

# From Classrooms to Campuses: Broadening Our Impact

Constructive Dialogue Institute  
2023 Annual Report



# A Letter From Our Co-founders



**Caroline Mehl**

Co-Founder & Executive  
Director



**Jonathan Haidt**

Co-Founder & Board Chair

Dear Friends,

When we co-founded the Constructive Dialogue Institute in 2017, our goal was to develop educational tools to equip the next generation of Americans with the skills to bridge divides. Our vision was that these tools would be adopted by colleges and universities across the country to embed the principles and practices of pluralism across the college experience. We're pleased to share that thanks to the continued support of partners like you, 2023 was the year that this vision started to become a reality.

Last year, research from two randomized controlled trials demonstrated that our online learning program, *Perspectives*, is effective in reducing polarization and improving conflict resolution skills. Following these successes, we have expanded our work by developing a comprehensive suite of tools to support colleges and universities in creating campus cultures that promote critical thinking and dialogue across differences. **In our first year of launching this campus-wide initiative, we have established partnerships with 49 campuses**, including a partnership with the Commonwealth of Virginia. Our plan is to replicate this model in states across the country.

While we have been encouraged by the growing interest in our work, the need for dialogue has become even more urgent. The aftermath of Hamas's brutal attack on October 7th has served as a wake-up call for how unprepared campuses are to respond to crises. Fear and intimidation are rising, and in many cases campus leaders have offered little or no response. Campus leaders need to invest in building relational trust across divides and equipping students with the skills to consider the complexity of issues, seek out multiple perspectives, and engage with opposing views. With the 2024 election less than a year away, the time to act is now.

This report highlights CDI's achievements in 2023 and our goals for the coming year. Our work would not be possible without the generous support of the many foundations and individuals who have helped us turn our vision into reality. Thank you for your continued support of our work. We look forward to what we will accomplish together in the years to come.

*With Gratitude,*

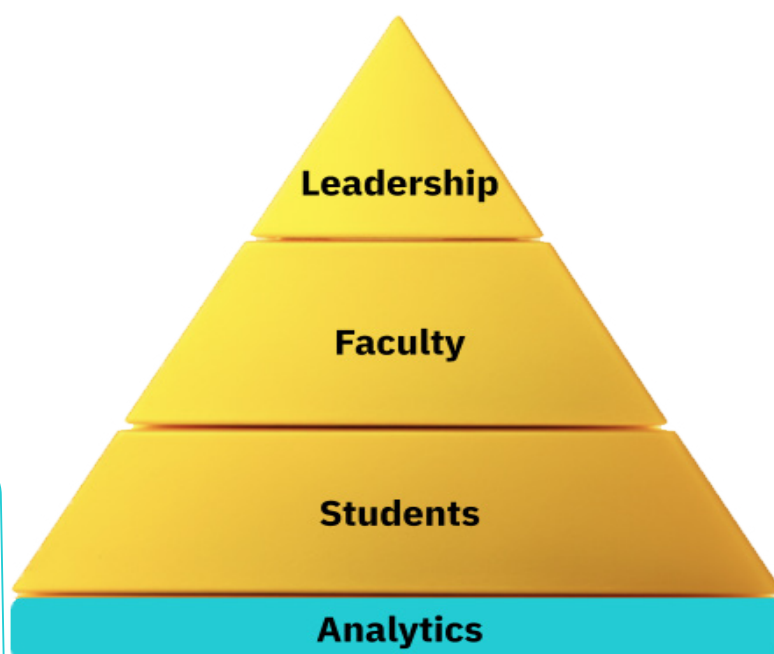
*Caroline Mehl & Jonathan Haidt*

## Our Work in Higher Education

# Theory of Change

Following our tremendous research successes in 2022, over the past year, we have been focused on expanding our impact within higher education **from the classroom to the entire campus**. Leveraging systems change theory, we developed a robust campus-wide approach that engages stakeholders at all levels of the institution, from college presidents to students, and everyone in between. Based on this approach, we developed a **comprehensive suite of tools to transform campus cultures into spaces that support dialogue and connection across differences**. We then partner with campuses and guide them through the following steps:

- 1 Engage institutional leaders and equip them with tools to champion inclusive, pluralistic values across their campus cultures.
- 2 Empower administrators, faculty, and staff to foster constructive dialogue across differences through professional development training.
- 3 Implement our proven blended learning program, *Perspectives*, among incoming students to build foundational dialogue skills and a shared language from day one.
- 4 Provide custom analytics detailing changes in campus culture over time and actionable recommendations for improvement.



