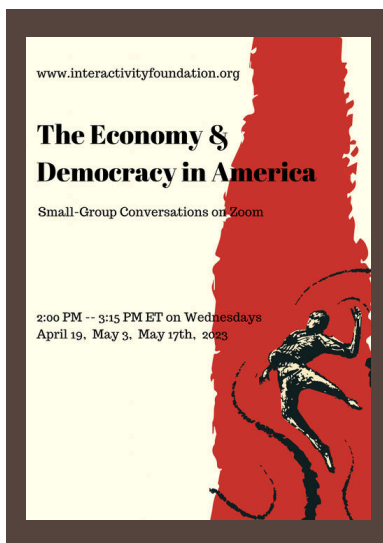
3  
Events

60+  
Participants

2  
Upcoming

## The Economy & Democracy in America

Conducted April - May 2023, this 3-part series engaged approximately 20 participants per session. The series originated from our earlier series of the year, titled "The End of American Democracy?" This prior series explored the various threats to US democracy. During these discussions, participants expressed a collective concern about the adverse effects of economic inequality and economic insecurity on the health of democracy.



Event #1: Exploration of key concerns about the economy and how it affects democracy

Event #2: Exploration of "the American Dream" and what it means today

Event #3: Co-imagining new visions for the American dream where the economic system better supports the health of democracy

Final Summary Report: Lessons learned, facilitator observations, and summary of participant content

## What participants said about this series

"I think the questions that were posed by the facilitators really led to in-depth discussions. Having the breakout groups where there are just a few of us listening to each other, really, it was just a wonderful experience. I love that."

Lori

"This was an oasis of civility. It reminds me of sometimes, the pictures that are taken at night of an oasis and there are all these different animals around it, not that the folks in the rooms were animals - as much as political animals. There's a wide variety of political animals around, we're all just taking in the water and having a good time and without fighting. I appreciate the environment you establish to have those conversations."

Jim

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023



## Who are We the People—and Who’s Being Pushed Out?

October–November 2023, exploring questions and concerns about the forces that seek to exclude others from full participation in our democracy--and how we might respond to them. This topic arose from the first series of the year, *The End of American Democracy?* where participants expressed concerns about how different minority groups were being targeted for exclusion from fully enjoying free and equal status in our democracy.



## In Development: Walking & Talking Conversation Series

This series will experiment with a new model for in-person discussions. In partnership with the Georgetown public library, the format of this series combines a walking tour with facilitated conversations. As participants walk past historical site, they will be invited to discuss specific concerns and issues that are relevant for democracy today. By exploring the African American history of Georgetown, for example, participants will be invited to engage in a broader discussion about confronting truths of our history and how this relates to strengthening democracy.



## In Development: Showcasing New Facilitation Resources & Sharing Best Practices

- We plan to create and share facilitation guides for each of this year’s series: *The End of Democracy?*, *Truth and Democracy*, and *The Economy and Democracy*. These will be short, easy-to-use facilitation guides that can be used by others to explore these topics with their communities or groups. We also plan to create at-a-glance documents for each series to help stimulate the exploration of key questions.
- These resources will be shared at the upcoming National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), Atlanta, October 12th - 15th.
- We will facilitate a session at the NCDD focused on Organizing Online Community Conversations Using Exploratory Discussions, which will highlight key lessons learned from the last three years of the online discussion series.

**“I feel like one of the biggest benefits is that I can sit and listen to other people and not judge them, just listen to what they say and understand it. People have different ways of thinking about things...it’s a good forum to collaborate or talk.”--Paul E.**

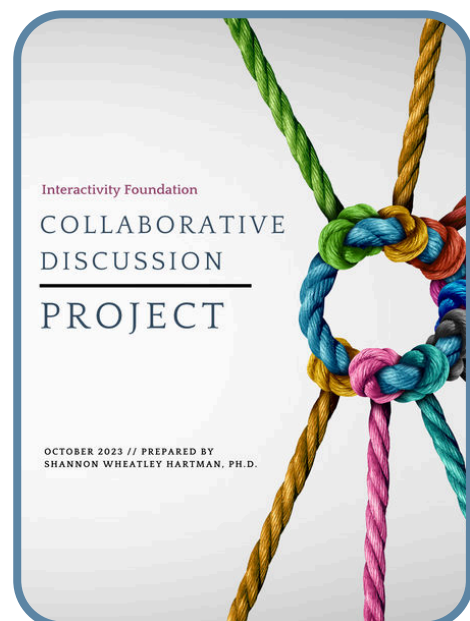
# COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023

