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NCDD 2014 conference notes  
Cynthia Kurtz

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Disclaimer: I take notes as partial (but mostly verbatim) transcripts. These are my perceptions of what people said. I probably heard wrongly in some cases (though I tried not to add any of my own thoughts without marking them as such). Take this for what it's worth.

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Key:  
((my comment))  
[a question from the audience while someone is speaking]

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Sandy Heierbacher talking to start conference

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Four barriers

- (1) lack of trust in government
- (2) unequal access - inclusion - not everybody has equal access to d&d or government
- (3) lack of cohesion as a clearly delineated field - because of this our community struggles to throw our collective weight around
- (4) structural barriers - antiquated laws for decision making, formats that don't work any more like town meetings, lack of funding

Please propose topics for discussion around those four barriers.

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David Matthews  
Ecology of Democracy

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We study democracy. We are not academics. We exchange what we've learned from past experiences and observations for a record of what people are doing now.

We have an exchange with NCDD that is very productive for us.

I was asked to talk about Washington. In 1953 a lot of independent organizations were brought together into one single agency whose budget was larger than the budget than all but 2 countries (US and USSR). It was the godzilla of government organizations. It was very pervasive -- some would say invasive. HEW (Health, Education, and Welfare; renamed in 1979 as Health and Human Services) regulated drugs, food, schools. It was not simply large; it was pervasive. It was also constantly controversial. There have been many lawsuits. The department can issue regulations that have the force of law but do not have to go through a process of debate as in Congress. That leads to litigation. At the same time it is an agency that is responsible for acting on the compassion of the American people.

Only three voices can get in.

- (1) Politicians.
- (2) Experts.
- (3) Groups that represent special interests.

What you will not hear is a public voice. By a "public voice" I mean the voice of a struggle. The voice of a people struggling with the tensions that are inherent in every decision we make. The tone of that voice is different from the other voices. It is practical, not ideological. And it is largely absent in governing.

There are things that a public voice can convey that no other voice can.

(1) It can convey what is deeply valuable to people: our most basic motivations as social beings, our survival instincts that people come back to time and time again when they make a decision.

(2) A public voice can convey what the options are that grow out of the many things we hold valuable. There are never just two options.

(3) A public voice can convey what people will and won't do when push comes to shove. It can convey trade-offs. The reality in government is that you have to understand what people will do when push comes to shove. People engage around what is valuable to them. When we say people are indifferent, they are not; they just don't care about the things we want them to care about. People care about survival and being treated fairly. We need to know those things. If we don't know what people will and won't do, we don't know what's politically permissible.

So where do you find the public voice? It's not a trained voice. We hear it every day in every place. In waiting rooms, in bars, around water coolers, in lines at the grocery stores. It is all around us.

So why is it unavailable? Because we don't recognize it for what it is. It is too ordinary.

The rivers in Alabama flow together and create a muddy swamp that runs for miles. It is full of amazing creatures. The largest alligator this year was 15 feet long and more than 1000 pounds. Developers covered the mud and took out the barrier islands. But then the hurricanes came and the fish were gone. That swamp was the breeding ground for life, but we didn't recognize it because it looked so messy and ordinary. That's true for the public voice.

A public voice can be nurtured. That's where I come to the part of my remarks that has to do with you. Somebody called you "the talking tribes." Never before in American history have we had all of the talking tribes in the range and diversity we have, nor have we had them in the room. Earlier we had controversies and problems, but there was not any group like this [NCDD] that we could talk to. The timing couldn't be more significant. People have lost confidence in the large institutions, including government. They don't think the system can reform itself. They say, "It's up to us" -- but they don't know how to do that. That's where you come in. You have an incredible opportunity if what you produce is in fact the public voice that's missing. These opportunities are rare. Will the talking tribes seize the moment? [Audience: Yeah!] I don't know.

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Short talks

Dialogue: The India Experience

Vinita Singh

((I went to the same talk twice, because I liked it))

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Our web site is [we-the-people.in](http://we-the-people.in). We used the World Café method as a model, with some modifications of our own. We brought in the story of the constitution. That sets the context of this project.

We lost that story in India ((the story of the constitution, of the origins of India)). So we start with that story and then continue the engagement. After we do the café, people come back for the other workshops. Our vision is "igniting a million sparks" across the country by initiating exploration, understanding, and action for being an active and responsible citizen. This is a movement of volunteers.

The US has the shortest constitution in the world; India has the longest. When the constitution was created, literacy levels were 20%. India is the world's largest democracy. Our big idea was to hit the core - the preamble. Pick something that includes and involves people. Use a method that was tried and tested, and transferable. We wanted to see how people responded to the constitution: What does it mean to me? Where do I stand in all of this?

We used the World Café method to explore the document. We asked people to bring in stories and experiences and see -- what does it mean to do something in my community? How do I live equality in my home? How do I treat people? We wanted to get that questioning out.

We did a "constitution connect" campaign. We had citizen cafés, radio shows on the constitution and citizenship, an online film competition, partnership with newspapers, facebook and twitter. People are used to cafés, and now internet cafés, that's where they communicate. Even in rural areas people have internet cafés.

The cafés were facilitated by people from the community. They were trained in making cafés happen. The cafés were held in parks, schools, colleges, offices.

