Growing the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership

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1. Overview

My fellowship focused primarily on the conceptual and pedagogical development of the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP). Secondarily, there was some development internal to Harvard, but the Partnership made a decision to focus on conceptual and pedagogical development instead of expansion over the course of the year. As such, I will detail the conceptual and pedagogical growth of the program afforded by my participation in the National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement by focusing on three foundational understandings that shape the ICDP:

1. Democracy requires on-going work and investment.
2. Civil disagreement is a core democratic practice.
3. Civil disagreement begins with dialogue; a dialogic approach provides needed structures and practices for civil disagreement.

What is presented here are the nascent pieces of a handbook for the ICDP. I first define each of the above three foundational understandings. I then detail the pedagogical approach we developed over the course of this year. The report concludes with some pedagogical tools included as appendices.

Profound thanks are due to my fellow ICDP collaborators: Alysha Banerji, Collin Anthony Chen, Maya Cohen, and Ryan Fergon. Their fingerprints are all over this report, from the development of the foundational understandings to the appendix of pedagogical tools. Our work proves the ICDP belief that people working together are capable of more than any single individual.

2. The ICDP

The Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership (ICDP) is a consortium of five colleges and universities located throughout the United States. The mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments to freedom of expression, equality, and agency; develop students' skills to facilitate conversations across political difference; and create spaces for civil disagreement to flourish on college campuses.

> the mission of the ICDP is to advance fundamental democratic commitments

The core of the ICDP is a cross-institutional fellowship that brings together students from a range of public, private, two-year, and four-year institutions in order to develop their abilities to engage in and lead conversations about difficult, important topics across political difference. Each participating institution supports eight fellows each year, along with one or two senior fellows. In addition to this core function, the ICDP supports individual partner's work on their own campuses to advance civil disagreement and conducts research about civic/political identity and the efficacy of the ICDP's efforts.

As its name suggests, the ICDP is truly a partnership. Leadership of the program is distributed among its members equally, with primary contacts at each school working in concert to plan, adapt, and execute a collaborative vision of the program. Our structure recognizes the funds of knowledge that each partner institution brings to the collective whole.

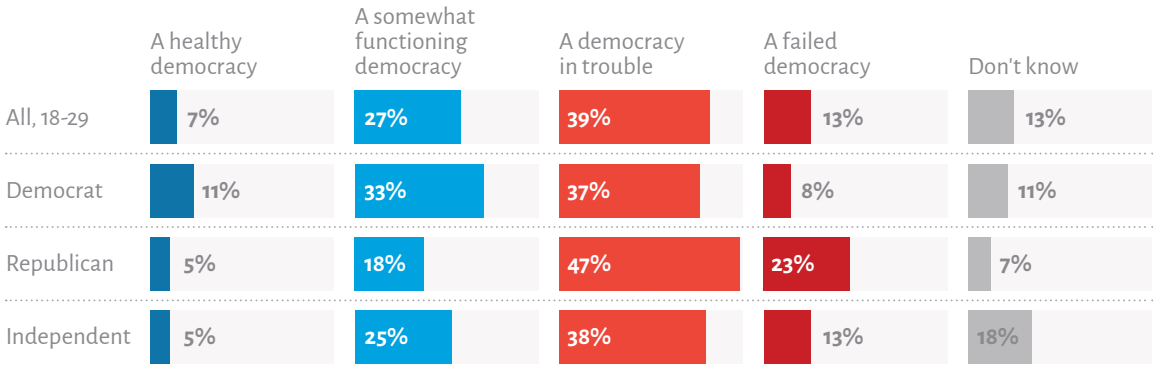
The partner institutions are intentionally and purposefully diverse. They include a mix of public and private institutions; two-year and four-year institutions; a historically Black college with a strong focus on education for military veterans; colleges that are primarily Hispanic-serving; and two institutions known for high research activity.

Partnership Institutions and Leadership Team:

- St. Philips Community College, San Antonio, TX
- Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, FL
- Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- California State University at Bakersfield, CA
- Stanford University, Stanford, CA

3. Democratic Work

Which of the following phrases best describes the United States today?



Source: Harvard IOP Youth Poll, Fall 2021

There is a growing sense that American democratic institutions are struggling. For example, according to a Fall 2021 national poll of Americans between the ages of 18-29 conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics, a majority of young people think democracy is either "in trouble" or "failing," and just over a third believe they will experience a civil war in their lifetime.[1]

As stark as this view is, it is also important to recognize that a considerably larger majority view democracy as "somewhat functioning" or "in trouble"—arguably a similar status characterized by either a positive or negative valence. One might reasonably understand many of those who fall in either of these camps as believing that American democracy "needs work." This view of democracy is important, whether you view the glass as half empty or half full.

A majority of young Americans, then, have got it right: democracy is in constant need of work. Writing nearly a century ago, the philosopher John Dewey observed that democratic ways of life cannot be taken for granted. That is, once established, democracy does not simply persist, rather, each generation much enact democracy anew, "in every year and day."[2] The challenges democracies face now suggest that heeding this ethos is important more than ever.

[1] *Harvard Youth Poll: 42nd Edition, Top Trends and Takeaways,* December 1, 2021 (https://iop.harvard.edu/youth-poll/fall-2021-harvard-youth-poll).

[2] Dewey, J. (1937/1987). "Education and social change," In *The collected works of John Dewey, 1882-1953: Electronic edition.* http://pm.nlx.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/xtf/view?docId=dewey_ii/dewey_ii.31.xml;chunk.id=div.lw.11.71;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.lw.11.53;brand=default.