The Collaborative Discussion Project (CDP) is a key education initiative, launched in 2021, with a primary goal of advancing collaborative intelligence. Collaborative intelligence refers to people's capacity to come together and effectively solve problems by employing collaborative discussion skills and mindsets. The program comprises three essential components:

- **Open Access Toolkit:** The heart of the CDP is an open access toolkit that boasts over 50 interactive lessons. These lessons have been designed and tested by educators and civic practitioners to ensure their effectiveness. They serve as invaluable resources for anyone looking to enhance their collaborative discussion skills and knowledge.
- **Coach Training Program:** The CDP features a 15-hour coach training program, which has successfully certified over 60 coaches. We anticipate training over one hundred coaches by the end of the year. IF coaches have awarded more than 600 certificates and digital badges in collaborative discussion.
- **Community of Practice:** Our program has cultivated a growing community of practice that is united through our website, a weekly newsletter, monthly gatherings, working groups, and training teams. This community serves as a hub for individuals from various backgrounds to connect, share experiences, and collaborate on furthering their understanding and application of collaborative discussion techniques.

## To date, program outcomes include



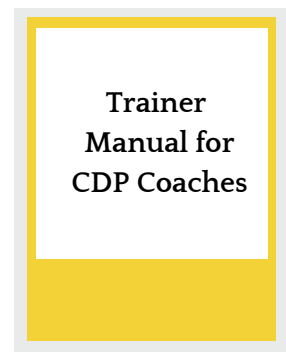
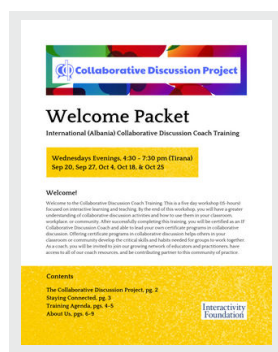
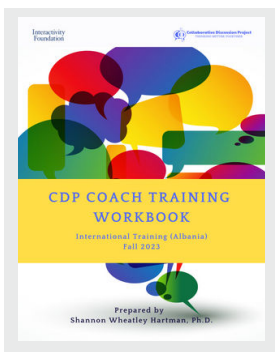
# COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023

## Key Developments During this Reporting Period

- Undertook a significant revision of toolkit activities and rebuilt the toolkit website pages.
- Offered two coach summer trainings.
- Currently offering two more fall coach trainings, including our first International (Albania) Coach Training.
- Developed train-the-trainer materials to support future training teams and coaches.
- Developed the first Standard Certificate Program template with an additional five templates in design (plus supportive workbooks).
- Launched the participant retrospective survey, offering an initial assessment of learning outcomes across certificate programs, using a 17-attribute metric that measures collaborative knowledge and behaviors.
- Initiated a new process to receive coach feedback and reflections, offering qualitative observations of learning goals, outcomes, and impact.

## New Coach Training Resources



**“I loved this program! It was so informative and it will impact my instructional style for the rest of my teaching career!”**

*“Overall, I just love that IF exists and that I was able to do something like this. What a privilege. I am so grateful and truly feel honored to have been a part of this training. Thank you so much!”*

*“I thought the biggest draw to this program for me --and the reason I'll recommend it to others--is that we will be certified as coaches and able to offer certificate programs to our students (and others). This is a huge benefit. I also look forward to seeing more activities/tools in the toolkit as you move along with this initiative.”*

# COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023





## Key Challenges & Areas for Growth

- We have reached our top capacity for offering coach trainings. We currently have a waitlist and are looking for ways to meet demand. We will be exploring alternative models for 2024, including but not limited to empowering external trainers.
- We are adapting and creating specific certificate programs designed to address specific problems and/or audiences (i.e., active listening, workplace team building, building connections, etc.) to make our resources more accessible and easy to use.
- We have refined the toolkit during this reporting period and we have significantly expanded our coach trainings, doubling our certificated coaches. Looking ahead, we need to refocus on supporting our community of practice by offering monthly gatherings, coach workshops and tune-ups, and, most importantly, 1-on-1 follow-ups with coaches. The post-training follow-up has been one of the most significant strategies for building connections and deepening relationships with coaches.