We had an online training for the facilitators - most were about 20 yrs old - we called them "anchors." They loved doing this. We used powerful questions to explore the preamble of the constitution. People offered spaces to the facilitators to hold cafés in. We had 66 cafés last year, involving 2500 people, with 35 anchors/facilitators. Our media reach was 8 million citizens.

Our aim this year is to do one café in each state - that's 30 states. There is a buzz about this; people say, "I want to do one here." Our participants have been about 75% youth, 75% urban. We have included citizens from marginalized, LGBT and economically fragile communities.

Our questions used for the World Café were:

- (1) What are some of the words in the preamble that speak out to you?
- (2) What are the values you are practicing in your life?
- (3) What are the values you would love to practice more? And how can you do that?

One woman said, "I give my household helper a different plate to eat from. I didn't realize that was unequal. I am going to change that." It is powerful for people to make sense of these values. They say, "I don't have the power to stand and picket, but I have the power to change something in my own house."

One girl said her parents were pressuring her not to fall in love with a Muslim boy, and she said, "That doesn't fit with the equality in the constitution."

These identities we carry, we can respect them and yet work together in making things happen. We still have 35% below the poverty line, which is living on 2\$ a day.

On YouTube look for WeThePeopleCitizen. On Twitter, WeThePeoplenw.

[Where are you going next?]

What we have done so far is just the tip. We have few numbers so far. We want to get out to more people, especially covering all of the states. We want to work in the Northern states, which have a history of disconnect with the rest of the country. We have a "Room to Read" program active in India - which is libraries in schools promoting literacy - we [will, want to] partner with them - we want to promote girls staying engaged [in learning].

[Is the constitution typically embraced?]

You start with, "This represents our country," but you don't ask people, "Is this a good constitution?" We are trying to capture what it really means. The first question is the critical one, and for us the question is, "What do you see here?" For example, many people question the word "socialist." For us it means that the state takes an active role in the redistribution of wealth. But a lot of young people question that. Complete dissent is possible. We keep that open - what strikes you in any way, not just because you love it.

[With a billion people it could feel to people that they could never make change. How does this engage people to be motivated?]

People engage with the community. It's not only about engaging with a state policy. It's how can I engage in

my community. It's a personal action. How do I dialogue with my own son or daughter? Domestic violence, for example. That in itself is enough power. The space for action is your family, your facebook group, your community.

[Do you collect the data from these sessions to accumulate it?]

That's a struggle for us. We have not been able to harvest as much as we would like to. Reports don't capture all of what comes in, especially stories. We are looking for ways to do that. That will be a major learning.

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first Friday workshop  
"Them" and "Us": Liberating Stories through Dialogue

Robert Stains, Laura Black

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((Showed film from dick-simon.net

"Them." This word has been responsible for the suffering and death of millions. THEMification is often the root of the problems we deal with.

Why do we do this? Historically, we had families and clans. The world is overwhelming. To simplify this complexity and to protect us from uncertainty, we label and simplify. Fear = False Expectations Appearing Real. It takes sustained, conscious effort to get rid of "them." And it takes courage.

One of the most powerful ways to get rid of "them" is through individual stories. When people hear other people's stories they become more than a stereotype. "In the other's shoes" is a method in which people retell the story they just heard through their own voice. Just by hearing their story we are changed. It is in our enlightened self interest.

Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." We can go from THEM to US. Can we interact with one new person a day?

There are 4 C's of getting rid of "them."

- (1) Be conscious of "them."
- (2) Be curious. Let curiosity replace our biases, our judgments. What's it REALLY like in their shoes?
- (3) Be compassionate.
- (4) Challenge everything we see and are told. Fight the urge to support and defend our positions. And when we catch others themifying, challenge.

There is no them once you know them.

end of film))  
((isn't that last sentence great))

We are impressed by how prominent stories have become in how people talk about the work they do.

((these next bits are not from speech but are copied from slides))

Why study stories?

- It's a fundamental way of learning.
- We construct our identity through stories.
- We invite others into our world.
- Stories can be emotional, relational; they are more welcoming than purely analytic decision making.
- Stories help us make arguments.
- Stories can be transformative.

But.. we do not own our stories.

- What happens when other people tell stories about us?
- What happens when we tell stories about others?

We create stories to explain:

- Life as lived, interpreted and told
- Self-reinforcing "data" selection / ladder of inference
- Effects of threat on storying ("When threat comes in the door, complexity goes out the window")
- Narrowed perception and selection
- Self-sustaining narratives; deepening, rather than expanding, existing stories, e.g., "When Prophecy Fails" - Leon Festinger
- Patterns that resist deviation and reinforce narrow stories of "us" and "them"
- Tend and befriend - Shelly Taylor research

((end of part from slides))

When people are trapped in a narrow story, our job is to create the conditions under which that story can change.

Small-group activity on listening to stories. From Art of Hosting. Preparing to tell a story: think of a time when you stepped forward to lead, in any aspect of your life. Each person has the time to tell a very brief story about yourself.

[What if we can't think of a story like that?] I have this prompt, you don't have to use it, but it's to help you get started.

The other 3 people in the group are going to be taking on roles:

- (1) listening for facts
  - who what where when why how
- (2) emotions
  - what emotions are mentioned in the story?
  - how would you describe the storyteller's emotions?
  - what do these things mean to you?
- (3) values
  - What values are mentioned in the story?
  - What events/people are seen as good/bad?
  - What does this storyteller care about?
  - What does this mean to you?