Part of the challenge, however, is that what that democratic work is may look differently depending on one's ideological position. For example, political scientists have coined a family of related terms that describes one such challenge: what they have called democratic erosion, de-democratization, democratic backsliding, among others. They focus on how many people have embraced authoritarian leaders or practices in response to growing social and economic pressures. Similar to those who argue that we should look to return to a less-polarized political culture, the idea here is that people ought to return to the democratic institutions and commitments that sustained the United States for much of its existence, adjusted, perhaps, to address some longstanding social, political, and economic inequalities. This view explains some of the challenges facing U.S. democracy (and other democracies across the globe), but not all.

Again, for other Americans, the idea that there is a democracy to erode or backslide from makes little sense. For many groups of Americans—BIPOC, LGTBQ+, women— their place in American society has never felt secure or valued. For long (and continuing) periods of American life, they have not treated them as political, economic, or social equals. The ideas of democratic erosion or backsliding, then, don't describe the fears they have for American democracy. What is there to erode or to backslide from? Rather, they are fighting for a different vision of democratic inclusion, where they have greater political, social, and economic clout than in previous times in American history. Thus, a democracy that is searching to re-establish commitments and institutions that have perpetuated their marginalization is at odds with the work they see as necessary for democracy to flourish.

For others, efforts to both create a new, inclusive democracy or to re-establish weakening democratic practices challenge yet another vision of democracy. This view is based on upholding certain principles, as they were and as they ought to be. For such folk, the work of democracy means protecting such principles from reinterpretation or revision. Though it may seem antithetical to either of the other groups, this is also arguably democratic work.

Harnessing these different drives to maintain, sustain, and revision democracy is part of the work civil disagreement can do for a democratic way of life. Members of a democratic community need spaces to share their different visions of democracy and disagree about them.

4. Civil Disagreement

Democracies disagree. This is a plain and unavoidable truth. They disagree about who should make their collective decisions. They disagree about what their fundamental values mean or what choices they should make to implement and live those values. They disagree about deep questions of faith, belief, and culture. They disagree about questions of what is right, what is good, and what is beautiful. Democracy should have room for a wide range of answers to these fundamental human questions. Indeed, disagreement is perhaps what democracies do best.

Yet looking at the world around us today, there is a very real sense in which disagreement is dangerous. Political scientists and psychologists, for example, describe how people have sorted themselves along increasingly singular and divisive identities that position contrasting identities as threats to social and political life.[3] Commonly used language and symbols reflect these broad societal trends; when people talk about those who disagree with them, they often use words like fear, distrust, danger, enemy, and they become more likely to support violence to achieve political goals. For example, political scientists have documented rising numbers of American partisans who believe that violence against other partisans is at least a little justified.[4]

> civil disagreement is disagreement about the sorts of things that matter to members of a democratic community

In this context, the prevalence and degree of disagreement can feel like it is *the* problem, the epicenter of American fracture. Thus, in order to preserve democracy, people should limit disagreement. Perhaps they do so by avoiding those who disagree with them. Perhaps they try to silence them. Perhaps they imagine a society where everyone in it shares a set of (their!) values, or is persuadable by their view of rational argument. However, in each of these cases, the solution is less disagreement, not more. The solution is to disengage rather than engage. But democracies should not and cannot avoid or disengage from disagreement. This is because disagreement, particularly civil disagreement, is a fundamental democratic practice.

As a term, *civil* disagreement requires some unpacking. The word *civil* has two different primary meanings, one of which is useful in this context, the other of which is not. Productively, civil disagreement signals the meaning of civil that relates to the concerns of citizens—think civil service or civil rights. Civil disagreement is disagreement about the sorts of things that matter to members of a democratic society. Adding civil to disagreement is important for two reasons. First, as the

[3] See Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (Mariner Books, 2009); Ezra Klein, *Why We are Polarized* (Simon & Schuster, 2020); Lilliana Mason, Uncivil Agreement: *How Politics Became Our Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[4] Nathan Kalmoe & Lilliana Mason, *Radical American Partisanship: Mapping Violent Hostility, Its Causes, and the Consequences for Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2022).

definition suggests, it focuses attention specifically on the sorts of disagreements members of a democratic society have with each other related to the work of living alongside each other. Second, the addition can help reorient how people respond to the idea of disagreement. If people think of civil disagreement in a way that is similar to how they think about civil service or civil rights, this brings people closer to recognizing disagreement as a fundamental democratic practice.

Defining civil disagreement in the positive sense also helps lay out the boundaries for what it doesn't mean, as well. Pairing these two words together is often meant to directly respond to the rancor on display in civic spaces across the country. When it is used this way, civil can signal a sense of courteousness and decorum; it is to ask for a respectful disagreement, or even a return to how we used to disagree in the past. Each of these signals are unproductive meanings of civil. For one, disagreement may not always feel respectful—talking about things that matter can reveal conflicts among deeply-held values, trip over peoples' hopes and fears, and evoke strong emotions. It may even surface discriminatory or disrespectful positions. But it is equally if not more disrespectful to obscure such ideas and feelings behind a norm of decorum.

For the other, the idea that we need to return to a time when those with different beliefs, faiths, and ideologies could disagree with each other and still work together rests on false premises. Political scientists have pointed out that the United States, for example, was far less politically polarized in the middle half of the twentieth century than it is now.[5] But focusing simply on polarization obscures important political context. During times when Americans were less politically polarized, Black Americans were effectively disenfranchised, and could realistically hold public offices only in majority Black municipalities or precincts. The halcyon days of disagreement thus turn on severely limiting (1) the access and inclusion of voices of many American people and (2), by consequence, the limited range and degree of potential disagreement.

