

ESSENTIAL PARTNERS DONOR NEWSLETTER



A QUARTERLY UPDATE FOR *OUR* ESSENTIAL PARTNERS | **SUMMER 2022**

RENEWING HOPE IN OUR COMMUNITIES



**A NOTE FROM
EP'S DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR,
DAMIEN LALLY**

Essential Partners gives people the means to strengthen relationships across differences, deepen belonging in their communities, and renew hope for the future.

For many, hope for the future of our communities, country, and world might seem in short supply these days.

But in our 33rd year, EP continues to inspire people to rediscover the best in themselves and each other.

Read on for updates about new dialogue guides, free events, and civic collaborations for rekindling hope in our communities—all made possible by donors like you.

Thank you for your support.



FEATURED STORY:

**EP OFFERS NEW ABORTION
DIALOGUE RESOURCE IN WAKE OF
SUPREME COURT DECISION**

ALSO IN THIS NEWSLETTER

New Guide: Conversations on Guns in the US

Community Voices: We The People Warwick

Partner Update: Dialogues on Race & Equity

Recent News & Event Updates



FEATURED STORY

EP OFFERS NEW ABORTION DIALOGUE RESOURCE IN WAKE OF SUPREME COURT DECISION

BY KATIE HYTEN
EP CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On June 24, 2022, in a 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court of the United States ended months of speculation by overturning *Roe vs. Wade*.

This reversal turns the legal issue of abortion rights and access back to individual states. One national conversation becomes fifty distinct deliberations—each one unique to the history, context, and communities within each state.

For a half century or more, abortion has been one of the most polarizing topics in American politics. The simplified version of the debate, in which one side favors access and the other favors restriction, is all too often the framing for this conversation, both in the media and in our national politics.

However, research finds that Americans hold nuanced, complex, and contradictory perspectives on abortion. It's just that most people have had few opportunities to talk about

abortion in ways that reflect that complexity and urgency. Between the complexity and the potential for conflict, many choose silence.

This reticence has allowed the most extreme voices to dominate in the media, in our politics, and in our communities. The result is a distorted, over-simplified shouting match with existential consequences and little room for compassion, dignity, and understanding.

We can and must change that—together.

Essential Partners has helped people navigate conversations about abortion since our founding more than 33 years ago. We will continue to do so as Americans navigate this watershed moment, starting with a brand new ***Guide to Dialogues About Abortion***, now available to download for free on our website.

[DOWNLOAD THE FREE GUIDE HERE](#)

It is essential to honor both the complexity and the urgency around this conversation. It is also vital to the future of our democracy that we empower the voices of everyday people, so they are able to articulate and advocate their genuine, nuanced views.

Our latest guide is designed to support a new kind of conversation on abortion—one that invites people to share deeper beliefs and explore the full complexity of their views. It creates a space for people to explore whatever comes up, even (or especially) if it is messy.

Our founder, Laura R. Chasin, who co-led [confidential leadership dialogues about abortion for the better part of a decade](#), often spoke of “liberation through structure.” It is so easy for conversations on this topic to devolve into unproductive venting or harmful, polarizing rhetoric—especially in times like these.

Intentional structures and norms like those found in our new guide help people step out of their routine ways of speaking and relating to one another, so they can free themselves of dysfunctional, polarizing patterns.

This guide is designed to offer any group an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the SCOTUS ruling in a way that builds empathy, understanding, trust, and compassion—and then, if they choose, to help them wrestle with how they want to come together as a community to support each other in a variety of ways.

Within this new resource are general tips as well as guidelines and prompts for several purposes:

- To have healthier conversations across differences of perspective;
- For circumstances in which talking about abortion feels taboo;
- To grieve and find strength in each other after the overturning of Roe;
- To reflect on how best to support families in a given community now;
- For faith communities who wrestle with the issue of abortion access.

Not only have we made this available to the public—thanks to your support—we will also use this guide to activate the thousands of trained community leaders, bridge-builders, and peacemakers in our growing Community of Practice.