((Group reflections after story exercise. Most of these are things participants said.))

It was difficult to distinguish fact vs emotion vs value. The listening role I struggled with was the facts.

There was identity work in being a listener. But it was a luxury, being able to listen for just one aspect. If you listen to one aspect you hear so much more than if you were listening to everything. It's difficult to sort those out if you are hearing them all.

It was interesting to me to hear the feedback on the story. We wanted to elaborate on our story afterward, to add to it. We wanted to say, "There's more to the story."

I found that when I told my story and heard the feedback, I learned more about my story than I had originally known. The exercise added depth and color. There were feelings I had experienced but never named.

I agree that it was hardest to listen to facts. The facts are on the surface. Sometimes we overlook the emotions and the values.

I got to know these people better through listening to their stories.

I used to have a fear of getting it wrong - but when listeners get it wrong, it helps me as a speaker to clarify what I want to say.

It was ironic that this defines active listening. We didn't look like we were actively engaged, but we were. This clearly defined active listening for me. While we were expressing another person's truths, we were discovering our own truths.

Hearing things about my story that I didn't know is leaving me feeling good about myself. People said my story was about something different and it helped me see it differently.

While we did this deliberately, sometimes people do it without being prompted. People listen only for facts or emotions or values. Sometimes it's important to listen for facts, and sometimes it's not. Sometimes facts are obscured by paying too much attention to emotions. In different contexts different types of listening are appropriate.

((another slide))

Re-authoring stories through dialogue

- create a context of less threat by:

- collaborating on articulating shared purposes
- assisting self-preparation by initiating reflection
- collaboratively creating agreements
- tight meeting structure; equal speaking
- inquiry to invite expanded stories:
  - before a meeting
  - during a meeting: questions for all
  - during a meeting: questions of each other

((end of slide))

Set up ground rules so that people will not feel their story is going to be attacked. Ask for a story of your experiences, your values, your perspective, your complexity. What's an experience that explains your position? Give people a chance to ask each other questions. So they can experience their story in a broader way.

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Making Space for Sacred Convictions in D&D: Threat, Necessity or Opportunity?

Jacob Hess, Heidi Weaver, John Backman, Arthur Pena, Phil Neisser, Tracy Hollister

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What do we mean by "sacred?" We mean things that have "identity conviction." These are things we hold very close to our identities. The term "identity conviction" removes it from the religious and allows it to apply to everyone.

In my organization, LOVEboldly, we have what we call SAFE talks. SAFE stands for Sexuality And Faith Engagement. This is a moderated open discussion where people share their experiences. One of the things I hear is that people feel like they can't even broach the conversation, because the minute they ask a question people feel their sacred beliefs are being jumped on. When I say this to people, I see light bulbs go on for people on both sides. It's healing for people to experience people with other beliefs just listening to them.

We called it "offensive sanctuary" - we are willing to provide safety for anyone who enters into the conversation. We say we provide "treasonous friendship" - we are willing to talk to people who bother us and confront us.

Allen Chambers is the former president of Exodus International, which is the Evangelical Christian response to homosexuality - reparative therapy, which says it changes people from being gay. This group caused a lot of

damage and trauma for people who tried to change their orientation. We brought Allen Chambers into one of our SAFE talks. Allen wanted to come and apologize to the people for whom it (reparative therapy) didn't work. He got the flu and couldn't come, but the people who were supposed to talk to him talked to each other anyway. Some of the people there had been hurt by Exodus. One woman, Karen, had been very hurt by it and had denounced it in public. Karen said, "What troubles me is that you asked - what if he was sincere in his apology? As a Christian, I have to forgive him."

It's hard to hear the other out. It's costly, but it works. We should navigate WITH the sacred instead of AROUND it. We should listen to what is sacred for people so they feel heard, and we should work with that energy.

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## Co-Designing Our Transpartisan Journey

Debilyn Molineaux, Mark Gerzon, Joan Blades, Michael Ostrolenk, John Steiner

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Being transpartisan is a spirit, a way of life.

We had a pre-conference meeting with 40 people. Three categories of engagement emerged out of it.

(1) Do people want to be part of a communication loop? Do people want to know all of what is going on? We want to start having transpartisan salons in Washington, D.C. We want to have off-the-record conversations with people in positions of connection and power, to make things happen. Not just the usual suspects in the middle, but reaching out the edges also.

(2) Engaging on specific cross-spectrum issues. We are compiling a master list - we have 50 so far. What are the existing collaborations? We want to set up a communications hub so that we all have a place to go to share our stories with each other. It might be an internet portal or a newsletter. Part of that is a PR campaign. We want to work with editorial boards and the people who are reporting on the news, to give them a different outlook on what they can report.

(3) The imagination level. What is not happening yet, but could happen in the future? What if the whole transpartisan community did something together in an election cycle? What could we do that expressed the ethos of what is going on here to the whole country? We want to steward a conversation about collective impact in 2016. We need to know what each group is doing; we need to coordinate so it's not in isolation. Will America notice? Or will we be still focused on the sensational stories of the day?

A particular definition of transpartisan is that we can be a transpartisan anything as long as we are willing to come to the same table and discuss things of mutual interest. The better partisan you are, the better transpartisan you can be.

((Group discussion after small-group discussions.))

It's not that our system is non-functional; it's more a matter of who it is functional for? It is very efficient in what it does, which is argue and fight.