When we talk about civil disagreement, then, we mean conversations that are open to any and all comers *who are committed to having an authentic conversation about issues that matter with others who likely think differently than them*. We should expect that when people engage in civil disagreement, they will very likely feel deeply for what they are arguing for, and the stakes may be very real for them. Civil disagreement may thus be far from polite. It may be hard and uncomfortable. It may be loud and full of emotion. It will almost undoubtedly be imperfect. But it is a democratic necessity.

[5] Alan Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and The Rise of Donald Trump* (Yale University Press, 2018); Klein, 2020.

5. Dialogue

Civil disagreement requires people to be able to talk to each other across different beliefs, values, and ideological commitments. Yet talking to each other under such conditions is hard work. Americans do not necessarily mean the same thing when they talk about values like equality or justice. They have vastly different beliefs. All too often, one person's values and beliefs directly conflict with another person's values and beliefs. This can make it hard to talk to each other, or to even feel safe sharing deeply held convictions (or emerging ideas). But we can learn how to do this.

Civil disagreement begins with dialogue. Dialogue—understood as reciprocal, norm-guided exchanges among individuals that rest on sharing personal experiences and perspectives—enables people to seek deeper understanding of their own and others' beliefs, values, and actions. Taking a dialogic approach to civil disagreement occupies a position between more familiar ways of learning from each other. On the one hand, dialogic approaches contrast with more traditional approaches that prioritize the transmission of knowledge and thus limit space for reciprocal exchanges and exploration. On the other hand, dialogic approaches differ from debate-oriented approaches that rely on argument as a means of exchange and limit the importance of personal experience and reciprocal exchange.

The contrast between the dialogic approach and other approaches to engaging disagreement is highlighted by the dialogic approach's emphasis on question asking. Questions can elicit people's thoughts, beliefs, values, experiences, and feelings. Questions can build trust, nurture relationships, and expand the boundaries of difficult conversations. They offer people chances to make sense of their own and others' views in novel ways. Questions hopefully open up the possibility for people to connect in ways they did not previously expect, however simple that may be. When a conversation is humming, people are asking each other questions instead of simply making statements at or in relation to each other.

However, it may be difficult for participants to use questions to further dialogue. Some may not enter the conversation expecting that questions will be so important. Some people may not feel comfortable asking questions that encourage people to share meaningful experiences, ideas, and emotions. Some may see questions as a way to undermine others' ideas and beliefs and are more comfortable using questions rhetorically than dialogically.

In short, using questions to encourage dialogic exchanges is a learned skill. It is a mistake to assume that people will just spontaneously start talking to each other and asking each other questions—especially when they are talking about complicated, divisive issues and they do not deeply know each other. This makes thinking about how to frame and ask good questions vital to developing the ability to facilitate conversations across political ideology.

6. Pedagogical Narrative



Phase 1: Connection and Motivation

This first phase of the ICDP pedagogical narrative focuses on developing points of connection between fellows, or, from the perspective of a prospective-facilitator, the importance of developing such connections prior to launching into conversations across political difference. These points of connection start with fellows learning about each other's interests both inside and outside of politics and the civic realm. We use the Civic Self-Portrait (see Appendix A) as the primary vehicle for this important work. Fellows create a single slide that captures how they see their own civic identity—what motivates them to want to learn from others who think differently than they do, their inspirations, their sources of strength, and the questions they are seeking to answer.

Why start here? For one thing, Myisha Cherry, a philosopher at the University of California-Riverside, observes that it is not the topics that make difficult conversations difficult. Rather, it is "who we are" in those conversations.[6] Part of what makes it possible to have difficult conversations is learning about who we are going to talk with, as seeing people as complex individuals with multiple interests that potentially even break with quick and easy ways of categorizing others can create important layers of goodwill or, perhaps, more deeply, trust.

At the same time, fellows learn about why the work they are about to undertake is important in a broader, institutional sense. They learn from experts in the field about phenomena like polarization, democratic erosion, changing political norms, and have chances to talk to each other about what they think about the health of American democracy. Such opportunities, in particular, blend together the insights they gain from learning about each other with the larger analyses of American political and civic life.

Phase 2: Reflection and Reorientation

The second phase of the ICDP pedagogical narrative turns inward as it asks fellows to rethink the purpose of having conversations across political difference. All too often, when we find ourselves talking about things that matter, we end up arguing about different right answers. We attempt to persuade someone who thinks differently than we do that their way of thinking about, say, abortion, is mistaken, and that our own way of thinking about it is superior—morally or practically.

The first major step to learning how to participate more productively and then facilitate conversations across political difference is to reorient the purpose one enters into dialogue with another person. The ICDP conceives of this shift as a move from persuasion to understanding.[7] The goal of conversations across political difference, at least initially, should not be to persuade each other about the rightness or wrongness of how one or another person thinks. This sets up adversarial conditions that can make it difficult to even hear what another person is saying.

[6] Myisha Cherry, *Unmuted: Conversations on Prejudice, Oppression, and Social Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 278.

[7] This view is influenced by Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bold Guide From Essential Partners* (Essential Partners, 2017).

Rather, the goal of conversations across political difference, at some point in the process, ought to be understanding. Why does someone believe what they believe? How does it make sense to them? Why is it important to them? The more people treat each others' positions as worth understanding, the more possibilities they can entertain for future dialogue.

