

2025 Annual Report



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Founders Letter



Caroline Mehl
Co-Founder &
Executive Director



Jonathan Haidt
Co-Founder &
Board Chair

Dear Friends,

This past year was among the most challenging in recent memory for American higher education. Colleges and universities navigated declining public trust, heightened volatility, and acts of political violence that reverberated across the country. As fear and uncertainty increasingly strain the mission of higher learning, the need for constructive dialogue has never been more urgent.

Against this backdrop, we are heartened by the remarkable leadership that has emerged in higher education. Institutions large and small made serious, public commitments to fostering cultures of constructive dialogue, open inquiry, and free expression—and CDI has been privileged to support that work.

This year, our Leadership Institute convened leaders from nine leading universities—Brown, Dartmouth, Duke, Harvard, MIT, NYU, Tufts, Vanderbilt, Yale—to advance shared models for long-term campus culture change. Through our multi-year partnership with the City University of New York, we began embedding dialogue-based practices across one of the nation’s largest and most diverse public university systems. These efforts, along with partnerships with nearly 100 additional campuses, reflect a growing recognition that higher education must better prepare students to live and lead in a pluralistic democracy.

As we look ahead, CDI is poised for its most ambitious chapter yet. In the coming year, we will:

- **Expand our work with state systems**, driving change across entire public higher education ecosystems.
- **Launch the CDI Institutional Change Model**, a three-phase approach that helps campuses implement data-driven system-wide culture change.
- **Leverage AI through human-centered design** to build tools that enhance student learning and support faculty and staff.

We are grateful for your partnership and your shared belief that higher education can be a place where curiosity is rewarded, conflict is navigated constructively, and students develop the capacity to engage across differences. Thank you for being a part of this work.

With gratitude,

Caroline Mehl and Jonathan Haidt

By the Numbers

150+

Campus Partners

190K+

Perspectives learners

3,600+

Webinar Attendees

5,200+

Publication Downloads



“I discovered new ways of talking, listening, disagreeing, interacting with people, and just a better understanding of how people function. I am excited to continue applying these to my everyday life.”

—STUDENT, COLLEGE OF THE SEQUOIAS

“The Constructive Dialogue Institute has given us the tools, training, and opportunity to connect more effectively with one another, our campus, and our world. It’s our mission to develop students who become effective global citizens. Being able to understand one another, talk to one another, and manage conflict more effectively is the empowering key to not just democracy, but peace. We need that.”



—KARLYN CROWLEY, PROVOST, OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Key Outcomes

Live Programs

Dialogue Facilitation Certification



99%

of faculty and staff said the program helped them understand the role of a dialogue facilitator



98%

of faculty and staff said the program helped them feel better equipped to plan and facilitate dialogue



86%

of faculty and staff said the program helped them feel more prepared to address and manage tense or controversial situations with students



Live Programs

CDI's professional development offerings

Approximately
10 months after
the trainings:

100%

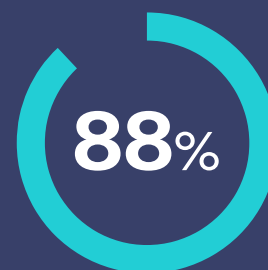
reported using skills taught in the trainings, including ...



Listening
for values



Asking
questions



Inviting
stories

92%

rated their dialogue facilitation
abilities positively

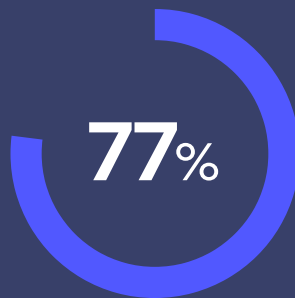
71%

had gone on to facilitate a
group dialogue



Impact of *Perspectives*

Students noted the following benefits from completing the *Perspectives* online learning program:



Perspectives helped me gain valuable professional and life skills.



I practice what I learned in my personal and professional lives.



I feel more confident communicating across differences.



I feel more comfortable working with diverse others.

“When conflict sparked protests on our campus, emotions ran high. Rather than silence difficult conversations, we chose to equip our students to handle them. We embedded the *Perspectives* course into our required first-year wellness curriculum—and I have seen the difference. Heckling is down. Engagement is up. Dialogue has moved from aspiration to practice. Next year, we will expand our implementation to reach every incoming student.”