## Measuring Impact

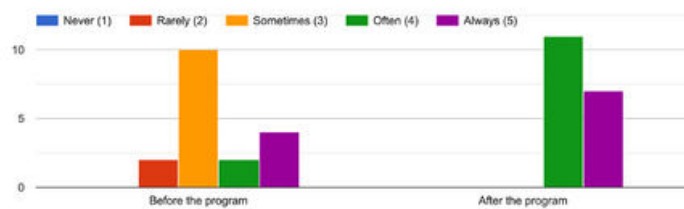
We have developed and launched a retrospective survey that evaluates collaborative discussion behaviors, practices, and cognitive understanding using a 17 trait metric. We are piloting this survey for preliminary feedback on how participants evaluate their own skill development (practices) and understanding (knowledge) before and after a certificate program. We are imagining other ways to utilize this survey and the two other surveys that are currently available to coaches via the toolkit.

### Why do 79% of coaches stay connected after their coach training?

-  Virtual monthly gatherings and workshops
-  Working teams and conference collaboration
-  1-on-1 follow-up and support
-  47% open rate of our weekly newsletter

### Sample Measurement of a Collaborative Discussion Trait

Acknowledging Values. I seek out the values that are behind many comments in a discussion. For example, I am able to identify some of the values th...might be in conflict or agreement in a discussion.





# HIGH SCHOOL DIALOGUE PILOT

April 2023 - October 2023

This summer, we launched a new pilot program designed to train high school students to become civil dialogue leaders in their school and broader community. We are piloting this program in partnership with the Spotswood High School in rural Virginia. The program has the support of the Rockingham School District administration. Together, we are laying the groundwork to expand the program to the three other high schools in the district during the 2024/2025 school year. Serving as a model for other high schools around the country, this program demonstrates how to empower youth to be the catalyst for creating cultures of dialogue in their schools and community.

## Our Training Model for Creating Cultures of Dialogue with K12 Schools

### Program Continuation

SHS students and staff continue to support dialogue while supporting IF's launch of program in other district high schools.

### Community Event

Student planned and facilitated community discussion events. Students will prepare discussion summary to present to the Board of Education. IF will collect stories and testimonials.

### Monthly workshops

Continued monthly support and workshops, preparing students to organize, plan, and facilitate a community-wide discussion event in April. Parallel prof development training for SHS faculty to help institutionalize learning.

### Student facilitation training

Initial in-person, 3-day student facilitation training, resulting in 25 certificates of completion,



"In the next year I'm hoping to learn how to enhance my community by having these discussions and kind of enhance my own understanding of the community" -- Student Facilitator

### Vision

In response to the significant conflict school districts have been experiencing, this program seeks to build collaborative spaces in school communities for all stakeholders (students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and local community members) to engage in productive civil dialogue. The goal is to create a culture of dialogue within the community that fosters mutual understanding and collaborative exploration.

# HIGH SCHOOL DIALOGUE PILOT

April 2023 - October 2023

## Key Challenges & Areas for Growth

- We had significant support for the initiative at the district level and at the pilot high school level. Moving forward, our challenge will be to identify people at the other three high schools that can champion and help lead the program at their individual schools.
- We are building bridges to expand our network of high schools. As we test this program model, we hope that it can be used by any individual school or school district around the country to build a culture of dialogue. Expanding the reach of this program will require us to track impact, collect and share stories or testimonials, and generally communicate more broadly about the effectiveness and long term benefit of this program.

## New Resource!



## What students are saying

“Something I learned over the past few days that I believe I might have struggled with previously is listening. I recognize that I’m not the best listener, and that it’s hard. But throughout the training, and especially on day two, the listening activity helped me define strategies...So I felt like I learned a lot of skills about listening and that can definitely be utilized to make myself a better listener.”

--Student Facilitator



## What administrators are saying

*“It gives me hope...that we’re really cultivating these student facilitators to lead community conversations that are really important. We’re talking about issues that are important to public schools and, of course, we need the students’ voices. For them to be leading those conversations is just really valuable.”*

**School District Coordinator of Community Engagement**

*“My hope for this going forward is that the students can be role models for what respectful communication looks like and hopefully inspire their teachers to employ some of the strategies that they’re learning in their own classrooms, which will lead to higher student engagement and could potentially make students feel more valued while they’re in school.”*

**School Program Coordinator**

# ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023

The IF asynchronous discussion program offers a virtual space for participants to engage in exploratory discussion. Some of the discussion series are connected to classes, designed to improve student engagement with course material. Other discussion series are open to a broader public and designed to examine the role of individuals in building a better democratic society. The “slow discussion” design encourages thoughtful engagement and helps to build a virtual discussion community. As described by an asynchronous participant, “It’s like hanging out with a purpose.”