And that is the key. Orienting toward understanding opens up possibilities while orienting toward persuasion seeks closure. The goal of ICDP conversations is the opening of possibilities.

This is not to say that persuasion is unimportant, or that there isn't a time to engage people about the rightness or wrongness of their beliefs and positions. Persuasion is an important aim; the ICDP approach suggests that it should not be the primary or initial aim.

To help fellows orient towards understanding as an aim, the ICDP approach is to ask them to engage in personal reflection about how they enter and what they withhold from conversations. One tool to encourage this sort of reflection is the Courageous Conversations Compass (see Appendix B). Understanding how one enters a conversation is important for thinking about what aspects of a conversation, or responses to a topic, may trigger someone into a defensive mindset. And, similar to the persuasion aim, finding oneself on the defensive forecloses possibilities for discussion. Understanding what one's strengths and limits are is important before starting to build dialogic skills.

Phase 3: Facilitation and Skill Development

The third phase of the pedagogical narrative marks a deliberate shift from being a participant in difficult civil discourse to explicitly learning the skill necessary to facilitate such conversations for others. During this section of the fellowship, fellows are tasked with shifting their perspective again; rather than just look reflectively at their own participation in difficult conversations, they start examining what it means to hold conversational spaces for others to speak.

In practice, this shift focuses on three areas of skill development. First, fellows reflect on a facilitator's role and purpose in leading others in conversations. Fellows discuss concepts like neutrality—are they really neutral arbiters of a conversation? What principles guide their practice? What are their ethical obligations to the participants in the conversation? Being a facilitator means leaving behind some roles one might be familiar with and embracing other roles to which one may not be familiar (see Appendix D).

The ICDP holds that facilitators have an ethical obligation to the conversation, and in this way, they are not neutral parties in the conversation. That is, facilitators are present because a group of people have indicated their interest in having a conversation that may be difficult for them to have with each other. Through skills like creating group norms or discussion agreements, facilitators help a group set boundaries on their discussion. The facilitator becomes the keeper of those norms; they are stewards of the conversation, helping hold people accountable to the boundaries they collectively set up.

The second area of skill development involves translating the question-asking skills fellows have begun to develop from the perspective of a participant to the perspective of a facilitator. This deeper dive focuses on what we call dialogic question (see Appendix C). Fellows learn that the facilitator can model the sort of questions they want participants to aim for in their own planned questions, and can encourage questions that sustain dialogue through the pacing and structure of the conversation.

The third and final area of skill development focuses on when a facilitator intervenes in a conversation. Interventions, generally, are necessary to (1) push a conversation deeper into a topic or encourage exchanges among participants; or (2) address potential norm violations. The ICDP employs a number of tools to help fellows think about interventions. As they learn about dialogic questions, for example, fellows practice designing questions with pacing and structure in mind—key concepts for thinking about digging deeper into topics and encouraging exchanges among participants. They also learn about how conversation norms relate to disagreement, and the surprising amount of room for disagreement that norms permit (see Appendix D). Finally, fellows learn about and practice specific ways of intervening in conversations that are breaking down (see Appendix E).

The ICDP trains fellows to participate in pairs. Why pairs? Pairing facilitators enables multiple, different voices and identities to share the responsibility for guiding the discussion. Sharing facilitation responsibilities provides a built-in support for each individual facilitator, which is especially important in moments when conversations become tense. Pairing also allows planning for conversations to be collaborative—the old adage "two heads are better than one" certainly applies here.

Phase 4: Skill Refinement and Practice

In this final phase of the ICDP curriculum, fellows focus on practicing the skills they have been introduced to over the course of the program. Each session focuses on a short workshop that reintroduces a particular skill or strategy, and is followed by a fellow-led conversation about topics that fellows select.

A typical practice session agenda goes as follows:

- 30 minutes skill focus
- 45 minute practice facilitation
- 15 minute group debrief

During the debrief, facilitators and participants have a chance to reflect on decisions the facilitators made. They consider how certain questions were framed, choices to intervene in the discussion (or not), as well as how people generally felt during the conversation.

7. Conclusion: Where Next?

Ultimately, growing the Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership turned less on expanding its institutional reach and partnerships and more on cementing its mission and vision. In my work this year, it has become clear that the ICDP still has significant room to grow internally before external expansion is a reality. In this last section, I want to detail where the ICDP can continue to grow internally, before offering some more speculative suggestions for external expansion.

Internal Growth

The ICDP is still figuring itself out. While the program has developed strong conceptual foundations and an equally effective pedagogical program, the ICDP is still figuring out how to utilize some of its emergent strengths. That is, the ICDP trains 40 fellows each year, but has heretofore focused on how those fellows learn skills and practice facilitation within the bounds of the program. But many of the fellows want to take their skills beyond the fellowship and help their peers on campus. This requires two potential steps: first, expanding the institutional capacity of the ICDP to offer programming beyond the fellowship for member campuses; second, developing partnerships with other student organizations and institutional agents on member campuses. Each of these pathways for growth have proved challenging.

A primary reason for this is the length of time it takes to train fellows to be ready to actually facilitate conversations for their peers. Right now, students still find they are learning new skills months into the program. So in any year, each new cohort of fellows is not prepared to facilitate until the latter half of the academic year. This, coupled with the age of the ICDP itself, makes it hard to offer external programming.

