



essential PARTNERS

DONOR NEWSLETTER

A QUARTERLY UPDATE FOR OUR ESSENTIAL PARTNERS | SUMMER 2025

DONOR IMPACT SPOTLIGHTS

FEATURED STORY

EP Engages Community of Practice in Summer Summits

*Community Leaders Summer Summit
Higher Education Summer Summit
Secondary Schools Summer Summit*

ALSO IN THIS EDITION

EP in the News!

Hello friends,

As we wrap up our 2024-2025 fiscal year, I've been reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared. This year has been full of remarkable accomplishments that fill us with hope. We launched over 25 programs on college campuses, transforming them into hubs for constructive dialogue, and piloted new training programs for high school students, empowering young people to lead discussions on issues that matter to them. We also deepened our connections with our global Community of Practice through intensive workshops and summer summits.

Yet, alongside these successes, we've also faced challenges. Many of our partners have been impacted by funding cuts, and the demand for our services continues to grow, requiring greater capacity. In the current climate of division, doing this vital work can feel like an uphill battle.

Despite these hurdles, our resolve has never been stronger. Our work is a crucial piece of building a pluralistic future—one where our differences don't tear society apart. It's about actively countering what divides us and instead investing in what connects us.

I truly feel I have the luckiest job in the world. I get to spend my days with people who are working to heal wounds and bridge divides. It takes a unique kind of grit and hope to do this work, especially in the face of so much polarization and conflict. In this newsletter, we want you to feel a connection to the champions you support. That's why the rest of this issue is mainly dedicated to our Community of Practice Summer Summits. These gatherings are a touchstone for us—a time for renewal, learning, and preparing for the year ahead. They bring together our people, their stories of learning, and a collective sense of purpose. What luckier work can we have than to be surrounded by those who are willing to stand in the chasm and rebuild the bridge, running toward conflict because they know how to help? We hope this newsletter, and the stories from our donor-funded summer summits, shows you that your donation is actively doing great things across our country.



Thank you for your support!
With gratitude,

John Sarrouf
Co-Executive Director, Essential Partners

DONOR IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

EP ENGAGES COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN SUMMER SUMMITS

This summer, Essential Partners hosted three Summer Summits to deepen connections and foster shared learning within our Community of Practice (CoP). Led by our new CoP manager, Grace, these events represent a unique dimension of EP's impact—deeper connections, personalized support, and collaborative thinking.



One highlight of the summits was hearing directly from our partners about how they are applying the work in their specific contexts. We saw a beautiful variety of applications, from hyper-local grassroots community work to using dialogue to implement school policy.

Our attendees came from a variety of backgrounds, including foundations, secondary school and higher education campuses, community organizations, local governments, and nonprofits, and were at different points in their journey with us. Some were just starting out, sharing lessons from their first year, while others have been on this journey with us for some time. This range of experiences provided a rich and dynamic learning environment for everyone.

Each summit included breakout groups and interactive activities to foster cross-collaboration and real-time learning. These sessions created a generative space for participants to engage with new resources and learn from each other. This emphasis on shared learning was a highlight for many attendees. It affirmed our belief that the heart of our CoP work is to unlock the creativity and context-specific expertise of our CoP members and to provide opportunities for our members to connect and share their real-world experience. **Participants expressed a strong desire for this type of sustained, meaningful connection, both with their peers and with EP's experts—and we're committed to making that a reality.**

DONOR IMPACT SPOTLIGHT

A NEW APPROACH TO FOSTERING OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Our new strategy is designed to create a more integrated and collaborative Community of Practice. We're moving beyond targeted enrichment to create specialized sub-communities based on specific sectors, such as Community Leaders, Secondary Schools, and Higher Education.

This approach allows members to engage in peer-to-peer learning, share best practices, address common challenges, and build a stronger sense of solidarity with others doing similar work.

The feedback we received at these summits will help to inform our new CoP strategy, which will begin with a Virtual Strategy Launch Event on September 17th, from 1-2 pm ET / 10-11 am PT. **We invite you to join us at this event to hear more about our upcoming plans. If you're interested, [Register Here](#).**

NURTURING OUR FRONTLINE LEADERS

Spearheading dialogue movements can be challenging, and we believe in providing our CoP members with the support they need to stay motivated and engaged.

As a tangible expression of our gratitude, attendees of the Higher Education Summit received care packages, which included EP merchandise and a copy of *The Dialogic Classroom in Higher Education*, a new book co-authored by three EP Academic Associates. This gesture of active care is a new way for us to honor the dedicated work of our community members, and we hope to create more opportunities for donors to support this initiative in the future.

The summits confirmed that participants feel less alone and more hopeful when they can connect with peers who understand their struggles and celebrate their successes. As one participant shared, "Connecting with other CoP members is recharging, inspiring, and affirming."

For details on each summit's themes and speakers, keep reading!

COMMUNITY LEADERS SUMMIT

The Community Leaders Summit focused on using RSD to strengthen communities and equip them to address complex challenges. We explored key questions: How can we use dialogic processes to improve our relationships? How do we build a dialogic culture where we live and work? And how do we move from dialogue to community action?

Our time together was designed to be a space for hope and healing. We connected meaningfully with each other and learned from courageous leaders who are using our dialogic approach to transform their communities.

Featured Speakers:



HANNIA PRECIADO

Founder, President, and CEO
RÍE Coaching and Facilitation

Hannia shared her work as a Community Cornerstone Fellow, which focuses on developing leadership and creating spaces for dialogue and rest.