Instead of a board of directors, we need to create a board of connectors.

What is our ism? What do we call this emerging group?

The only way to go up against money power is people power. But how do we organize that?

Our ((group's)) theme was: if you want to make changes at a large scale, you have to go back to families and youth, not just imparting your own values but teaching children that there are other values as well. Creating a culture of open-mindedness in youth. With young people, how can we make them feel empowered to bring their energy to the democratic system, when it is so obviously undemocratic?

The transpartisan fellowship and process includes lots of pieces. We need a common set of facts and values. Our language can be used to divide people or to bring them together.

There are a huge number of radio stations in universities that are transpartisan.

We ((our group)) has a broad vision of the future, but everyone has different specifics.

We need to listen to women more. We need to restore educational funding.

How do we become one connected world? What does it mean to be human in this world?

Polarization is the antidote to American ingenuity.

We ((our group)) talked about how there are good things going on that don't get visibility. We talked about the decline of media, and how it doesn't cover things. We need to redefine the narrative. We need a centralized way to share stories of transpartisanship. We are looking for ways to create more space for understanding at a national level. We are interested in shifting the narrative.

We need to tell each other's stories of what we are doing. When we hear things, we need to pass them on. This could create a powerful shift. We need to share our stories with Hollywood and the media.

Not thank YOU; thank US.

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Plenary talk by people in the Alberta Climate Change Dialogue (ABCD) project

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((the reason this part repeats so much is that several people spoke and I ran it all together))

We created province-wide virtual deliberations. We wanted to know: what is people's experience on these issues? We had six sessions, with a webinar and phone-based technique. We had note takers. The clunky technology obstructed participant access and the quality of the interaction.

[How long would people commit?] Two hours.

We had a narrow frame. We asked people what were the points of political influence that were possible. People came wanting to talk about climate change. We overcame challenges through persistence, repetition (6 sessions) and transparency. We were open with participants about our challenges and efforts.

One challenge was risk averseness with oppressed civil servants, who felt a need to support official positions. We also had difficulty sustaining participant involvement after they ((I think this means facilitators)) submitted their reports. Deepening connections might have increased profile and capacity.

We felt that public opinion and trust would grow if people had access to what dialogue looks like. We wanted decision makers to feel compelled to pay attention to the process of dialogue. We wondered, how can we create conditions and structures and incentives to connect deliberation with civil society?

One challenge was finding a group that wanted to invest time and energy into the process.

We often had to treat climate change as the backseat issue rather than the sole target. People saw it as a scientific matter, not something regular people would pay attention to. Citizens saw the discussion of values as taking away from teaching people about the scientific facts. People felt that educating people was key to making sure people were on the same page. The city didn't see deliberation results as informing elected officials; it saw them as instead proving where people needed education. In this view it was hard to see how it could be a catalyst.



We recognized that climate change is many, not one. We wanted to look at ways to adapt to it. We wanted a diversity of perspectives, including rural and First Nations. It was hard to get people to connect water to climate change. It was hard to challenge dominant frames of mitigation of carbon (and talk about the many repercussions). Frames as well as process are not neutral. Some frames reinforce instead of challenge existing systems.

Also, some publics are not represented. How do we represent the non-humans and future generations in our deliberations?

We wanted to build more capacity for dialogue and deliberation. To do that, we needed good facilitation and good organizational capacity for it. This requires rigor. But high-quality design and facilitation increases costs, because it's usually professional. We had a vulnerability because of low budgets.

For many groups climate change does not connect to their primary mission. Many efforts are still one-offs rather than sustained efforts. We took a disciplined approach to facilitator training. We helped people develop a range of abilities and aptitudes for facilitation, especially around tough issues. We had a focal point for volunteers. We helped to build some internal capacity in some environmental groups. But the challenge remains: how do we move past one-off deliberations and micro-publics to longer-term and fuller participation dialogues?

We come to this work out of values. Like most D&D projects, we left a very faint scratch on the machine that is moving our society forward. We came to reflect on the intransigence of these systems of governance, economy, finance. We need to combine with other forces to leverage systemic change. We risk fiddling as Rome burns, or painting a funny face on bad systems. The problem is not how to get more people doing D&D - we need to reflect on how these inspiring micro-exercises really might add up to serious change at the macro level. And we need to strategize on this. We need to grapple together with understanding social change, and develop analyses of how D&D can be one part of a more complex story of change. Deliberation by itself is not nearly enough when big systems have strong tendencies, and when a merciless climate clock keeps ticking. It is not just an absence of public voice, but strong structural problems. There needs to be an ongoing critical conversation about what our world needs. We may not agree on this. But there are forces that hold an unjust and destructive status quo in place. How can our work in D&D combine with structural change? The conversation about D&D and systems change is the one we need to hold most. NCDD is about values. We owe it to ourselves and to the world to build critical stories about how D&D can be part of the systemic changes we yearn for.

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Plenary exercise about barriers to D&D having a bigger impact on society

- lack of trust
  - lack of inclusion
  - need to delineate our field of practice
  - structural barriers
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Lack of trust - Mark Gerzon. We need trust within our organizations, trust among our organizations, and trust between our field and the larger culture.

Lack of inclusion - Martha something and Val Ramos from Everyday Democracy. We are working together across backgrounds. We have seen communities grappling with structural inequities. We have seen how it influences lives. We need an equity lens. People need to use it as they do D&D work.