## Our Work in Higher Education

# SCHEV Partnership

In spring of 2023, The State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) and CDI forged an initial 18-month partnership to support 12 institutions across the Commonwealth. To catalyze this work, CDI's research team created asset maps for all 12 schools to determine the state of dialogue on each campus and make recommendations for how CDI can support the growth of open dialogue across differences on each campus. **Our team conducted over 100 qualitative interviews** and created bespoke implementation plans for each campus.

For many of the institutions, we recommended first-year experience programming as a pathway to reach a significant number of students. During Fall 2023, we began implementing our blended learning program, *Perspectives*, with schools through first-year seminars and orientation courses. Additionally, we led three in-person professional development days for faculty and staff across Virginia on leveraging dialogue as a pedagogical tool.

So far, CDI's tools have been incredibly well received. Participating campuses have already been expressing enthusiasm in rolling out programming in Spring 2024 and beyond.



# 5,341

students reached in  
fall 2023 across  
SCHEV campuses

“



Inviting Virginia Tech students to engage in challenging conversations revealed a divide—some came armed with facts to “win,” while others aimed to convey impact, without delving into understanding people or their opposing views. CDI provided a foundation for meaningful dialogue, emphasizing listening over winning. This shift has nurtured empathy, understanding, and forged connections across differences. The *Perspectives* lessons have proven instrumental in our inclusion and belonging initiatives, and I anticipate an even more significant impact in the future.

Anthony R. Scott, J.D.  
Chief Inclusion & Belonging Officer  
Virginia Tech

231

Virginia faculty & staff  
participated in CDI  
professional development

91%

would recommend future  
trainings from CDI to  
colleagues

## Our Work in Higher Education

# NASPA Partnership

This year, CDI partnered with NASPA, the leading association of student affairs administrators in higher ed, to recruit a cohort of NASPA member campuses interested in strengthening dialogue and civic engagement across their campuses. In the spring, NASPA shared the opportunity with their national network of student affairs leaders, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. We heard loud and clear that campuses, more than ever, are paying attention to dialogue and bridge-building on their campuses, and they're eager to find high-quality partners that can support their efforts. Through a competitive application process, **CDI and NASPA selected 31 campuses** to participate in this inaugural cohort experience. The cohort represents a diverse network of colleges, including public and private institutions from California to Florida, with enrollment ranging from 1,000 to 65,000 students.

Over the 2023-2024 school year, each participating institution will have support from CDI to craft a high-impact implementation plan, access to CDI's blended learning program, *Perspectives*, analytics tracking the effectiveness of our programming, and a monthly community of practice where campus leaders can connect and share learnings over the academic year.

We are grateful for this partnership with NASPA and the opportunity to bring our resources to new campuses, different in many ways but unified in their desire to strengthen dialogue, civic engagement, and bridge-building at their institutions.



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In preparation for a new academic year, UCLA Student Affairs incorporated the content from the Constructive Dialogue Institute’s *Perspectives* course into a workshop with over 500 Residential Life student staff. After working through content around our divided minds and strategies for engaging across differences, the students were given the opportunity to have peer-to-peer conversations which further cemented the learning and engagement. The workshop was such a success that the Student Affairs professionals who facilitated the session will be taking the show on the road – next stop: student organization leaders.

Philip Goodrich  
Manager, Campus Life Initiatives  
University of California, Los Angeles



## Beyond Higher Education

# Impacting High Schools & Workplaces

Beyond our work in higher education, in 2023, we also partnered with several organizations to foster constructive dialogue in high schools and workplaces.

