

LET'S DELIBERATE!

Deliberative Citizenship Community Partnerships

The [Deliberative Citizenship Initiative](#) (DCI), a part of Davidson College's Institute for Public Good, fosters spaces of inclusive, thoughtful, and respectful deliberations about prominent social and political issues. Through structured, deliberative dialogue, participants in DCI programs engage in conversations about a wide range of pressing topics that are relevant to public life. These conversations are designed to share personal perspectives, promote empathy, build understanding, and encourage engagement across generational, ideological, and cultural divides.

The DCI has an extensive history of success hosting deliberations in many forms, including large-scale forums, small-group discussions, classroom deliberations, and more. In order to build on this success and share what it has learned beyond the Davidson campus, the DCI is interested in partnering with high schools, faith communities, and higher education institutions in developing deliberative opportunities and programs customized to their particular contexts



and building on their experience and expertise. Through these partnerships, the DCI hopes to promote and expand deliberative skills and civic engagement across a wide range of contexts, with the potential for establishing long-term and sustainable collaborations with organizations that have similar aspirations.

In today's deeply polarized public sphere, the DCI recognizes the growing need for members of our communities to engage in meaningful and respectful deliberation across our various differences. This need is particularly apparent for high school and college students, members of faith communities, and employees in diverse workplaces who do not have the opportunity to engage in such discussions. We hope to work with organizations in each of these sectors in creating these opportunities across a wide range of different contexts.

Read on to learn more about the DCI's background and its LET'S DELIBERATE! Partnership Program. Please email dc@dauidson.edu if you'd like to follow-up further with us.

II. Background: Why the DCI?

Founded in 2020, the DCI has become a well-established cornerstone of civic discourse at Davidson College. It has organized [annual training sessions](#) for deliberation facilitators, frequent small group discussions (called [D Teams](#)), large-scale [Deliberative Forums](#), and a multi-institution [Deliberative Pedagogy \(DeeP\) Program](#) for faculty members. It has developed an extensive number of [deliberation guides](#), trained a large number of facilitators, and hosted dozens of opportunities for thousands of people to engage in deliberative dialogues within one another.

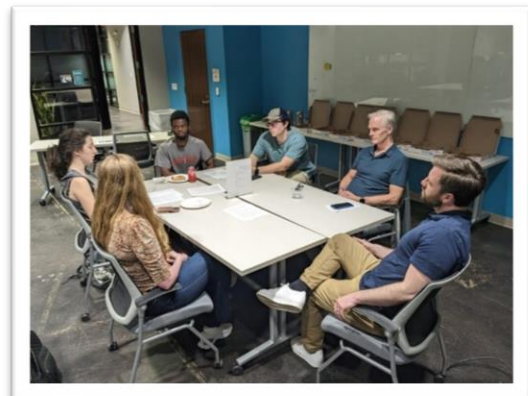
DCI programs are open to Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members and cover a wide range of topics—from gun violence to healthcare reform to the location of Davidson’s commuter rail station. Every autumn, the DCI hosts a two-day training program that teaches participants how to lead these important and challenging conversations. They learn to ask thoughtful questions, introduce multiple perspectives, and help deliberators share their own thoughts and learn about the perspectives of their fellow citizens, broadly defined.

At its core, the DCI is committed to robust and respectful deliberation rather than divisive debate. Rather than seeking to win arguments, participants practice deliberation, a process focused on listening, understanding, and weighing different values and perspectives to find common ground or clarify disagreements.

This year, with the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaching, the DCI is hosting a Deliberative Series on American Values, a set of four deliberations all exploring longstanding questions about the relationship between different American values and how they apply to both historical examples and contemporary policy debates.

III. LET’S DELIBERATE! Partnership Program

Building on its past work, the DCI looks to expand its focus beyond the Davidson College campus through its LET’s DELIBERATE! Community Partnerships Program, working with local colleges and universities, public and private high schools, large and small private sector firms, and religious institutions of different faiths to foster stronger deliberative dispositions and skills in the broader Davidson/Lake Norman community.