Delineating our field of practice - Larry Schooler. You would need a private jet to go to all the conferences on D&D topics. It is high time we recognize that to do this work well we need to know how to facilitate, resolve conflicts, and know about systems. It makes sense for all of those people to gather together than to gather separately. Go back to the other organizations you are connected with and say, let's all sit down together at the NCDD table and strengthen each other by standing together.

Structural barriers - Matt Lininger. I see four structural barrers:

- (1) Official laws and processes that allow, encourage, or even mandate bad participation. These are not just a hindrance but also a destructive force. They poison the well. People's view of what participation is is influenced by these awful experiences. We need to create models of good participation people can replicate and think of.
- (2) There are few effective modes of participation that are scalable. Most are great but local. We need to experiment with scaling up public deliberation to the national level. Text-Talk-Act is a good example.
- (3) There is no clear professional learning pathway for people who want to learn this field. It is not taught enough. IAP2 is working on this.
- (4) Where are people already assembled? We still can't answer that question.

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## Getting Real about the Politics of Environmental Deliberations

David Kahane, Susanna Haas Lyons, Gwendolyn Blue, Lorelei Hanson

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Alberta is Texas North.

We had a "virtual deliberation" on energy efficiency. We wanted to talk about adaptation to water impacts of climate change - not just any environmental issue but big global issues, looking at systemic change. What systems are relevant? Is tweaking within a system enough? What else could we do? Our goal was to generate policy recommendations from the people. Even if we got everything we dreamed of with each of these deliberations, would we still be just tweaking the system?

People are usually asked to discuss issues in narrowly framed ways chosen by experts. Solutions are presented as if they are universal and affect everyone equally, as if it was politically neutral planning. This is supposed to be consensual. The implicit message is that it's better than political fighting about the issue. But it's ALWAYS a political debate. Because we want to make a difference, we narrow and narrow. But because we do that, do we really make a difference?

There are hard questions about what we mean when we talk about climate, and then what we mean when we talk about climate change. People talk about climate change like it's a self-evident thing that we can fix and manage, but that discourse is itself contestable. We need to ask difficult questions. What kinds of knowledge do we need to understand the problem and fix the problem? People in natural sciences and economics frame it in facts, but people in social sciences say we need to frame it in terms of perceptions.

For example, some people focus on mitigation rather than adaptation. If you focus on adaptation you focus on the fact that not only is climate change happening, but that climate affects us now and always has. People see climate change as in the future, but climate is real right now. The global climate is a construct that is useful but is not the only way of making sense of the climates around the world that affect us differently depending on location. Are we trying to fix the climate? Or are we trying to live on the earth?

Our narrow framings keep economic and political systems in place. If we reframe it...

[Can you frame the setup differently depending on the region? Some areas are more hit by climate affects than others. NY, NJ are more amenable because of Sandy; places with tornadoes are more amenable. What if you stage the communications for each region? The military is taking on climate. It is concerned about both mitigation and adaptation. Watch for "resilience" in the news. It is defined as recovery, not capacity; as adaptation, not mitigation. The mitigation argument is more political. But when you name something critical infrastructure, it becomes a different priority.]

We need to think about terminology, and sooner rather than later.

[Some cities are beyond this and are working on adaptation for their city. They are not focusing on mitigation. But these things are linked; the same solutions have both components and you can't separate them. I am here to learn more about talking to citizens about this. How can we use what you did?]

Are they bringing in issues of race? And socioeconomics?

[They are trying to but it breaks down. We've been brainstorming with someone about bringing in many perspectives. We need to talk to more groups. We need to frame it in terms of what they would like to see in their communities and how it would benefit them.]

There is a difference between the paternalistic giving of information and talking with people. If the solution was just better information, we would have solved this a long time ago. It's through the testing of what is possible that we uncover new approaches.

We see wonderful innovations on a local scale, and maybe if what we were all doing was like this we could achieve something. But how can we insure that innovations occur? And how can we work with power holders who are slow to change? How can we move away from power holders but also scale the local innovations?

[What would be ideal as a solution tool?]

It would be many solution tools.

[What is the most important?]

We don't know. Some people want to focus on particular levers they can control. This packs in assumptions. We could delve more deeply. There is no one solution that will fix it. We need to address more fundamental questions of continuing to live the way we do, the things we take for granted about the way we can live. This is a giant process challenge. We need to bring people into the places where we don't know the answer. We are all swimming in consumerist growth like fish in water.

[You want to take them out of that context and have them think anew and come together in unity and provide responsible direction to government.]

That is the profound challenge we face.

[We think we know how to do that. The Wisdom Council is not dialogue or deliberation. It doesn't operate within the system. It is not even about decision making. We randomly select 12 citizens - this is not a jury because it's not deliberative - and they redefine the problem over and over. We ask them, what insight can you bring to squaring this circle?]

[I'd like to share what we did in Australia. There is a lack of faith in everyday people to figure out what needs to be done. At the end of the day it's the public will that matters. We need to provide a way for the public will to come out. We asked, and people said they wanted more emphasis on green energy, nuclear power. The people said what they wanted. So what is the issue? Why can't you hear what people want?]

The problem is not that citizens are not capable of dealing with complex issues. People can, and this can create the political will to act. But we are so deeply embedded in a system that is incapable of challenging itself that it's very hard to crack the systemic structures that will continue us barreling along making the same choices. How do we get to a new meta-narrative? What are the dangers of going too big? How do we balance between the big picture and brass tacks? Maybe this has to do not just with unity but with plurality. By asking only big picture questions, we lead citizens away from considering the whole because of the framing we have created.