For any questions about using this guide, or for additional support and collaboration, please [reach out for a free consultation with an EP expert](#).

DEVELOPING STORY

EP PREPARING SPECIAL WORKSHOP ON ABORTION DIALOGUES FOR OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

EP is designing a special webinar to support members of our Community of Practice as they hold dialogues about abortion, reproductive healthcare and rights, and the recent SCOTUS decision in their own communities.

A main driver of EP's sprawling impact, our **Community of Practice** includes *thousands* of program and training alumni from all over the U.S. who are using what they learned from EP to strengthen relationships in their home communities and cornerstone institutions. They are teachers, elected officials, faith leaders, community advocates and organizers, and many others.

EP can offer them advanced workshops and resources throughout the year on a broad range of issues and conversations—at no cost—thanks to the generosity of donors like you.

If you have questions about our Community of Practice or how you can support it, please reach out to damien@whatisessential.org.

NEW RESOURCE

GUIDE TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF GUNS IN AMERICAN LIFE

BY DAMIEN LALLY
EP DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

According to the [Washington Post](#), there have been more than 250 mass shootings in the United States during the first half of 2022, resulting in the deaths of more than 250 Americans, and the injury of 1,000+ more. As the Post observed: "Not a single week in 2022 has passed without at least four mass shootings."

Tragically, the bigger picture is far worse. Mass shootings only account for a fraction of gun deaths in the U.S. These numbers don't include shootings involving three or fewer victims; nor do they include the single largest driver of gun deaths in America—suicides.

The national debate on the role of guns in American life has felt stuck for decades. It is highly polarized, with extreme voices drowning out the majority who are eager for a new conversation about firearms and public safety, protected rights, and personal freedom. Essential Partners is ready to help.

[DOWNLOAD OUR GUNS GUIDE HERE](#)

EP recently released a brand new, free resource—our ***Guide to Conversations About the Role of Guns in American Life***—to help people unpack the vast complexities of the gun debate. This guide supports a new kind of conversation that fosters mutual understanding, trust, and a desire to solve America's epidemic gun violence together.



Our new guide creates a roadmap for dialogues that can help people understand each others' deepest convictions, ask questions and explore the full complexity of their beliefs and identities, heal in the aftermath of traumatic events, and inspire fresh ways of thinking together about how to make our communities safer while also protecting constitutional rights.

EP's new guide is based on real conversations that have taken place among gun owners and regulation advocates, as well as people who don't fit neatly into either label. We hope you will [download it here today](#).

A WORD OF THANKS TO OUR DONORS

Thanks to donors like you, EP can offer this resource—and many others like it—for free to anyone, anywhere, who needs it.

Please consider supporting more free resources by [giving generously today](#).

Thank you for making our work possible!

COMMUNITY VOICES

BEVERLY BRAXTON AND WE THE PEOPLE WARWICK

Beverly Braxton is a former teacher, mediator, advocate for families, and active member of the Warwick, New York community for 50+ years. She is also the founder of [We The People Warwick](#), an emerging “grassroots movement with the goal of addressing the civic health and complex divisions in the Warwick community.”

Beverly was inspired to launch WTPW in the aftermath of the January 6th riots in Washington, D.C. Shocked by the political violence and the breakdown of civic trust, Beverly believed a local initiative to build relationships across polarizing differences might keep Warwick strong by “ensuring every person feels welcomed, heard, and supported in the town we all love.”

Beverly has been a dialogue facilitator and community advocate for 40+ years, but this challenge felt new. She needed more support to establish a group that could foster healthier dialogue, encourage people to solve problems, and help them invest in building a more engaged community together.

“My goal was to go deeper in my conversations—to learn more skills for encouraging people to talk more deeply about the civic health of our country. I was guided by a question: Do we, the people of Warwick, have it in ourselves to invest in working together on the complex issues we face in our community?” Beverly said.