1. **Faith Communities:** Faith communities have long served as spaces where individuals gather to seek deeper understanding, a greater purpose, and stronger connections with others. The DCI is interested in building on this rich history, its past work with Davidson College Presbyterian Church, and its recent Deliberative Forum on Religion in Public Life, the DCI is interested in partnering with congregations from a wide range of religious faiths to host deliberative discussions on topics that are of interest to them. Activities could be organized within congregations, across congregations within the same faith tradition, or across congregations from different faith traditions. These partnerships would foster spaces designed to make thoughtful, meaningful dialogue both possible and productive.
2. **High Schools:** High schools are foundational spaces where young people begin developing the habits of civic engagement. Yet many students have few opportunities to engage in open and respectful dialogue about complex social and political issues, particularly in an era when polarization and misinformation dominate much of public discourse. The DCI is open to helping public, private, and charter high schools host deliberations during classes, lunchtime meetings, and/or afterschool sessions to build students' deliberative skills and eventually train them as facilitators themselves.
3. **Colleges and Universities:** Colleges and universities are important centers of discourse, which can serve as both a way to enhance the learning process and to ensure campuses are actively contributing to the civic life of their wider communities. The DCI would be honored to work with other higher education institutions in designing and implementing training and deliberation programs that meet their particular needs and goals. These might include bringing more deliberation into classrooms, co-curricular life on campus, and/or its community engagement initiatives. This collaboration would enable participants to join a coalition of institutions dedicated to encouraging robust deliberation and promoting healthy civil discourse.
4. **Private Sector Firms:** Learning how to deliberate through participation in deliberations about issues of public concern and facilitator training programs can help improve productivity, conflict management, client relations, and employee morale in any workplace. Such training and deliberation experiences allow employees to build skills they can utilize both in their careers and as active and engaged citizens. They also enable employees to contribute to conversations about public issues that affect their personal lives, their communities, and their workplaces. The DCI is open to collaborating with large and small firms on planning

and facilitating training and deliberation sessions that are catered to their specific needs.

III. Menu of Partnership Options

Listed below is a list of options that organizations could choose to partner with the DCI on. They include participation in a pilot deliberation session(s), regularly scheduled programs, and a deliberation facilitator training program. These could lead to longer-term multi-year partnerships if they go well and interest continues moving forward.

Pilot Deliberation Session(s):

- This option is the most straightforward and could be a great way to try out the DCI's deliberative model. It would cover one topic and could connect to a public forum that the DCI is already organizing, such as the American Values Deliberative Forum Series mentioned above.
- The DCI could provide trained facilitators to moderate small discussions for the session (pending their availability).
- The session would allow participants to express their views, explore both areas of agreement and disagreement, and reflect on what they learned in the conversation.
- This option is an effective starting point to gauge interest in DCI programming and establish some familiarity with the fundamental skills of deliberation.
- Organizations could also participate in multiple sessions to enable their participants to have a deeper deliberative experience. They could join, for example, both spring sessions of the American Values Deliberative Forum Series.

Regularly Scheduled Program

- This option could take many forms and sizes: DCI-trained facilitators could moderate conversations among students, employees, or congregation members over lunch, during relevant courses like civics or American history, or for a larger-scale organizational meetings or school assemblies on deliberation.
- They could take the form of monthly meetings hosted by a trained facilitator to deliberate preselected topics, potentially after reading a "deliberation guide," or a shared set of preliminary materials, once per month or every several months.
- This option offers the opportunity for deliberators to form deeper connections and for the program to be customized to the organization's particular context and needs. Whatever the format and situation, the DCI's facilitator will work to ensure that, as time goes on, the deliberators continue to explore both their areas of agreement and disagreement.

Facilitator Training

- The DCI hosts a two-session ***Deliberation Facilitator Training Program*** in which participants are assigned preparatory readings and meet to discuss deliberation strategy, learn from trained facilitators about the process of deliberation, and engage in informative exercises that will help them prepare for work as facilitators. This comprehensive introduction to facilitation equips participants with the skills and insights needed to design and guide their own deliberations, as well as train others to facilitate.
 - The deliberation facilitator training program is open to students, teachers, or any community members who are interested. Organizations could send representatives to participate in the training and then serve as facilitators back at their organizations. Davidson College Presbyterian Church has used this model to develop their own homegrown deliberation program.
- The DCI is also developing a ***new “Deliberation Host” training program*** that is a shorter version of the full DCI “Deliberation Facilitator” training program. This training option would only be 2 hours instead of 8 hours, and it would teach participants about how to organize and host a deliberation that the participants will self-facilitate without the guidance of a trained facilitator.
 - The Deliberation Host Training Program may be a good option for staff and students who are interested in learning more about the DCI’s approach and want to organize more deliberations in their organizations but lack the time to commit to the full Deliberation Facilitator program. This option approach may be more realistic for organizations that do not have anyone available who can attend the full deliberation facilitator training but still want to organize something for their students, staff, and members.
- As part of the DCI’s Deliberative Pedagogy Program, the DCI is also developing a series of workshops on how to integrate more deliberation into classroom settings, whether they are at the K-12 or collegiate level. These ***Deliberative Pedagogy Workshops*** will incorporate material from the full-scale one-day training that the DCI held for members of its year-long Deliberative Pedagogy Collaborative.
 - K12 or higher education institutions could invite their faculty to participate in these workshops, and the DCI could organize them around their availability and schedules.