—VP OF STUDENT AFFAIRS, LARGE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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“Perspectives is a powerful tool that has already had an impact on our incoming students. It challenges us to approach dialogue with empathy and understanding... I loved the program and have shared it with a lot of people beyond Harvard. These are skills not just lacking at universities; they are being lost across our society.”



—PENNY PRITZKER, SENIOR FELLOW, HARVARD CORPORATION

99

2025 Leadership Institute

In October 2025, the Constructive Dialogue Institute convened presidents and senior leaders from nine of the nation's top universities—including Brown, Dartmouth, Duke, Harvard, MIT, NYU, Tufts, Vanderbilt, and Yale—for a two-day Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C. to accelerate a shared commitment to strengthening constructive dialogue, open inquiry, and free expression on campus.

Against a backdrop of rising polarization and growing threats to democratic life, leaders from across the country came together to meet the moment. At the summit, they exchanged successful models, confronted shared challenges, and designed high-leverage initiatives for long-term culture change. That work will now continue through CDI's year-long Learning Labs and professional learning community.

The Institute marks the beginning of an ambitious, collaborative effort to strengthen higher education's civic mission and equip the next generation to engage across differences with thoughtfulness and courage.



“

“CDI’s Leadership Institute marked another invigorating step on NYU’s journey of bridging divides and creating a campus where all can flourish.”

—LINDA G. MILLS, PRESIDENT, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

“Dartmouth is committed to helping our students learn to engage in dialogue across difference—an essential skill for training future leaders. We returned from the Leadership Institute with strategies that will support the continued growth of Dartmouth Dialogues.”

—SIAN LEAH BEILock, PRESIDENT, DARTMOUTH UNIVERSITY

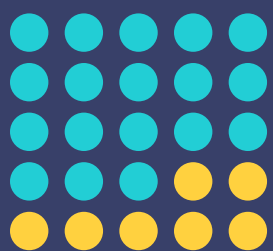
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CUNY Partnership

CUNY has partnered with the Constructive Dialogue Institute to embed dialogue as a core practice across all 26 campuses, strengthening the university's ability to navigate ideological differences, combat hate, and foster a sense of belonging. Through leadership development, strategic advisory support, facilitator training for staff and student leaders, professional development for faculty, and the adoption of Perspectives, the partnership is creating a lasting culture of constructive discourse throughout the nation's largest public urban university system.



CUNY Partnership Outcomes



18/25

schools have launched or are
in the process of launching
Perspectives with students

103

CUNY Leaders attended CDI's
summer Leadership Institute

Representatives from all 25 CUNY campuses
and CUNY Central completed the following
professional development:

90+

faculty completed
Foundations of
Constructive Dialogue
Facilitation training

50

staff certified
in Dialogue
Facilitation
Certification

40+

students completed
Foundations of
Constructive Dialogue
Facilitation training

“

“Through this partnership with
CDI, we’re building a culture
of engagement and trust that
will prepare our students to
work across differences in all
domains of their lives.”



—RACHEL STEPHENSON,
CHIEF TRANSFORMATION
OFFICER, CUNY

”

Program Outcomes: Foundations in Facilitating Dialogue

Across three cohorts of faculty, staff, and student leaders, CDI's Foundations in Facilitating Dialogue program delivered consistently strong satisfaction and learning outcomes.



88%

Faculty & Staff
Overall Satisfaction

96%

reported a clearer
understanding of the
role and purpose of a
dialogue facilitator

88%

felt better prepared
to manage tense or
controversial student
situations

77%

felt better prepared
to plan and facilitate
constructive dialogue

Program Outcomes: Foundations in Facilitating Dialogue

100%

Student Leaders
Overall Satisfaction

100%

felt better prepared to *plan and facilitate constructive peer dialogue*

94%

gained clarity on the *role and purpose of a dialogue facilitator*

88%

felt better prepared to *address tense or controversial peer situations*



Strategic Association Partnerships

This year, CDI strengthened its national footprint through new and ongoing partnerships with leading higher-education associations, supporting more than 50 campuses in advancing dialogue across differences.