As a contributing partner to the Civics Renewal Network, we provided K-12 teachers with access to free, high-quality learning materials to improve their students' civic education. Additionally, over the course of the year, we partnered with the K-12 education group, Sphere, the Colorado Attorney General's office, and The Birch Wathen Lenox School, to provide professional development workshops to cohorts of high school educators looking to facilitate constructive dialogue about complex topics with their students.

In addition to our work in secondary education, CDI equipped professional leaders around the country with the skills to foster inclusive and diverse workplaces and communities. Through keynote speeches, workshops, and access to the adult version of *Perspectives*, our partnerships with organizations like Groundwork Ohio and TEKsystems equipped professional teams with skills for solutions-based dialogue and more productive engagement within their diverse workplaces.



# 9/10

rating from professionals  
who attended our  
keynote presentations



“

The Bridging the Divides in Corporate America convening, hosted by Convergence and Interfaith America was a fantastic event with thought leaders working together to find solutions to help navigate challenging topics in corporate settings.

Thank you Constructive Dialogue Institute for inviting us to the table! We appreciate your continued partnership with our own journey at TEKsystems as we build the skills that enable us to have more productive conversations and learn from one another in order to make progress that supports an inclusive and diverse workplace!

**Michelle Webb**

Executive Director, Employee Experience  
TEKsystems



## Informing the Field

# Leading Through Research

Through rigorous, field-informing research, in 2023, CDI reinforced our position as a respected thought leader on polarization and constructive dialogue. By engaging policymakers, academics, campus administrators, teachers, and grassroots organizations, our research projects analyzed issues and provided data-driven recommendations. We partnered with the leading research organizations More in Common and The Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity Program to explore complex questions such as how to engage in bridge building within the context of systemic inequities, how leaders can transform campus conflict, and how college students experience free speech and inclusion on their campuses. Our research also demonstrated the effectiveness of interventions in reducing polarization and explored K-12 polarization dynamics and teacher burnout. From national surveys to qualitative interviews, our comprehensive reports established CDI as a trusted source of analysis of some of our country's most pressing challenges regarding division within our key institutions. You can find all of our [publications here](#).

## 5 Publications in 2023

For Practitioners	For Higher Ed	For K-12	For Higher Ed	For Higher Ed
<b>Building Bridges in the Context of Inequality</b> January 13, 2023	<b>Transforming Conflict on College Campuses</b> February 22, 2023	<b>Political Polarization and Its Repercussions for Public School Teachers</b> July 27, 2023	<b>The Online Educational Program 'Perspectives' Improves Affective Polarization, Intellectual Humility, and Conflict Management</b> August 21, 2023	<b>Free Speech and Inclusion: How College Students Are Navigating Shifting Speech Norms</b> September 21, 2023
 <p><b>BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE CONTEXT OF INEQUALITY</b></p> <p>Mylien T. Duong Caroline Mehl Caroline Jany</p> <p>Citizenship &amp; American Identity Constructive Dialogue Institute</p>	 <p><b>Transforming Conflict on College Campuses</b></p> <p>Citizenship &amp; American Identity Constructive Dialogue Institute</p>	 <p><b>Political Polarization and Its Repercussions for Public School Teachers</b></p> <p>Constructive Dialogue Institute</p>	 <p><b>The Online Educational Program 'Perspectives' Improves Affective Polarization, Intellectual Humility, and Conflict Management</b></p> <p>Constructive Dialogue Institute</p>	 <p><b>Free Speech and Inclusion: How College Students Are Navigating Shifting Speech Norms</b></p> <p>Constructive Dialogue Institute More in Common</p>

