

INTERACTIVITY FOUNDATION

BIANNUAL REPORT

October 2022 - April 2023

Integrating IF's Mission Areas



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Approved by IF Fellows & Intellectual Development Committee (IDC)

INTEGRATING IF'S MISSION AREAS

October 2022 - April 2023

In the current reporting period, many of the Interactivity Foundation's (IF) programs and activities have been shaped by our continued focus on advancing democratic governance through citizen engagement with our dialogic approach. We take seriously the threats to democracy and continue to engage in research and in conversations to learn how best to center our programming to achieve our goals as an organization. We are working to better integrate IF's three mission areas around our pro-democratic theme. In this report, we outline:

Pg 3 Greater coherence in the **Community Conversations Program** by using the threat to democracy as a connecting theme across multiple series.

Pg 5 Expansion of the **Collaborative Discussion Program** with renewed emphasis on the role that discussion skills play in supporting citizen centered governance.

Pg 7 Continued experimentation with the **Asynchronous Discussion Program**, bringing discussants together to explore the mindsets and positive discussion practices that build virtual communities.

Pg 9 Ignition of the **Sustained Discussion Program** after a three year pandemic pause, with new projects proposals that will offer points of connection to the theme of democracy.

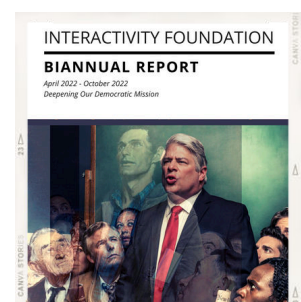
Pg 11 Pursuit of organizational and individual **partnerships** that share a commitment to democracy building and our ongoing **communication** strategies.

Pg 14 Recognition of the need for **greater capacity** to support our current and future programming. A need met by hiring a Visiting Fellow and Associate, creating Stern Fellowships, and adding a new member to the Board of Trustees.

We maintain our mission to support democratic governance through the use of exploratory dialogue in communities and classrooms. We will continue to integrate our various programs around the theme of democracy while also remaining committed to our culture of experimentation and innovation. We will leverage our skills and resources in the pursuit of building a better democratic future together. To review our evolution of thinking and programming, please see our previous reports:

Defending Democratic Principles,
October 2021 - April 2022

Deepening Our Democratic Mission,
April 2022 - October 2022



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM

October 2022 - April 2023

2
Series

6
Events

210+
Participants

1
Training

1
In Process



We began 2023 with a discussion series, *The End of American Democracy?*, that was designed as an overarching survey to uncover topics that will serve as the focal points for subsequent series throughout the year.

THE END OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

3-session online series, January 2023. Approximately 30 participants per session. As part of our focus this year on the growing threats to U.S. democracy, we framed this discussion series to survey those threats and develop a list of topics that we could explore in subsequent series throughout the rest of the year (and beyond). The topics could also each be the subject of their own Sustained Discussion Project.

The series introduction

Discussion #1 Summary

Discussion #2 Summary

Discussion #3 Summary

Final Report



TRUTH & DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

3-session online series, March 2023. Approximately 30 participants per session. This series explored the interrelationship between truth and U.S. democracy, with a focus on three different areas where truth is a central concern: the news media, science, and education. Please review:

The series introduction

Discussion #1 Summary

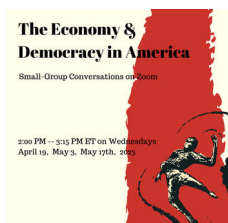
Discussion #2 Summary

Discussion #3 Summary

“I’ve been to all three sessions as well and I think my overall response is that after going through them, I feel more optimistic about the future of our democracy, just listening to my fellow citizens. So thank you.” --Kathy

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PROGRAM

October 2022 - April 2023



IN DEVELOPMENT: THE ECONOMY AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Proposed 3-session online series, April-May 2023. This series will explore the interrelationships between our economic system and the health of our democracy. It will launch during the National Week of Conversation.