New Partnerships



The Council of Independent Colleges

Council of Independent Colleges (CIC)

In partnership with CIC, CDI recruited **8 of its member campuses** to implement *Perspectives*, faculty/staff professional development, and analytics tools.



American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

Through a new partnership with AAC&U, CDI partnered with **8 member campuses** to roll out *Perspectives*.

Continuing Partnerships



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU)

CDI launched **Year 2** of its partnership with ACCU, supporting **14 of its member campuses**. Together, CDI and ACCU recruited a diverse cohort of campuses, facilitated a year-long professional learning community, and guided campus-wide rollouts of *Perspectives*, analytics, and Catholic-specific supplementary resources.



KERN NATIONAL NETWORK FOR FLOURISHING IN HEALTH *Character. Caring. Practical Wisdom.*

Kern National Network (KNN)

CDI began **Year 2** of its three-year collaboration with KNN, supporting **10 medical schools** as they integrate CDI's tools, including a customized version of *Perspectives* for academic medicine and focused discussion groups on medical topics.



STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)

CDI launched **Year 3** of its partnership with SCHEV, rolling out *Perspectives* to **11 public colleges and universities across Virginia**, including returning and newly participating institutions.

A Comprehensive Model for Campus Culture Change

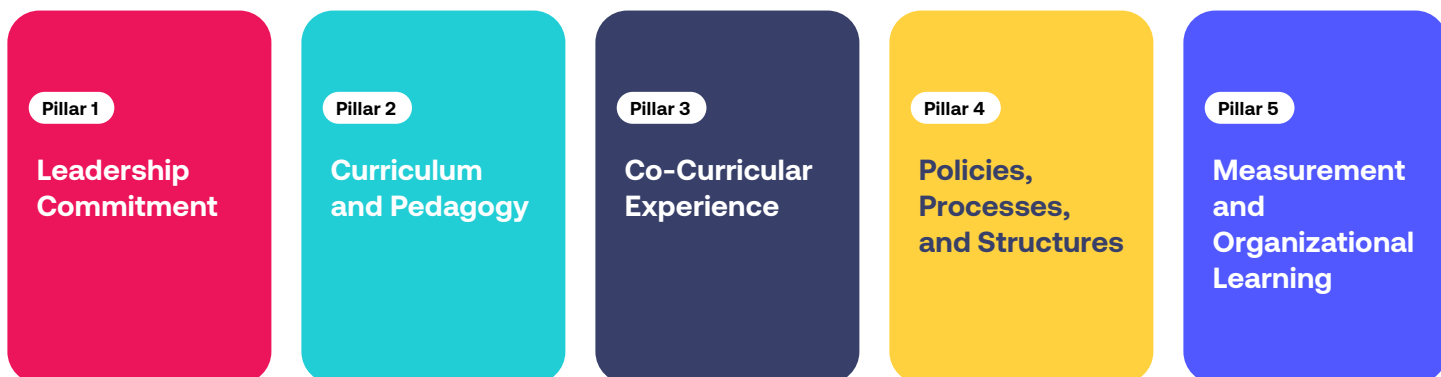
Why Interventions Alone Are Not Enough

Based on our work with more than 150 campus partners—and grounded in rigorous research in behavior and culture change—we have reached a clear conclusion: Isolated interventions are insufficient to shift campus culture. Many institutions are investing in dialogue-related programs, policies, and trainings, but these efforts are often fragmented, uncoordinated, and disconnected from a coherent theory of change. As a result, promising initiatives rarely translate into durable, institution-wide impact.

A Systems-Level Approach to Campus Culture Change

To drive meaningful and lasting change, campuses must embed the principles of pluralism, open inquiry, free expression, and constructive dialogue throughout their institutional systems. Drawing on our research and field experience, CDI has identified five core pillars that together enable sustainable culture change:

Pillars



Values



Launching the CDI Institutional Change Model

From Pilot to Model: Lessons from CUNY

In 2025, CDI began piloting this approach through a multi-year partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY)—our first engagement delivering deep, system-level culture change support across an entire higher education system. This work demonstrated the power of pairing dialogue interventions with sustained, strategic advisory support, yielding impact far beyond what standalone programs can achieve.