## Looking Back

# CDI Highlights



Serving Institutions in All

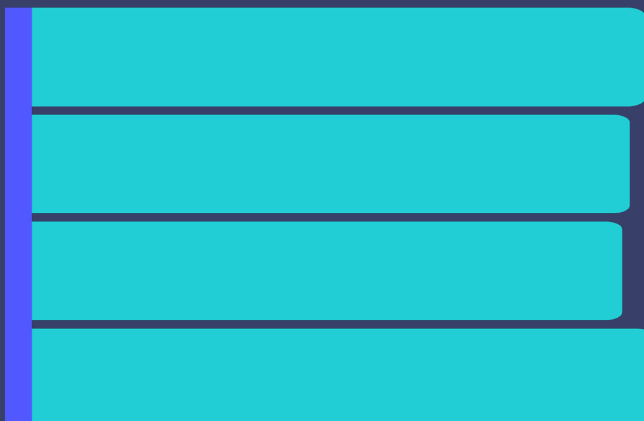
**50 States**

**79,790**

Total Learners  
Reached



**Over 80% of Students** who complete *Perspectives* report gaining key benefits



**83%** practice what they learn in their personal or professional life.

**81%** feel more confident communicating across differences.

**80%** feel more confident having difficult conversations.

**84%** feel they gained valuable professional and/or life skills.

## Looking Ahead

# CDI 2024 Goals

As CDI looks ahead to 2024 and beyond, we are focused on increasing our impact through ambitious goals grounded in evidence-based strategies. In 2024, we will continue to refine and expand our campus-wide offering by developing tools to support college presidents and administrators in transforming their campuses into learning environments that support dialogue across differences. Our commitment to rigorous research and continuous improvement will ensure our solutions are effective in fostering pluralism on campuses. We plan to partner with 55 institutions to implement our refined campus package.

Additionally, we will continue our thought leadership by releasing research-based resources, including a guide for campus leaders on how to prepare for the 2024 election. To satisfy demand and diversify our revenue streams, we will offer turn-key solutions for non-profit, for-profit, and public sector organizations.

Operationally, we will expand our talented team, grow a committed Board of Directors, and maintain robust financial health to sustainably pursue our work. We are at an exciting inflection point where we are poised to experience tremendous growth in spreading the principles and practices of dialogue and pluralism across our nations' institutions of higher ed.

**We invite new partners to join us!**



## Support & Revenue

# Audited Financials

	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total Support &amp; Revenue</b>	\$871,906	\$1,189,490	\$4,109,022
Program Expenses	\$601,095	\$1,207,433	\$1,444,761
Fundraising Expenses	\$0	\$41,954	\$199,966
Management & General Expenses	\$302,983	\$448,695	\$736,675
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$904,078	\$1,698,082	\$2,381,402

We are deeply grateful to our funders and supporters who have enabled our continued growth over the past three years. Your contributions have allowed us to expand our research-based programs to institutions across the country. By helping us unite people across differences to solve shared problems, you are helping strengthen our democracy.

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The Constructive Dialogue Institute has shown remarkable successes in its first few years of work, and has fast become a trusted leader within civil discourse practitioners. The CDI team pride themselves on continually seeking to assess their work empirically, and to improve that work as opportunities arise. Tens of thousands of people have used their resources to date, and this usage should continue to scale in deep and long-lasting ways. For all these reasons and more, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations is proud to have awarded multiple grants to CDI, totaling more than \$600,000 since 2021.

Dr. Michael Murray

President and CEO

Arthur Vining Davis Foundations



# We Thank Our Supporters

## \$1,000,000+

The John Templeton Foundation

## \$250,000 – \$999,999

Anonymous (1)  
Arthur Vining Davis Foundations  
Einhorn Collaborative  
NaHCO<sub>3</sub>  
New Pluralists

## \$100,000 – \$249,999

Anonymous (2)  
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Intellectual Humility Science  
Jacobs Family Foundation  
Porticus North America  
SCA Charitable Foundation  
Stanton Foundation  
Survival and Flourishing Fund (SFF)  
The Snider Foundation

## \$25,000 – \$99,999

Anonymous (2)  
Deepa Javeri  
John Brown Cook Foundation  
Josh Klivan  
Lubetzky Family Foundation  
Mercatus Center  
Toby Shannan

## \$5,000 – \$24,999

Baskin Family Foundation  
Civic Health Project  
Gottesman DeBode Family Fund  
Jonathan Haidt  
Happy Elephant Foundation  
Leland and Ellen Prosch  
Brian and Lori Schreiber  
Richard Davoud Donchian Foundation  
Diana Smith  
Sophie Sutton

## \$1,000 – \$4,999

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Ryan Shaw  
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