The asynchronous discussion approach also helps to expand IF’s discussion programming through offering another pathway for engagement in exploratory discussion. This discussion model allows participants to engage at their own pace and through text based communication, which may serve as an inclusive model for people who might otherwise be excluded due to circumstance or engagement style.



## Technology Entrepreneurship

43 participants, Summer 2023 & Fall 2023. This discussion series explores the personal traits needed in an entrepreneurial career. Discussants are enrolled in the Technology Entrepreneurship class at WVU.



## Career Success

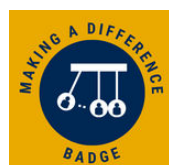
29 participants, Fall 2023. This discussion series introduces the soft skills that current employers are seeking in the labor market. Discussants are enrolled in the College to Career class at WVU.

## Challenging Myths

Asynchronous courses and discussions are often dismissed as a second-rate experience compared to traditional, in-person classes. It is assumed that students who are enrolled in online courses and engaged in asynchronous discussions are not receiving the same type of engagement from instructors and peers. In both of these courses, the online format actually makes it possible for participants to receive regular and timely feedback on their work.

The federal government mandates engagement between instructor and students as qualification for an academic institution to receive federal funding (e.g. Pell grants). In these courses, students provide feedback to each other on their weekly posts. In addition, the instructor summarizes the comments from each weekly series of posts and provides additional feedback. Student evaluations at the end of the semester praise the level of feedback provided and often make comparative comments to the lack of feedback in face-to-face classes.

Other digital badges that have been awarded



# ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM

April 2023 - October 2023

## Looking Ahead

As we explore our theories of change, we are examining different types of content that might inspire or motivate individuals to engage more fully as citizens and human-beings. We are in the process of revising and exploring ways of disseminating content that can support individuals in their self-journey. We see this as a reasonable first step for preparing or offering support to some individuals who might want to later engage with others in collaborative or exploratory discussions. Some of the content that we imagine incorporating into an education initiative in 2024 includes:

## Serial Discussions

**Lessons from Blue Highways** (52 episodes) – This series explores the lessons from the nation's heartland as they can be applied to the functioning of corporations in a democracy.

**Affinity and Beyond** (49 episodes) – this series examines what can be done to increase the talent capacity in our nation to ensure that all citizens have the ability to discover, develop, and utilize their talents.

**Sarah's Diary** (38 episodes) – this series explores how one family engaged in the development of purposeful lives.

**Charley's World** (36 episodes) – This series explores the development of a learning community.

**Memories of Awe** (41 episodes) – This series explores the development of what is called moral beauty. It explores how citizens can contribute to others.

# SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENTAL DISCUSSIONS

April 2023 - October 2023

Over the years, IF fellows have managed sustained, developmental discussions with citizen panels on various topics of societal concerns. In the past, these sustained discussions tended to last approximately a year and resulted in an [IF Discussion Guide](#). Since 2020, these projects have been on pause because of the pandemic. This hiatus has afforded us the opportunity to review this program, assess our impact, and imagine alternative possibilities for moving forward. This year we have relaunched this program, with a shared understanding that we will lean into experimentation to explore improved structures for moving forward. This includes experimenting with:


- format of citizen panels (asynchronous, synchronous, in-person, or hybrid)
- time-frame of discussions (daily, weekly, monthly)
- possible outcomes or product of discussions (moving beyond long, static guidebooks)
- strategies for sharing final products, stories, and understandings of impact

All fellows are leading a sustained discussion project this year and are currently at various stages of development. Project themes include:

- 1) Artificial Intelligence,
- 2) Civil Society Responses to the Rise of Authoritarianism,
- 3) Learning & Society,
- 4) Citizenship for the Future

## What is a serial discussion?

**Summer 2023**  
17 participants (late-career)

 **Looking Backward:** Discussions with late career or post-career participants, focused on learning over the course of a lifetime.



**Looking Forward:** Series of distinct discussion groups: 1) early career participants w/ cross campus student participants, 2) WVU first year cohort, and 3) WVU fourth year cohort. Discussions ran parallel but generated an aggregate summary. All discussions focused on what learning means as participants anticipate the future.



**Winter 2024**  
Recruiting participants



**Engaging Experts:** Discussions a range of educators, focused on instilling a passion for learning beyond formal institutions.