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Politics, Race and Abortion: Using Controversial Topics to Build Meaningful Connections

Danielle Thomas, Joan Blades, Dori Maynard

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Danielle thomas from Exhale.

People either couldn't tell their stories ((about abortion)) or wanted to sensationalize awful stories. I watched

people leave the clinic and wondered how they felt. I recognized a need for a social climate in which each person's unique voice was respected. We created a "pro-voice" phone line where people can talk about abortion without engaging in arguments. ((This process)) can be used to discuss many stigmatized issues. Personal transformation comes first, and this leads to cultural change. Without giving voice to the many experiences, it stays invisible. We need real human experiences, and a non-judgmental, non-politicized space to describe experiences.

80% ((of the people who use our service)) are women who have had abortions, 20% are friends and family. Politics rarely comes up on the talk line. For many, this is the first time they can share their story the way they want to. I was a counselor on the talk line. By the end I heard people say, I want to keep telling my story. They expressed gratitude. Women craved the opportunity to share their story outside their personal networks.

We created the pro-voice fellowship and stories tour. We asked, "Is it possible to talk with strangers about it in ways that feel supporting to all involved?" We partnered with an evaluation firm to evaluate the effort. I remember a Muslim man who said he was changed by the experience. ((Showed a video - trailer from upcoming documentary - book also coming out)) This is a change experience for people on all sides of the debate. Personal relationships shape values.

Dori Maynard from the Maynard Institute.

We help the country's news media cover all segments of society. We train people to use multimedia.

We have a "Fault Lines" program that helps people own their voice. Our race, class, gender, generation, and geography shape our perceptions of ourselves, each other, and our environment. That is perfectly natural. Two people can look at same thing and see things differently. We see this in Ferguson - was it murder or self-defense? We need to rethink how we have that conversation. Instead of coming to agreement, we can take the need to agree away and simply try to understand each other. If you do that, it is easier to understand, and you get to deeper issues. It's not about Brown and Wilson, it is about the criminal justice system. People identify with people on one side or the other, but if you can get to that point of understanding, you can get to a different conversation - about what we do about it. We ask people to have these conversations with the goal of understanding each other.

This idea did not come naturally to me. But it works! We figure out what fault line is at play. We usually go for the obvious fault line, and if we are wrong we have skewed conversations. For example, in 2008, with Hillary and Obama, people thought it was about gender and race, but it was really about generations. The younger people supported Obama. We need to know what fault line is in play. And we need to be less squeamish about talking about fault lines. For example, we use geography to avoid talking about race and class. That's inaccurate. We have to have the courage to name it. But that's scary. We are afraid we will make a mistake. But nobody has all the answers. Our diversity has become so complex that we are ALL going to make mistakes.

I realized this during Obama's second inauguration. I was watching it on TV at home. Obama said "Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall," and she started sobbing. ((Cannot remember who started sobbing.)) So many would have been touched to see their personal struggle mentioned by the President.

I talked to a woman on twitter about that. I said, "I'm not gay, but I cried." The woman didn't like that. I had conflated gay with trans. ((I'm not sure how.)) I told her, "I do diversity work, and I make mistakes all the time, and I'm sorry."

We need to not be afraid of making mistakes. When people make mistakes with us, do we roll our eyes and walk away, or do we engage and correct them? We all have blind spots. I ((did something related to)) women of color in digital space. I got a response - why are there no Native American women? She was right. I said, "You're right, and we'll fix it." Then I thought, how did I make that mistake? I looked around my office and realized we have no Native Americans on our staff. I won't make that mistake again. We need to continue the conversation.

Joan Blades, co-founder of MoveOn.org and Living Room Conversations.

People have forgotten that MoveOn originally was about censuring the President and then moving on. It wasn't partisan - everyone needed it. In 1998 getting 100,000 people in a week was unheard of. But it was all parties.

Afterwards, I wanted to get involved in getting leaders to better represent our values. Finding common ground is what I found the most inspiring. I co-founded MomsRising, which fights against the bias against mothers in hiring wages etc. We said, let's fix it.

Uniting America in 2004 was about bringing people together with different views. A direct approach to bridging seemed necessary. Conversations in 2004 weren't possible in 2009. Tribal lines were getting strong.

So we created Living Room Conversations as a tool to address the challenge of: how do we start listening to each other? We should call it Living Room Listening, because listening is what it's about. There are clear guidelines. There is no facilitator; everyone is responsible. Use what you learned in kindergarten, take turns, be responsible, be curious, look for common ground. I learned that I was part of a pro-voice organization when I went to an Exhale meeting. It is about listening to our differences in a respectful way. The first hour of the meeting is coming to realize that you share values with people you disagree with. It's listening in a different way. We are having a hard time hearing each other because of barriers. This is a simple intervention to start that relationship. Out of that, many possibilities arise.