The ICDP has tried to address this by introducing senior fellows—students who have completed the first year of the program and return to help lead new fellows. This institutional advancement is deeply promising. Senior fellows have been deeply invested in the program; they have led early facilitations and have helped teach facilitation skills throughout the year. But the ICDP struggled with institutional capacity to make best use of its senior fellows this year, in no small part because of the continued need to develop the conceptual and pedagogical foundations of the program. This is an area that I hope the ICDP continues to turn its attention to in subsequent years, and one that the ICDP could learn well from other student-based dialogue programs.

Developing senior fellows has the added potential benefit of creating student-led partnerships on campus. It is speculative, but I think that just as conversations about difficult issues works well in peer-led situations, I think that developing partnerships through students rather than top-down from extant campus structures will prove a more efficient and effective means of expanding the footprint of the ICDP on its members' campuses. I can imagine that senior fellows would be vital to this process, given their experience with the program and the skills and abilities they bring to any campus partnership.

External Growth

There also remains real questions about whether and how the ICDP should expand beyond the five initial partners. The ICDP has not fully confronted this avenue for growth, but our initial discussions suggest two possibilities.

For one, the ICDP could add potential partners to the institutional side of the partnership for a trial year. This would allow faculty at an institution interested in civil disagreement work to acclimate to the ICDP approach before jumping in with their own set of fellows. Institutions that wish to move forward with the ICDP could then join the ICDP or start their own cluster.

However, the ICDP was designed with a specific cohort-size in mind. Adding beyond that, especially in virtual setting, become unwieldy, especially given the sort of conversations that take place during training. This makes simply expanding the size of the ICDP a potential strike against simply adding members to the cohort.

That said, the ICDP is committed to developing materials that are freely available to other institutions, and would encourage other institutions to take on this necessary work—even creating their own clusters of inter-institutional partners.

This leads to the second option, which is simply to take the experiences from our work developing the ICDP and apply them to other contexts and partnerships. This sort of growth may well be the most likely pathway for expansion, and is a reason for sharing the appendices contained in this report. The ICDP hopes that any interested institutions would want to reach out with questions or connections.

8. Appendix A: Civic Self-Portrait

Directions:

1. You will create your civic self-portrait on **one** Google slide. You may choose to either work directly in our shared gallery slide deck, or to work separately and copy and paste your slide in once it is complete.
2. On your google slide, you may use any combination of media (video, audio, images, writing, etc.) to represent your answers to the questions below.
    - For example, some of you may choose to include images or clips of art (yours or others'), pictures of people or places important to you, written descriptions, etc. The goal is to allow you to represent your answers the way you would like to.
    - That said, do keep in mind that the purpose of this exercise is to get to know each other! Consider how to effectively convey your reflections to the group.
3. Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions:

Your Influences:

- Who in your life has most shaped your civic values and beliefs, your sense of what it means to be a good member of your communit(ies)? (e.g. - family, friends, teachers, mentors, public figures, etc.)
- What institutions have most shaped your civic values and beliefs? (e.g. school, religious institutions, sports/extracurricular groups, local or national political groups, etc.)
- What events or experiences have shaped your civic values and beliefs? (e.g. experiences with travel, migration, service, success or loss, local or national events, etc.)

Your Values & Beliefs

- What values and beliefs about being a good member of your communit(ies) are most important to you? How do you try to live these values and beliefs?

Your special sauce

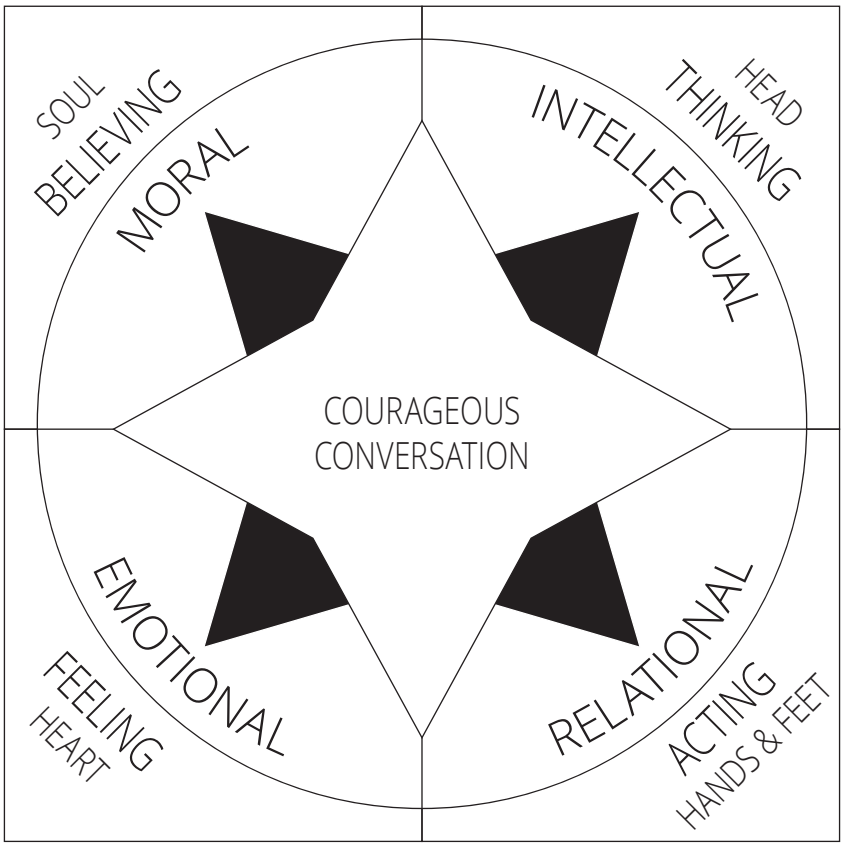
- Is there anything else you want the group to know about you that isn't covered above? Do you have any unique passions, talents, or hobbies you want to share? (We know many of you do because we read your applications!) Anything you would love to connect with others about?