INCLUSIVE DUBUQUE FACILITATOR TRAINING

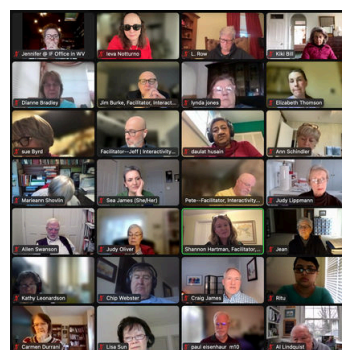
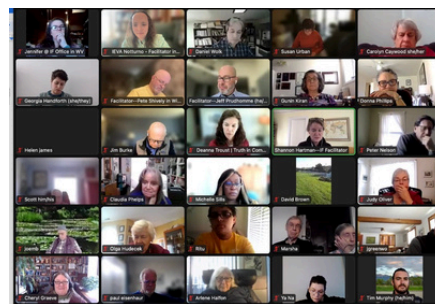
This on-site facilitator training program in Dubuque, Iowa started last fall with an initial training session for 36 volunteer facilitators. A second, follow-up training session for additional volunteer facilitators was held in Dubuque in early December. Since last fall, the volunteer facilitators have been facilitating 4-5 separate community discussions each month in Dubuque on the following seven different areas:

- Housing (September)
- Workforce and economic well-being (October)
- Education (November)
- Health and wellness (January)
- Arts and culture (February)
- Safe neighborhoods (March)
- Transportation (April)

These open discussions have been engaging members of the community and gathering their input as part of a larger update of Dubuque’s Community Equity Profile. This project is being coordinated by Inclusive Dubuque, an initiative of the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque.

LOOKING AHEAD

- We are exploring the possibility of co-organizing a discussion series about Race & Democracy with community partners.
- We are exploring how past programs, like the Four Freedoms project, might have potential for ongoing and outward growth through partnerships, like working with our educational partners for Constitution Day discussion programs.
- We are updating Community Conversation facilitation guides for public sharing. This ongoing effort is focused on producing shareable versions of both our better facilitation plans on individual discussion topics *and* our basic “how to” guidance for planning, organizing, and facilitating discussion series.



COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROJECT

October 2022 - April 2023

The IF [Collaborative Discussion Project](#) (CDP) was launched in May of 2021 as part of IF's education initiative. Over the past two years, IF has been working closely with educators and dialogue practitioners to develop this 3-part initiative, aimed at supporting the skills necessary for citizens to function in democratic societies. The project includes:



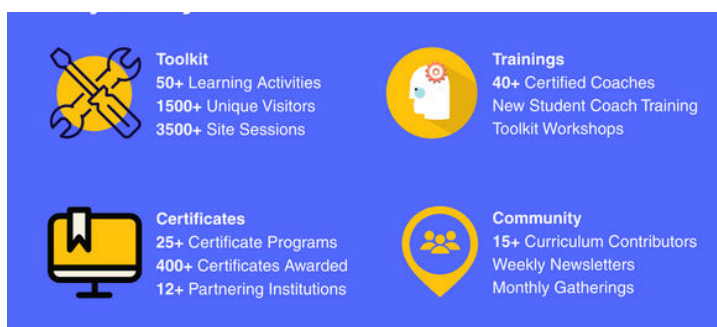
1 OPEN ACCESS TOOLKIT

Designed by educators and dialogue practitioners, this toolkit contains over 50 ready-to-use, interactive discussion activities for the classroom, workplace, or community. The activities are designed to enhance creative, critical, culturally responsive, and civic discussion skills. During this reporting period, we have added 3 new activities, a 5-star rating system, and launched [a weekly newsletter](#) that highlights a new discussion activity each week.

2 TRAININGS, WORKSHOPS, & CERTIFICATES

We have offered a total of 4 coach trainings, resulting in the certification of over 40 IF Collaborative Discussion Coaches. We are preparing for our upcoming summer and fall trainings, anticipating that we may double the number of total coaches by the end of the year. Coaches help to sustain this program by institutionalizing certificate programs on campus and expanding them into the community, contributing curriculum to the toolkit, & building our community of practice.

During this reporting period, we launched new initiatives to support coaches, which included a New Certificate Program Stipend Award, formal letters of recognition for new certificate programs, and a new debriefing process that should help us to better capture the strategic narratives of different coach initiatives and certificate programs.