People say, I don't have any conservative or liberal friends. I tell the story about how I did this ((formed this)) with a Tea Party founder, because a friend introduced a friend to him. It's the Kevin Bacon rule. You are probably only one degree removed from a person with a different viewpoint. There is such modeling of disrespectful behavior in the media. People who do have friends with different viewpoints are afraid it will injure their relationship. I've asked people: why did you want to learn about Living Room Conversations? Every person said they had a relationship where they couldn't talk. That's sad. We need to listen to each other in an open-hearted way. We need to have collaborative solutions that have the possibility of going to the next level of facing big issues. Like health care - ours is the most expensive in the world, but not in the top 20 in effectiveness. It took hard work to make it that dysfunctional. We have got to do better. I'm glad to be part of the pro-voice movement. It is healing the heart of democracy. LLC is a first step. Here ((showing it)) is a newspaper with an article about our first conversation. People like happy endings. They are ready for this. How can we overcome the fear and create the safety to have the conversations we need to have to bring our communities back together?

[It's a cultural war with casualties. There is fragmentation. People are being torn apart. Healing - whole - heard - understood for the first time - those kinds of words can be used to get people to participate.]

It's a collaborative effort, it's an exploration.

[What do you mean by open source?]

Our guidelines are open, the meeting structure is on the web site, anyone can use it.

[How do you create an invitation that feels trustworthy? How do you find allies in communities and speak the language? I'm curious about the invitation and how you establish trust? How is your intent perceived?]

You are thinking bigger than these are. This is very granular. Simple rules set it up. It's a self-organizing thing. You can use identity, people being part of something, to get people to do things. People want to know, what is the real goal. The goal is having the conversation. The means are the ends. There is no particular outcome or plan, we are open to whatever the conversation brings.

[What is the LLC structure?]

There are 5 rounds

- (1) Why did you come?
- (2) Tell us about yourself.
- (3) What are your hopes and fears for the community?

- (4) A question framed to allow people to talk about an issue
- (5) If you see anything differently now, explain it.

This is never a debate. It's in a living room with food. We are taking advantage of social norms in being hosts and friends.

((Danielle)) With Exhale ((in our tour)), people presented, so ((the other)) people didn't feel a need to participate. They could observe, so that made them feel safe. Then they could later on feel ready to share. Because of the space the fellows/presenters created, afterward people were ready to share their own stories.

((Dori)) In organizations, after we leave, there is a heightened sense of communication, because people have a new language and a new way of approaching the conversation. We try to teach people. Instead of typical head-butting, afterward ((after the fault lines session)) people said "we have a fault lines issue here" and then they would discuss where the fault lines were. We are training everybody in changing the calibre of the conversation.

[Do you have recommendations for tools and strategies?]

((Danielle))

Some key foundational things for Exhale have been:

(1) Investing in the leadership of the people doing the work. Helping people to feel they have what they need to lead people. People have it within them, we just help them find it. We are a strengths-based organization; we help everyone tap into their unique set of talents and skills. We work with a consultant ((whose name I missed)) to create a skill building retreat for our fellows. They learn about storytelling and also facilitation. We have also worked with Thaler Pekar, who helped them craft their stories. An abortion story can be lots of different stories - what story do you want to tell in this situation?

(2) Our organizational mantra is: caring + challenging = championing. We want them to know we care about them as a person, then we can drop in the challenge. Championing each other and the process we are embarking on together.

[But you are coming from a pro-choice perspective. It sounds like an open conversation. But how do you get people to participate when you come from a place with a bias? Why should I feel comfortable in this room? Your organization comes across as left biased. How do you overcome that?]

Exhale is apolitical. We have no political stance. We are open to people across the spectrum. We have no affiliation. We have dealt with this for 12 years. Each group thought we were the other side under cover. We are focused on taking conversation outside of politics. People do come into the room with pre-conceived ideas. But when they get involved we saw transformations. Pro-life people said, "I've never felt comfortable in conversations like this before." We have seen this work for people from all different political backgrounds.

((Joan)) For Living Room Conversations, it's so granular it's about the host and co-host.

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Third plenary session: Gamification, Rapid Response and Our Path Forward

Josh Lerner, Amy Lee, Gene Koo, Grande Lum, Jessica Solomon  
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Josh Lerner, Participatory Budgeting.

This is about making democracy fun, redesigning the processes to be a game, or like a game. How can game design make democracy fun? And make it work?

For example, people were voting with marbles in Argentina. Games are inherently enjoyable in a way that

discussions and deliberating are not.

- (1) Games have clear rules that spark creative action. Participatory Budgeting has a rulebook.
- (2) Artificial conflicts can inspire collaboration. It can be effective.
- (3) Measurable outcomes make participation matter. People need concrete outcomes. Somebody said, "This is different. You are actually deciding how the money will be spent."

Don't be afraid of the big words. It sounds boring, but it's the opposite of that. We give people a pool of money, and they decide how they will use the money, with ideas from participants. We have budget delegate meetings where people represent project ideas, then everybody votes. Once a year the process starts again. It becomes part of the community budget process. Cities, schools, and universities have used this. It is about creating a more educated platform of voters.

Amy Lee, Kettering Foundation.

What makes a game challenging, engaging, and fun? Common Ground for Action is an online platform for deliberative decision making based on the National Issues Forums, and also serious games. There is a moderator and 6-12 participants. They choose their top five most preferred actions. They come together to deliberate 3 more options. They individually evaluate options. They choose support, don't support, or are conflicted by each action. A graphic ((2d space with circles)) shows each participant the collective positions of the group. When people change their positions, the graph changes. People look for common ground. The last screen is the big win, where people can see the difference deliberation makes. People can see their initial top 5, the group's initial top 5, then how it changed during the discussion, and also how satisfied is the group with the results. This is an authentic sense of winning. It lets people see the difference that what they have just engaged in makes.