The CDI Institutional Change Model

In 2026, we will build on this success by formally launching the CDI Institutional Change Model, designed to help campuses move from fragmented efforts to coordinated, system-wide action. The model includes three integrated phases:

1

Diagnostic: A comprehensive assessment of campus culture mapped against CDI's five pillars, drawing on climate data, program inventories, policy reviews, focus groups, and leadership interviews to identify strengths, gaps, and redundancies.

2

Roadmap: A tailored, evidence-based strategy for culture change, including prioritized recommendations and clear metrics for progress.

3

Implementation: Ongoing support to execute the roadmap through CDI programs, curated partnerships, monthly coaching, and customized advisory services.

Aligning Systems for Lasting Impact

Together, this model reflects a shift in CDI's work—from delivering high-impact interventions to helping institutions align their systems for lasting change.

The 2026 Leadership Institute for Public Flagship Universities

In 2026, we will launch a new cohort of our Leadership Institute—this time bringing together public flagship universities from across the country. This initiative builds on the success of our 2024 and 2025 cohorts and reflects a strategic focus on institutions that educate millions of students, serve ideologically diverse populations, and set norms that ripple across higher education.

A National Peer Network for Public Flagship Leaders

The 2026 Institute will gather senior leaders from public flagships who face many of the same pressures: navigating charged campus environments and responding to heightened public scrutiny. The cohort model allows these leaders to learn from one another, examine shared challenges, and work together on practical solutions.

Participants will:

- Leverage best practices from institutional culture change.
- Gain exposure to innovative models from peer institutions.
- Grapple with shared challenges in candid, facilitated discussions.
- Develop high-impact culture change initiatives to drive change on their campus.

Advancing Dialogue Through Responsible AI

This year, we began leveraging AI to deepen student learning, provide interactive practice, and offer tailored feedback.

AI Coach Launching in *Perspectives*

In January 2026, CDI is launching a closed beta of our new AI-enhanced version of *Perspectives*. This new program will feature an AI coach embedded directly into the curriculum to provide students with structured opportunities to practice key dialogue skills and receive immediate feedback. We will conduct a rigorous assessment of this pilot to compare its outcomes against our standard version of *Perspectives*. We will further revise the program based on the results of this pilot, with plans to launch the program more broadly for academic year 2026-2027.

Exploring What's Next

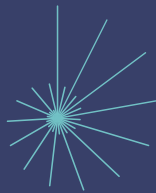
We've begun a broader exploration of how AI could responsibly strengthen our offerings for students, faculty, and staff, including:

- Personalizing students' learning journey by identifying their needs and adapting content accordingly
- Offering just-in-time practice or coaching when people need quick support

Human-Centered by Design

Across all of this work, our commitment remains the same: To leverage technology to promote curiosity, empathy, and dialogue. As we continue learning with our campus partners, we will only develop and scale programs that measurably strengthen constructive engagement and support healthier campus cultures.

Supporters



JOHN
TEMPLETON
FOUNDATION

Inspiring Awe & Wonder



\$4.5M

Awarded to expand CDI's work fostering intellectual humility, curiosity, and constructive dialogue across higher education. The three-year grant (2026–2028) will support CDI's efforts to equip 1.75 million college students with the mindset and skillset to communicate and collaborate across differences.

Supporters



“The Constructive Dialogue Institute is a leading provider of programming to help university students develop humility, open-mindedness, and empathy. We are excited to support CDI as they continue to strengthen their programming and expand their capacity to achieve their ambitious goals.”

—RICHARD BOLLINGER, SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER FOR CHARACTER VIRTUE DEVELOPMENT, THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION

Supporters

We are grateful to the generous supporters who make our work possible. Together, we are taking steps to repair our civic culture and strengthen our democracy.

\$5,000,000+

The John Templeton Foundation

\$1,000,000+

Anonymous

\$250,000 – \$999,999

Anonymous

Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

Einhorn Collaborative

NaHCO₃

New Pluralists

The Mike & Sofia Segal Foundation

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The Webber Family Foundation

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