3 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

We continue to build a community of educators and practitioners focused on collaborative discussion skills by offering our website as a hub to share about upcoming events, regular monthly gatherings, working teams, and new resources. We continue to professionalize our materials, trainings, and forms of recognition to help support our community members.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION PROJECT

October 2022 - April 2023



KEY DEVELOPMENTS, OCT 2022 - APRIL 2023

- Offered a Certificate Program Stipend (\$1000) to help coaches launch new programs.
- Created and issued Level 2 Certificates and digital badges per coach request.
- Organized regular community of practice meetings (first Friday of each month).
- Launched a new weekly newsletter via substack, which has received positive feedback with over a 50% open rate.
- Created an assessment suite, which includes 6 assessments that can be used by coaches to evaluate the learning goals of their certificate programs. This spring, we are requiring Assessment 1: Retrospective Survey to be completed by participants and Assessment 2: Program Reflection to be completed by coaches.



KEY CHALLENGES & AREAS FOR GROWTH

- We have a relatively high rate of continued involvement after the training (50%). This year we will focus on how best to support coaches and expand their opportunities to offer certificate programs. One area of interest is supporting out-of-classroom programs and community-based programs.
- We are collecting participant feedback this spring and standardizing coach debriefing.
- We are evaluating how best to strategically capture and share the stories of these individual programs and the overall community program.



IN DEVELOPMENT & LOOKING AHEAD

- We are currently planning our next Summer Coach Training, May 31 - June 6, 2023. We have more applications than in any prior summer training.
- A group of coaches will submit a workshop session at the NCDD Conference (Oct). We will also offer a preconference coach training.
- We are planning an information workshop for April 27, followed by a (potential) virtual cohort training in Albania this fall.



ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM

October 2022 - April 2023

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

The asynchronous discussion program also helps to expand IF’s discussion programming through offering another pathway for engagement in exploratory discussion. This discussion model allows for discussants to engage at their own pace and through text based communication, which may serve as an inclusive model for discussants who might otherwise be excluded: daytime workers, parents, people with neurodiverse or introverted tendencies, etc.



INTELLIGENCE

12 participants (7 active). By invitation, internal discussion exploring different dimensions of intelligence, examining how intelligence is developed and nurtured. This discussion series may lead to an IF sustained discussion project.



INSPIRING OTHERS

24 participants (17 active). An intergenerational discussion series designed to broadly explore what it takes to inspire others. Participants represent a range of WVU affiliations: current students, recent graduates, and senior alumni.



TECHNOLOGY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

38 participants (26 active). This discussion series explores the personal traits needed in an entrepreneurial career. Discussants are enrolled in the Technology Entrepreneurship class at WVU.



CAREER SUCCESS

30 participants (24 active). This discussion series introduces the soft skills that current employers are seeking in the labor market. Discussants are enrolled in the College to Career class at WVU.



INNOVATION LEADERSHIP

7 participants (4 active). With invited members of the Society of Women Engineers, this discussion series explores innovation leadership through examining the experiences of women throughout history. The discussions focus on what it takes for women to become innovation leaders.

Common Traits

- Average of 12 weeks
- Discussions initiated by prompts or stories
- LinkedIn platform
- Student discussions offered the possibility of earning an IF Badge

ASYNCHRONOUS DISCUSSION PROGRAM

October 2022 - April 2023



KEY INSIGHTS

Participation Style. Participants in these asynchronous, online discussions could be organized in 3 discussion styles:

- **Initial Responders** tend to respond early in the discussion and offer a first impression which may not be as insightful as later contributions,
- **Read & Simmer Discussants** tend to read the initial prompts and messages but do not engage right away. They tend to engage later in the discussion, often with thought provoking contributions or questions, and
- **The Tag Along Responders** tend to engage when directly invited or reminded, but tend to limit their responses to generic affirmation ("ditto").

Types of Interactions. Participants in these asynchronous, online discussions tend to engage the discussions with:

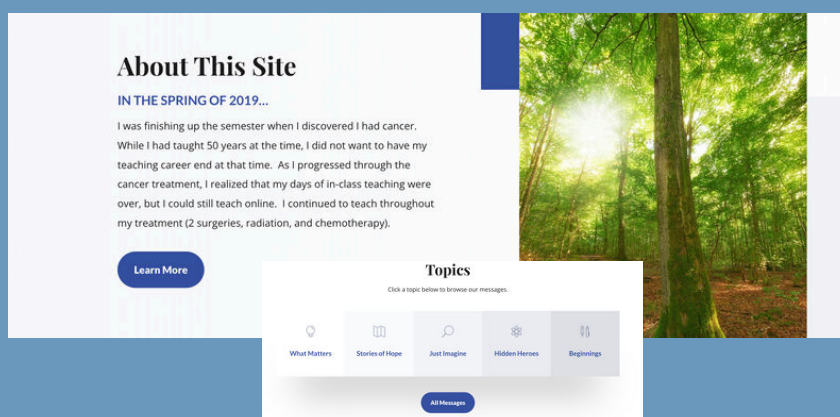
- **Affirmation** ("I feel the same way...") Participants enjoy having the sense they are like others but these contributions tend not to move the discussion in new directions.
- **Clarification** ("Are you saying that...?") These contributions can be very helpful for peer-to-peer engagement and developing greater understanding through active listening but, unfortunately, are not as common as affirming engagement.
- **Guidance** ("Something that has helped me...") These are examples of direct participant engagement and can even be helpful to others observing the exchange. These are more prevalent with intergenerational discussions.



LOOKING AHEAD

- The Intelligence discussion series may serve as the framing for an upcoming Sustained Discussion Project. This would be IF's first experiment with an asynchronous sustained project. This effort may also offer an innovative way of blending features of IF's other discussion programming.
- The Blue Highways stories may serve as a basis for an upcoming community conversation series.

The Perspectives for Living website launched this reporting period, and serves as an archive for over 750 messages used as discussion catalysts in the asynchronous discussion program. The messages are organized by theme with examples of how they might be used in the classroom, workplace, within family discussions, or with broader community conversations.



SUSTAINED DISCUSSION PROJECTS

October 2022 - April 2023

Over the years, IF fellows have managed sustained, development discussions with citizen panels on various topics of societal concerns. These discussions have tended to last approximately a year and resulted in a final product: [IF Discussion Guides](#).

Since 2020, these projects have been on pause because of the pandemic. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are relaunching this program but with the aim of experimenting with the format of citizen panels (virtual, in-person, synchronous, asynchronous) and we are also open to innovative and alternative project outcomes.

Fellows are in various stages of developing and launching discussion projects.

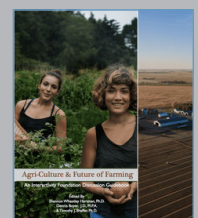
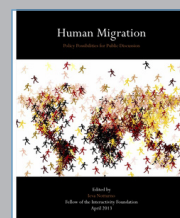
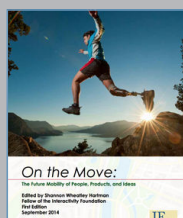
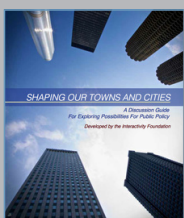
PROJECT #1: LEARNING & SOCIETY

As a society, what if we thought more intentionally about how we support, acknowledge, motivate, and advance learning in our communities? As we prepare for challenges now and in the future, how do we create multiple and decentralized arenas for building learning capacity? Thinking beyond traditional structures of learning, like formal education, how do we seek out, nurture, and reward learning that takes place in less formal locations, like peer-to-peer support, self-learning, reflection, apprenticeship, mentorship, learning through virtual platform, or community-based learning?

These are just a few questions that might help to guide our thinking about learning and society. In this project, we will examine our own personal relationships and experiences with learning. Together we will explore:

- Where does learning happen? How can we support these and other spaces to create a more equitable society? Where might learning happen in the future?
- How do we create a society that truly embraces and supports lifelong learning? What challenges might we anticipate and how we might we address these?
- How do we motivate a continual pursuit of learning in individuals?
- How would society look different if we really supported a more expansive and multi-dimension process for learning within our communities?

In this discussion project, we will be experimenting for the first time with convening entirely online and asynchronous discussion panels. Using positive framing and discovery learning techniques, this project will also depart from some of the traditional structure of an IF sustained project. Continuing with theme of innovation, this project will pilot new project outcomes that may include but will not be limited to mini-facilitation guides that can be used in community and classroom conversations.