What about Common Ground for Action is game-like? It's a discussion forum, but it involves elements of games. There is conflict - conflicting views - between options. There is a challenge - a group challenge - it's a group vs system game. The goal is to discover or create common ground. Any individual participant can change the world of the conversation. There is not too much information, but just in time information. People use it as they need it. There is a way to win; everybody wins because you find authentic common ground. There is no way to lose. This is not like soccer; it's a group goal.

[What are the challenges of integrating game design into deliberation?] ((Questions were asked by Gene Koo of the Good Games Group))

People's perceptions that games are trivializing. Forums online needed to be engaging. If you want it to be engaging, it is going to need to involve elements of gaming. We don't use the word "game." If the word "game" bothers people, it is not necessary to use it.

We learn from breaking things, making mistakes, trying to do things when we don't know how. A game is like that: a challenge you need to approach via play. People know how to play games. If we want to make it accessible, we have to draw on things they know. Drawing on inherent forms of communication and action works.

It takes more time than money to do this. We put many hours of play testing and design into our games. If you want to gamify things, you need to invest the time to play test. This is not necessarily a computer game. It could be a game like chess.

[What is your advice on starting to integrate game mechanics into dialogue and deliberation?]

I ((Josh Lerner)) wrote a book called *Making Democracy Fun*. There are tried and true techniques. There are organizations you can look up - games for change, engagement game plan. You don't need a professional game design company to make your processes more game-like. You can draw on experts selectively as you need them. Gaming principles are as much a lens as a process. You can use elements of games in other things.

The things I find useful are:

- (1) There must be a conflict or a challenge, and it must be real, not fake.
- (2) There must be clear rules. Constraints force creativity.
- (3) There must be real outcomes. People need an outcome to create satisfaction, so they want to come back and do it again.

Games are systems of rules. Adding a game element surfaces rules that are already in what you do in facilitation. You are already experts in the rules; you just need to surface them.

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Grande Lum – Department of Justice, Community Relations Service

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I have long admired NCDD. It is one organization bringing together people on public engagement. You help people solve their own problems. That is what this administration has stood for. We need more of that. We need citizens who are informed, engaged, and involved. You are all bringing people to the table. CRS has been doing this for 50 years.

I want to focus on the dialogue piece. On August 18, 2014, ten days after the Michael Brown shooting, the President issued a statement on Ferguson. He said we had CRS working to foster conversations among voters and resolve tensions in the community. He ended his speech by saying, "It requires we listen and not just shout. That's how we are going to move forward together."

The Justice Department is the only government agency whose name has a moral meaning. Justice is known for litigation, and this is important, but listening to each other is what we need to bring about justice. Giving people a voice ensures that justice and peace aren't just about fighting each other. It's the fact that people can work out their issues on their own. Justice will come about because of a common sense of peace. In Ferguson we have run sessions between residents and officials about communication and trust. We are providing facilitation support to area leaders, who have been meeting weekly to deal with the issue. We had 8 staff members there. We work with law enforcement, community leaders, youth groups. It has made a difference.

The history of CRS starts with President Johnson in 1956. He was a consummate negotiator. He believed people could work things out. The lesson of American history is that in great crises a conciliator performs the most important service: of keeping people communicating. I have great faith in people to solve any problem - as long as they stay in communication. CRS is 50 people in 15 offices. We learn from you. How can we all contribute in all the issues of the day? In the 70s the CRS was known as the "cool it" guys because we were always going between groups and saying, "Cool it." From the start it was communicating between parties. We mediated at Selma Alabama so the second march was not like the first. It took courage to do that work. We have done race work, but more recently LGBT, age, etc.

The theme of this conference is democracy for the next generation. This is a huge challenge. It is a struggle for all of us. It means partnering up, planning bigger, advocacy. The focus on technology is huge. The PeaceTech lab at the US Institute of Peace is an example of that. When conflict is brewing around the world. We have heard so much interest in CRS here. Let's have a dialogue at each one of our 15 offices with NCDD folks.

I'll end with a quote from LBJ: "It is with the people that the ultimate responsibility lies. It rests in their hearts. It rests in their sense of decency and fair play. Above all, it rests in their common sense."

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Jessica Solomon, US Department of Arts and Culture  
[www.usdac.us](http://www.usdac.us)

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(( Led everyone in a song:

We are solid as a rock  
We are rooted like a tree  
We are here



Standing strong  
In our rightful place

End of song))

Everybody's a singer. DC is dubbed a creative capital. But 15% of our residents make below 15K a year. 12% make >200K. There are 1000 people moving into the capitol every month. We need to think of equity and inclusiveness.

We are not a government agency. In fact, we were founded the week the government shut down! We are citizen artists from all over who believe that art and culture are untapped resources in this country. We want to think about how public life would look if we brought our imaginations in, so that 15% can get what they need.

When art is fully integrated into the community, it becomes embracing. What is the future we wish to inhabit? We imagined our communities in 2034. We asked, "What if..." What if our greatest problems are rooted in culture? It has to be *done* and it has to be *fun*. We have the world's greatest renewable resource: creativity.

We want you to get involved. We need help from the NCDD to turn these imaginings into action. This is a step in the larger conversation.

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END OF NOTES ☺