Why are you here?

- What inspired you to pursue this fellowship? What are you here to contribute, and what are you here to receive?

4. Once you've reflected, consider how you'd like to represent your answers on your Google slide and collect your materials. Again, you may use any combination of media.
    - Please note: We understand the answers to the questions above might be very personal for some folks. Please share only what you feel comfortable sharing.
    - Additionally, don't feel pressure to represent everything!

9. Appendix B: Courageous Conversations Compass



Source: Glenn Singleton, Courageous Conversation About Race:
A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools, 2nd Edition (2015).

1. Purpose of the Compass
   - A reflective tool for understanding how you enter a conversation
   - A diagnostic tool for understanding where other people enter a conversation
2. Adapting the four points to controversial issues
   - *Emotional:* I respond to the topic primarily through my feelings (anger, sadness, fear, joy)
   - *Intellectual:* I respond to the topic primarily through a desire to think and learn more about it.
   - *Moral:* I respond to the topic primarily through deep-seated beliefs.
   - *Relational:* I respond to the topic primarily through action and organizing.

10. Appendix C: Dialogic Questions

This tool covers multiple aspects of teaching dialogic questions, perhaps the key feature of the ICDP's approach to facilitating conversations across political difference.

Features of Dialogic Questions[8]

Dialogic questions:

1. encourage people to speak about deeply held values and beliefs in ways that others can understand, even if they do not agree
2. welcome people to share the complexities of their thoughts and experiences
3. expand conversation beyond the issues and concerns that typically surface about a topic
4. pose questions to which you do not know the answer to

Designing Dialogic Questions

What is the purpose of the question you are asking? How does it align with the purposes of the conversation?
Always think of purpose first. Why do you want to ask this question? What effect do you think asking it will have? How does it advance the aims of the conversation?

How does the question provide participants new opportunities to understand each other?
Good dialogic questions enable participants to move through tense moments in a conversation by creating new ways of talking about an issue. They can expand what people consider part of the conversation about a topic, or they dig past rhetoric to get at people's heartfelt beliefs, values, and concerns.

Does the question implicitly frame what is right and wrong?
How a question is framed can purposefully or inadvertently imply judgment about a topic. Good dialogic questions avoid both asking people to search for a "right" answer to the question and being neutral about a contested topic. Instead, they focus the group's attention on questions to which we don't already know the answers.

Does the question enable multiple points of entry?
People in your group likely relate to and engage with a topic differently. Does your question enable someone who has direct experience with a topic to speak about it, on par with someone who may feel strongly about the topic but has little direct experience with it?

[8] These question-design resources are adapted from Essential Partners, "Designing Good Questions," and "What Makes a Good Dialogue Question?" (Essential Partners, 2019).

What impact might asking this question have on the group dynamic, including that between you and the group?
What questions you ask and how you ask them shape how people experience the conversation and how they view you. Carefully consider power dynamics, authority, legitimacy, authenticity, and care as you develop your questions.

Does the question invite complex thinking or reflection?
If a question is too broad (Can you share a time you felt insecure?) or too narrow (Have you ever felt unwelcome in a corporate meeting?) it is much less likely to encourage conversation or reflection. Yes or no questions, in particular, do not invite much complex thinking and reflection. Good dialogic questions invite people to think past the expected and dwell on the uncertain and complicated.

Sequencing Questions

It is often useful to think about how one question leads to further questions. Planning out a set of related questions focuses our attention on how facilitators *sequence* conversational structures. Sequenced questions can structure a part of a conversation, or they can serve as the backbone for an entire conversation.

1. **Peeling the Onion**

   This approach to sequencing aims to dig into the layers of meaning participants' attach to their experiences and beliefs. They start by encouraging people to share an experience or a belief and then scaffolding reflection about that belief.

> Example:
>
> Describe a time when you experienced your political values as unwelcome or mistaken—or thought that others wouldn't welcome or respect your values. What happened? What do you believe others assumed about you at that time? How do you believe this experience shaped your willingness to share your beliefs with others or hear about others' beliefs?

2. **Bivalence**

   This approach to sequencing asks people to consider two different sides of an experience. The goal is to create opportunities for people to find unexpected sources of commonality, and then use those connections as a means to engage in deeper inquiry.

> Example:
>
> What, if any, gender expectation from your community aligns with your own authentic sense of your gender?
>
> What, if any, gender expectation from your community contrasts or conflicts with your own authentic sense of your gender?

> After sharing:
>
> What have you heard from others that surprised you? Or, are there connections between your experiences and others that are surprising? Unexpected? Welcome?

3. **Aperture**

   This sequencing approach broadens the lens through which people view and understand their values and beliefs. The hope is that by expanding the field of focus, people will be willing to consider uncertainties and sources of internal friction among their beliefs.

As you think about your perspectives and experiences, can you speak about any ways in which you feel pulled in different directions?

> Example:
>
> Please share a story from your life experience that may help others understand how you came to have the perspectives, concerns, or values that you have related to immigration.
>
> What is at the heart of the matter for you when you think about immigration?