“When I found Essential Partners, I was amazed. They had exactly what I needed—the skills to facilitate dialogues at the level of community problem-solving, and a network of other people working together at that level.”



***Beverly Braxton**, a long-time resident, civic leader, and founder of **We The People Warwick (WTPW)**. WTPW is a grassroots movement to address civic health and complex divisions in Warwick, NY.*

EP offered Beverly a training scholarship, which she used to hone her skills and build out her vision for We The People Warwick. “Everything I needed to think about to make for a successful outcome was there—well-developed and thought through.”

When it came time to launch the initiative, Beverly started by placing an invitation to sign up in her local newspaper. “In just 30 days, 90 people signed up!” She began leading facilitator trainings and dialogue sessions, each of which culminated in participants outlining action steps.

Thanks to the generosity of EP’s donors, we continue to support Beverly and We The People Warwick in their second year of action. One of Beverly’s tasks this year is to create a Youth Engagement Team by recruiting student leaders with visions for “building communities of hope and belonging”.

“I want WTPW to be a seed of inspiration for other communities. I’m not doing anything other people can’t also do. People in other communities might be inspired to have these conversations, but still lack the skills. When I look at EP’s resources, they enhance what I’m doing.”

PARTNER UPDATE:

In our last edition, we shared a story about one of EP's partners, **FIS Global**, a U.S. financial services company with more than 55,000 employees, which has been working with EP to create a shared language and toolset for dialogue across differences as part of their Inclusion & Diversity program.

We are proud to share that FIS Global recently used EP's free [Race Dialogue Guide](#) to facilitate internal conversations about race and equity as part of this year's Juneteenth holiday.

Among the prompts they developed together for the dialogues:

Q: Think about a time when you had the chance to talk with someone about race or ethnicity but chose not to. What made that conversation feel challenging?

Q: Share an experience you had when you became aware that race, ethnicity, or assumptions about another core part of your identity were significant factors in your work or personal life. How were you impacted by the experience?

FIS Global is just one corporate partner working with EP to create new possibilities for difficult but urgently needed conversations on race. To learn how your company can do the same, [reach out to us any time.](#)

RECENT NEWS

Dialogue Journalism Collaboration in Alabama:

This spring, EP joined Reckon, Cortico, and the Bridge Alliance for a project on dialogue-informed journalism and civic engagement, facilitating dialogues with Alabama residents about voter issues ahead of the 2022 elections, as well as peoples' hopes and dreams for the future of their state. Cortico digitally analyzed dialogue recordings to reveal common themes, and Reckon used the analysis to craft new voter guides based on issues residents said mattered most to them. [Read more here.](#)

New Grant to Support Community Dialogues: EP has been awarded a \$55k grant from the Center for the Science of Moral Understanding at the University of North Carolina, funding a team of EP experts and academic researchers in facilitating and studying local dialogues in Sandwich, MA. The grant will also fund a new free dialogue guide for communities around the U.S.

Climate Change Dialogues at Miami Dade College:

With 8 campuses and 100,000+ students, Miami Dade College is the largest community college in Florida and the second largest in the U.S. In year 3 of our partnership, together with previously-trained educators from a pilot cohort, EP helped MDC launch a new series of climate dialogues for students, faculty, and administrators to foster deeper curiosity, engagement, and "a culture of active hope" across MDC's campus communities.

"What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?": Thanks to a [generous grant from Mass Humanities](#), EP recently hosted a public reading and dialogue about Frederick Douglass' famed 1852 speech. [Check out our free guide](#) to lead your own July 4th conversations about his speech in the context of American history, identity, and civic life.

ONE LAST THING...

Many of the stories you read about in this newsletter were made possible through the extraordinary generosity of EP's donors. To support our work with a gift, [please click here](#) or reach out to EP's Director of Development, Damien Lally, at damien@whatisessential.org to discuss how a major gift can impact the communities we serve. **Thank you for reading, and thank you for your support!**