**Fall 2023**  
23 participants (early-career & cross campus student cohort)



**Fall 2023**  
10 participants (WVU first year students)



**Fall 2023**  
12 participants (WVU graduating students)

## PARTNERSHIPS

April 2023 - October 2023

### **Bridge Alliance (BA)**

We have renewed our membership with BA, a network that can amplify the reach of IF activities, especially via the BA platform Citizen Connect, and in terms of clarifying IF's core mission of promoting citizen-centered democracy via civil dialogue.

### **The Horizon Project**

The nonprofit Horizons Project, which focuses on promoting social justice and helping pluralistic democracy to resist authoritarianism, continues to be helpful for IF's efforts on these topics. They are knowledgeable conversation partners who assist with making network connections that can be vital resources and participants in our work.

### **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. KF has emerged from a period of internal discussions with a renewed focus on supporting democracy and opposing authoritarianism.

### **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.

### **National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)**

The NCDD remains a valuable and supportive home network for the D&D community. It plays a vital role as a convener for collaborative learning opportunities. IF Fellows regularly take part in, and benefit from, these opportunities. IF has been contributing to the NCDD by sponsoring the biennial NCDD conference (October 2023), assisting with the overall planning for the conference, and with the proposal of several conference sessions that will be conducted with partners outside of IF.

### **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.

## PARTNERSHIPS

October 2022 - April 2023

### **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.)

Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (Dubuque, IA)

Aware & Active Citizens (Merrill, WI)

Midwest Partners Foundation (Princeton, IL)

### **Anti-Authoritarian Organizations and Networks**

The 22nd Century Initiative (22CI), a nonprofit umbrella organization focused on bringing together people and organizations who are engaged with blocking authoritarianism and building a healthy pluralistic democracy. The affiliated 12:01 network works as a communications platform for those associated with 22CI communications.

### **Stubblefield Institute at Shepherdstown University**

This institute promotes civil political discourse through a variety of on-campus events. They reached out IF in part because of the West Virginia connection. They are actively conferring with the Community Conversation Team about the work they do, including their public discussion programming, and support for peer discussions in their student-run Civility Club. The Community Conversation Team is developing a facilitation training program for them to launch in October 2023.

### **The Greater Good Science Center, Berkeley, University of CA**

Participating in the Bridging Differences in Higher Education Learning Fellowship, an 8-month facilitated virtual learning community running from Fall 2023 through Spring 2024, hosted by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center (GGSC). The experience will center on the GGSC's [Bridging Differences](#) free online course, giving participants a common reference point that is based on science.

### **Spotswood High School & Rockingham School District**

## PARTNERSHIPS

October 2022 - April 2023

### Collaborative Discussion Project Partnerships

James Madison University	Allegheny County Department of Human Services
West Virginia University	SUNY Nassau Community College
Nassau Community College/SUNY	North Shore Country Day School
Emory University	University of Virginia
State University of New York at Plattsburgh	Emory University
Gordon State College	Jefferson County Public Library
American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)	PennWest University, California
Aquinas College, Michigan State University	Loveland Public Library
CSCU Three Rivers Community College	Colorado State Library
Waterford RISE	Denver Public Library
The Lead Listening Institute	High Plains Library District
Saint Ignatius College Prep	Grand County Library District
Dickinson College	Northern Saguache County Library District
University of Indianapolis	Jefferson County Public Library
The Aravis Network	Summit County Libraries
Great Lakes Urban Restoration Network	Lyons Community Library
Cerritos College	University of Shkoder “Luigj Gurakuqi,” Albania
Chapman University	Culture Principles
Texas A&M University	The University of Texas at Austin
Penn State University	Project on Civil Discourse
Kent State University	American University
Duquesne University	Wabash College
University of Texas at San Antonio	Carroll Community College
Inver Hills Community College	Associació de Justícia de les Illes Balears, Spain
University of Kentucky	Wesleyan College
University of Texas at San Antonio	Baruch College, CUNY
Providence College	Cultural Humility and Equity Collaborative
University of Cape Town, South Africa	Carlow University
University of Delaware	Florida A&M University
University of Southern Maine	North Carolina Campus Compact
SUNY Broome Community College	University of North Carolina at Charlotte

### Conferences attended during this reporting period

- 22nd Century Conference: Forging a People-Powered Democracy, Minneapolis, MN
- Frontiers of Democracy 2023: Religious Pluralism and Robust Democracy in Multiracial Societies (Tufts University)
- Can We Talk? Defining, Practicing, and Protecting Dialogue in Higher Education (American University)
- Guanacaste: Transformational Listening Conference, Chicago, IL.
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, Atlanta, GA