How to Sequence Questions

When you are thinking about sequencing, one other thing to consider is whether to ask a single multi-part question or multiple single-part questions. The benefit to asking multiple single-part questions is that they are crisp and clear. For example, each of the questions of the aperture example is weighty enough on its own to evoke meaningful conversation. And the importance of asking about uncertainty and conflict might be lost if it is grouped together with the first two steps of the sequence.

Yet single multi-part questions can help people avoid leaning on generalizations and assumptions as they reflect. For example, presenting a peeling the onion sequence as a single multi-part question has the potential benefit of encouraging people to reflect more deeply on their experience. They may not oversimplify their description of the experience, or move into a space where their focus turns to blaming others for how they felt, or making generalizations about others as they describe how generalizations and assumptions affected them, because they can see the purpose of the sequence of questions.

Pacing Questions

In addition to thinking about how questions themselves are structured, it is important to think about the conversational structures you use to create space for people to answer the questions you ask. This what we refer to as the of pacing a conversation. Below are a few basic structures we use that lead to different conversational paces.

Go-Arounds

Go-Arounds are a way to dramatically slow the pace of conversation. Go-arounds typically work like this:

1. Facilitators offer participants a short time to consider the question on their own.
2. Carefully considering whom to start the go-around, the facilitator informs the group that everyone will have X amount of time to share (30-90 seconds, typically). One person will start and then each person will have a chance to share moving around the circle. People can pass if needed.
3. While each person speaks, everyone else listens. Questions are reserved for after the Go-Around is finished; the facilitator can encourage people to write down any questions they'd like to ask someone.
4. Facilitator helps transition from Go-Around by asking people to reflect on what has been shared, opening up space for question-asking, or leading into another Go-Around.

Popcorn

Popcorn structures work much like Go-Arounds although they are slightly less formal. Instead of sharing in a set order, the facilitator explains that people can share in the order they'd like. The other rules generally apply: while one person is sharing, others listen; questions are reserved until everyone who wants to share has shared.

Open Floor

This is the most informal and fastest paced structure. Open floor enables the participants to control the direction of the conversation; the facilitator may offer a prompt, to set up a general direction, but then participants may pull conversation in any number of ways.

11. Appendix D: Being A Facilitator

Facilitating a conversation oriented toward understanding across different perspectives, beliefs, identities, and ideologies means embracing a different role than one may be used to. A facilitator of civil disagreement is committed to helping others engage in a conversation they want to have. Their primary role and purpose is to sustain a space in which a conversation can continue, despite and through its toughest, tensest moments. We think of this commitment to the conversation in terms of *stewardship*. Embracing this role, however, means that it is important for a facilitator to avoid:

1. *Assuming authority as a topical expert or acting as the focus of the conversation.* A facilitator's authority comes from their commitment to upholding the norms or agreements that the group lands on prior to beginning their conversation. A facilitator does not need to present information on a topic to gain authority, nor should a facilitator seek to be the hub of a conversation, where they respond to each remark by participants. The goal is to create conversation structures that enable participants to speak to each other, rather than to the facilitators.
2. *Feeling that you are solely responsible for a successful conversation*. A facilitator cannot guarantee a successful, productive conversation. If a facilitator is overly invested in reaching a preconceived end goal they may miss potential opportunities that the group wishes to explore or become the focus of the conversation, among other unproductive outcomes. A facilitator can model exchanges, raise concerns about the direction of a conversation, or intervene when norms are violated, but they should try to let the direction of the conversation remain in the hands of the participants as much as possible. Similarly, if a conversation is listless, it is not the role of the facilitator to force a spark. It may well be that participants need to talk about how they talk to each other before they can invest energy into a topic.
3. *Attending to the needs of a single participant at the expense of the group*. This is perhaps the trickiest adaptation to make. A facilitator's primary purpose is to create the sort of space that sustains conversation even when it is difficult. When a single participant is offended or harmed by others in the group, it may feel like the facilitator should jump in to the rescue. Doing so, however, risks undermining the basis of a facilitator's authority—their commitment to the conversation. This does not mean that there is nothing a facilitator can do when such circumstances arise. A facilitator can shift the energy of the conversation with a pause or a reflection, they can remind the group of their agreements and aims, or they can comment on what they are observing. The responsibility of a facilitator to sustain the space for conversation entails concern for each participant, as losing a participant also compromises the space.

12. Appendix E: Disagreement Index

Table 1. Disagreement Index



Heat Level	Description	Moves	Resources
Level 4: Boiling	Conflict among participants is at level that norms cannot sustain the conversation	Pause, check-in, reset, suspend	Facilitator interventions: boil
Level 3: Bubbling	Pointed disagreements lead to identifiable conflict(s) with conversation norms	Direct intervention, re-engagement	Facilitator interventions: bubble PSA approach
Level 2: Simmering	Disagreement among participants Facilitator helps participants focus on learning from each other through disagreements	Dialogic questions Soft or indirect interventions	Facilitator interventions: simmer Courageous conversations compass
Level 1: Warming up	Facilitator guides participants into dialogue and attempts to build some initial points of trust and connection among participants	Preplanned and unplanned dialogic questions	Dialogic questions handout Courageous conversations compass
Level 0: Getting started	Facilitator frames the conversation	Introductions, purpose of conversation, role of facilitator, establish norms	Facilitation cheat sheet ICDP agreements

The disagreement index is meant to help facilitators think about managing disagreement rather than avoiding or minimizing it. With this in mind, level 2 ought to be understood as the sweet spot. Here, disagreement is present, but it does outpace or overwhelm group agreements. Facilitators should expect disagreements to rise to level 3, even level 4, and should have strategies in mind to help reduce the heat.