SUSTAINED DISCUSSION PROJECTS

October 2022 - April 2023

PROJECT #2: CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES TO THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM

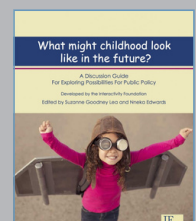
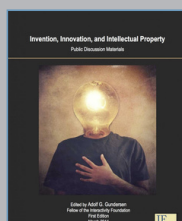
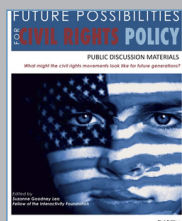
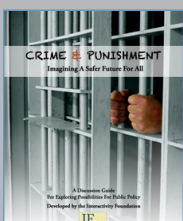
One variation of our Sustained Discussion Project that is currently in development is a “pre-project” discussion group. IF Discussion Projects typically engage parallel teams of experts and members of the general public in exploration of a topic and in the generation of alternative possibilities for a democratic society to address the concerns about the topic. In regard to the threat to democracy, an additional complication arises: how to engage the public without doing more harm than good. For example, the norm of neutrality for civil dialogue can create space for the introduction of anti-democratic positions, thus further weakening democracy by disseminating and legitimizing these positions. The focus for this pre-project is to generate a sense of the concerns that democracy-promoting civil society organizations face and to generate possibilities for civil society organizations to best bring their resources to bear in order to resist the growing threats to U.S. democracy. This pre-project will form the basis for a regular Sustained Discussion Project (involving a team of general citizens as well as a team of experts) on the general topic of resisting the authoritarian threats to our democracy. It will also help to inform how we frame and conduct our Community Conversation work.

OTHER PROJECT THEMES

Fellows are in the process of developing, proposing, and approving Sustained Discussion Project themes. Fellows are considering how project themes might be combined and become joint projects while also weighing the importance of having variation in our collection of topics this year. Some project themes that are in early stages of development and/or consideration include but are not limited to:

- Citizen Futures (previously proposed and approved prior to the pandemic)
- Democratic Community (previously propose and approved prior to the pandemic)
- Building Resilient Communities (previously suggested with at least one international discussion panel)
- The Peoples' Philanthropy (a revision and expansion of an earlier discussion project on the topic philanthropy)
- And more...

IF Fellows welcome the opportunity to brainstorm, partner, and collaborate with others on the development and execution of sustained discussion project.s



ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

October 2022 - April 2023

BRIDGE ALLIANCE (BA)

We have renewed our membership with BA, a network that can amplify the reach of IF activities, especially via the BA platform Citizen Connect (where we post announcements and registration links for IF discussion events), and in terms of clarifying IF's core mission of promoting citizen-centered democracy via civil dialogue.

THE HORIZON PROJECT

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

KETTERING FOUNDATION (KF)

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

LISTEN FIRST COALITION (LFC)

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

NATIONAL COALITION FOR DIALOGUE AND DELIBERATION

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

PHILANTHROPY FOR ACTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT (PACE)

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

ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

October 2022 - April 2023

CONTINUOUS COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTNERSHIPS

- IONA Senior Services (Washington, D.C.)
- Diversity Relations Council at Leisure World (Silver Spring, Maryland)
- D.C. Public Library (Washington, D.C.)
- Guy Mason Community (Washington, D.C.)
- Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (Dubuque, IA)
- Aware & Active Citizens (Merrill, WI)
- Midwest Partners Foundation (Princeton, IL)

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

- Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue at James Madison University (Harrisburg, VA)
- West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV)
- Colorado State Library System (Denver, CO)
- Nassau Community College/SUNY (Garden City, NY)
- Emory University (Atlanta, GA)
- State University of New York at Plattsburgh (Plattsburgh, NY)
- University of Shkoder, Albania)

ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

These are early, in-development relationships:

- The April Institute, a nonprofit research organization focused on anti-fascism
- The 22nd Century Initiative (22CI), a nonprofit organization focused on opposing authoritarianism and promoting pluralistic democracy
- The 12:01 network, a network of organizations affiliated with the 22CI

*FEATURED PARTNERSHIP: WESLEYAN COLLEGE

Wesleyan College has been engaged in a multi-year, national Mellon Foundation grant. They have been using IF's exploratory discussion process to convene a series of community meetings in Macon, Georgia, to develop community-based projects targeting systemic and symbolic reparations. In particular, Macon's Bicentennial Subcommittee on Historic Markers is using Wesleyan's work with the community and the express support of local African American griots and historians to create Macon's first historic markers featuring overlooked sites of African American history in the city, including three previously unrecognized slave auction sites.