13. Appendix F: Interventions

Facilitator Interventions[9]

Approach	Move	Example
Simmer		
use curiosity	encourage further inquiry	"Can you say a little more about what you mean when…"
	ask for more detail	"Can you tell us more why you think that?"
encourage authenticity	affirm risk-taking	"I can tell that was hard for you to share, so thank you for…" "I appreciate your willingness to put that out there for us all to think about." "Thank you for sharing that. I appreciate you trusting this group with your experience."
	connect to experience	"That is an interesting perspective. How do you think you've come to hold that way of thinking?"
leverage the group	invite other participants to join in conversation	"What do people think?" "Would anyone like to respond to the point just raised?" "Are there similar or differing views in the room" Use silence and wait for group to respond.
narrate what is happening	share observations without judgment	"I am noticing that…"
	name differing perspectives	"I'm hearing two (or more) different perspectives from the group. They are… Does that sound right?"
	acknowledge emotional energy	"Thank you for sharing … I also want to acknowledge that what you shared may have elicited strong emotions from others in our group."
change pace	pause	"Let's take a moment to pause and think about what has been shared."
	change conversational structure	"I'd like to invite everyone to share where they are at, or what they are thinking about. Each person will then have X time to share."

[9] Adapted from Essential Partners, "Basic Facilitation Guide" (Essential Partners, 2018)

Approach	Move	Example
offer alternatives	parrot	"I think I heard you say… is this what you meant?"
	use confusion	"I think I got lost there. Can you say a little more?"
Bubble		
directly address conflict with agreements/ norms	PSA model[9]	State the Purpose: Why are you intervening? Name the Slip: What is the norm violation that happened? Provide an Alternative: Offer a way for participant to re-enter the conversation "Just a reminder to speak only from your own experience and not for other people. I heard you talk about sophomores in general. Is there a way you could share your own experience as a sophomore to help us understand your feelings about this rule?"
re-center conversation	remind participant's of purpose	"I just want to return us to our goal for today's conversation. I'm worried that what has just happened has pulled us away from this goal."
	reinforce norms	"I think it is important we are talking about X, but let us also not forget our agreements/norms."
Boil		
halt conversation	pause/check-in/reset	"I think our conversation has outpaced some of our purposes and agreements. Let's all take a moment to stop. We can return in a few minutes and decide if we want to continue."
	suspend	"I am noticing that our agreements are not enough to guide our conversation. Why don't we stop and revisit this conversation another time."

[9] Adapted from Essential Partners, "Basic Facilitation Guide" (Essential Partners, 2018)

14. Appendix G: Facilitator Guide

This guide is a model script we share with fellows as they learn to facilitate conversations. It walks them through crucial steps in establishing structures and supports for having difficult conversations: the purpose of the conversation, their role, group agreements, and an agenda.

Welcome & Introduction:

F1: " Welcome! Thank you all for coming. My name is _____. [briefly explain why you are here]"

F2: "And my name is _____. [briefly explain why you are here]"

Purpose:

F1: "The purpose of our discussion today is to learn from each other about what we all believe about [INSERT ISSUE]. You being here indicates your interest in talking about topics that have proven difficult but vitally important to speak about, in ways that enable each of us to be heard and understood by the other people here."

F2: "Our conversation does not aim to model a debate format. We are not seeking a "right" answer to [ISSUE]. We hope that you will:

1. think and speak deeply about [ISSUE];
2. come away with new, more complex understandings about what is important to others and you when it comes to [ISSUE];
3. and leave the conversation open to possibility of further discourse across ideological disagreement."

Role of the Facilitator:

F1: "Our role is to act as stewards of your conversation. We will help set up some guidelines for how we will relate to each other during the discussion. We will also initiate the conversation, keep time, and, if necessary, remind people to converse within our guidelines."

Agreements:

F2: "One way to help our conversation remain true to our purposes is through communication agreements. Some of you may have heard these referred to as norms. We call them agreements, however, because we want everyone to agree to them before we begin. Because we have limited time together today we propose the following for our discussion [F1 SHARES SAMPLE AGREEMENTS]. Please take a moment to review these agreements. Is there anything else that you would suggest or need to allow you to participate fully?"

***Below are sample agreements.*

1. Allow people to pass/pass for now;
2. Honor confidentiality: after this conversation ends, you may speak about ideas from and your experience of this conversation with others, but refrain from identifying people.
3. Speak for ourselves, not others
4. Express our different viewpoints in a thoughtful and respectful manner
5. Speak one at a time, avoid interruptions, and refrain from side conversations
6. Honor timeframes
7. Share the air—make space for everybody to contribute.

F2: (When appropriate) "Can everybody agree to these agreements?"

Agenda:

F1: "Today, we will structure our conversation as follows…"

F2: "Are there any questions before we get started?"

F1: "Is everyone ready to get started?"

Tips:

1. Take your time! Barring a longer conversation about agreements, framing can take about 15 minutes.
2. Speak in a welcome, warm tone that puts people at ease. Use your eyes and body to engage all members of the group.
3. Model a spirit of openness and curiosity.
4. Open your conversation with a dialogic question that allows: (1) everyone to respond; (2) people to introduce themselves; and (3) engages participants to talk from or about experience.
5. Once the conversation has started, remember the other resources you have at your disposal for addressing norm violations, handling hot moments, etc..