FORTHCOMING: STERN FELLOWSHIPS

To support our growing activities and remain committed to innovation, we have approved the creation of Stern Fellowship positions, which would be short-term, project-based, partnerships that help to advance our mission. These fellowship proposals will be submitted by Fellows and reviewed for approval on a rolling basis.

COMMUNICATION

October 2022 - April 2023

IF WEBSITE & BLOG

Oct 2022 - Mar 2023 and comparing to the preceding 6 months (April-Sept 2022):

- sessions, page views, users/new users all up 16-22%
- time on site up over 30%
- bounce rate down 25%

The **overall positive increase** in traffic and interaction with the IF website is most likely a result of two factors. 1) The announcement of the new visiting fellow position in early December, and 2) Increased, more consistent, and varied content in the IF Blog. During this reporting period, we shared a total of **43 blog posts**, which were comprised of:

- Just Imagine...series
- Hidden Heroes...series
- What Matters...series
- Announcing Community Conversation events and discussion summaries
- Collaborative Discussion program highlighting toolkit activities and events

IF SOCIAL MEDIA

IF social media accounts include:

- Facebook page
- Facebook group page
- Twitter "@IFTalks"
- LinkedIn

Connect with us!



[Join The CDP
Newsletter](#)

[Join the IF
Newsletter](#)

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS TO OUR TEAM

October 2022 - April 2023

INTRODUCING JULIE SMITH

Julie recently joined the IF Board of Trustees. She came to West Virginia to earn a doctoral degree in WVU's Behavior Analysis program, where she worked with the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and Development (CESD) to pioneer one of the most powerful behavior-centric business management systems available today. That success led her to co-found the Continuous Learning Group (CLG), which has become one of the world's premiere consultancies for behavior-based strategy execution. After experiencing back-to-back family health crises that were caused by preventable medical errors, Julie co-founded Performance Ally. She has brought together a world-class team focused on combining behavior science with mobile technologies to ensure patients and staff work together to execute critical Vital Behaviors that lead to better outcomes—every time, at scale. Dr. Smith is a successful entrepreneur who was inducted into the West Virginia Business Hall of Fame. She is a Trustee of the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies and has served on several not-for-profit boards. She was honored to receive the Outstanding Contributor Award for lifetime achievement by the Association for Behavior Analysis International. Julie resides in Fairmont, WV where she and her husband founded Heston Farm. When they retreat to the farm with their children, grandchildren, and friends, they truly understand why George Washington said, "I'd rather be on my farm than emperor of the world."

INTRODUCING RITU THOMAS

Ritu will be joining IF as a full-time associate in July. She first got involved with the IF in 2013, working as a notetaker and panelist for the Future of Mobility project. In September, 2022, Ritu joined IF as a part-time associate, assisting on the Collaborative Discussion Project. She has a BA in International Area Studies, with a Minor in Architecture, from Drexel University in Philadelphia. Ritu loves animals. She enjoys spending time with her cat and likes to do an annual fundraiser for the Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife refuge. She also openly shares that she is neurodivergent, with many autistic traits.

INTRODUCING ERIC SCHMUCKER

Eric will be joining IF as a Visiting Fellow in May. He has a master's degree in Public Administration with a concentration in Public Governance from James Madison University (JMU), where he teaches a course for the School of Nursing built around community engagement. Eric has served as a restorative justice facilitator, a story exchange facilitator for the organization Narrative4, and an Affiliate Facilitator with the Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue at JMU where he has been involved in and led several community-based processes. He worked internationally in Indonesia and Uganda, for a total of five years, focusing on community engagement and peacebuilding. Eric is currently the Board Chair for Gemeinschaft Home, a residential reentry and support center for justice involved individuals from around the State of Virginia. Eric's professional interests include community engagement, community building, sustained dialogue, and exploring/strengthening democracy, with research interests in incarceration and community reentry.

INTRODUCING KEVIN

Kevin is the beloved office cat. Named after the character Kevin McCallister from Home Alone, he spends a lot of time alone but is always eager to demand attention from the office staff, often meowing until he gets his way. He was a stray cat who found his way into the office one day and has been a valued member of the team ever since. Kevin is a skilled hunter, and he is not shy about showing off his catch. He may be missing a few teeth, but that doesn't stop him from sticking out his tongue and stealing the hearts of everyone he meets. His playful and affectionate personality has made him an indispensable part of the office community.