AMANDA CHANCE

Associate Mission Director
YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap
Counties

Amanda shared four key lessons she's learned from scaling dialogic practices both within her organization and in the broader community.



SEPI DJAVAHERI

Director of Community Mobilizers
UJA-Federation of New York

Sepi reflected on her experience launching interfaith dialogues with clergy on Long Island following October 7.

Participant Takeaways:

- "[There are] little ways to incorporate Reflective Structured Dialogue in everyday life."
- "[There are] so many ways to foster dialogue and build community—can go big AND go small, both are so impactful."
- "The breadth of projects is inspiring. I hope to continue to work on being a bridge builder."
- "The power and value of human connection exists everywhere."

HIGHER EDUCATION SUMMIT

Our Higher Education Summit brought together faculty, staff, and students who are applying RSD in classrooms and on campus. In this divided moment, the need to repair trust, deepen mutual understanding, and build new relationships across deep differences has never been more critical.

The summit was an interactive space for attendees to connect, share insights, and find solidarity with their peers. It featured innovative speakers who are using dialogic competencies in transformative ways on their campuses, along with practical resources and connecting activities.

Featured Speakers:



DR. CASSIE MAJETIC

Professor

Saint Mary's College

Cassie shared her experience launching a new first-year seminar program designed to help students transition to college-level intellectual life. The three-credit course centers on enduring questions and challenges within faculty members' disciplines, with dialogue and dialogic practice serving as the primary method for exploring contemporary issues.



NOGA SHEMER

Associate Professor

University of Connecticut

Noga shared how UConn has established a dedicated cohort focused on building a campus-wide dialogic culture, which successfully advocated for including dialogue as a formal competency in the new common curriculum. This coming year, they are focused on how to hold faculty accountable while ensuring buy-in, supporting a systematic approach to generate an authentic campus-wide dialogic culture.



DANIELLE TORRES

Dean of Equity and Inclusion

Lewis & Clark College

Danielle shared how Lewis & Clark launched a campus-wide dialogue initiative in January 2023. This initiative has been successfully applied across complex campus contexts, including community dialogues for changing the school mascot, strategic planning conversations with faculty about institutional vision, and student-led symposia on race and gender. The program continues expanding into first-year experiences and seeks to support campus community members' own dialogue initiatives.

Participant Takeaways:

- "Slow and steady is how change happens."
- "Connecting with other CoP members is recharging, inspiring, and affirming."
- "Implementation has to be in sync between official initiatives and on-the-ground work."
- "We're not alone in this work!"
- "There are tools out there, and a community of folks to practice with."

SECONDARY SCHOOL SUMMIT

For our Secondary School Summit, we learned from innovative leaders working in schools to strengthen students' capacity for dialogue and connection.

Practitioners from Hawken School, Cary Academy, and Newburyport schools shared their experiences developing a student-led dialogue cohort and facilitating dialogue on cellphones in schools based on EP's dialogic approach. There was a time to connect with and learn from one another, as well as to discuss how we want to stay engaged as a community in the months ahead.

Featured Speakers:



2025 Newburyport Cellphone Community Dialogue: Focusing on how they used dialogue district-wide to create the circumstances to craft a policy that felt representative of the community's perspective of cellphones in schools.

- 1 staff and 2 students spoke



CARY ACADEMY

Cary Academy Dialogue Facilitator Program: Sharing how their 47 student dialogue facilitators support conversations that strengthen understanding and healing around contentious cultural moments and topics.

- 1 staff and 3 students spoke

HAWKEN
SCHOOL



Hawken School Dialogue Initiative: Sharing lessons from the first year of their dialogue initiative, especially how they embedded it into a humanities class and are working with the administration to scale up in the coming year.

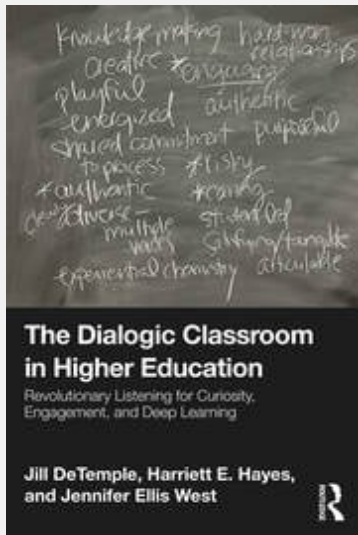
- 2 staff and 1 student spoke

Participant Takeaways:

- "I loved connecting with other CoP members in small groups"
- "Dialogue is a means through which students build essential skills for life!"
- "[I plan to] continue to refine messaging and identify ways to embed dialogic moments into classroom spaces."

We are inspired by the passion and commitment of our community and look forward to building on the momentum from these summits. Your support helps make these valuable connections possible, nurturing the people who are building a more dialogic world, one conversation at a time.

EP IN THE NEWS!



[Purchase HERE](#)

THE DIALOGIC CLASSROOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As mentioned in the above article, *The Dialogic Classroom in Higher Education*, a book co-authored by three EP Academic Associates has just been published: Jill DeTemple, Southern Methodist University associate professor, Harriett E. Hayes, Dean of the Rhodes School of Arts and Humanities at Bridgewater College, and Jennifer Ellis West, Samford University associate professor. Its release will help expand the reach of a program initiated in 2017, when EP received a grant to research and refine the use of Reflective Structured Dialogue in a classroom setting. What began as a successful pilot program with five schools, now dozens more schools and universities have been trained in the model. This book will greatly support the expansion of this work for teachers, students, and administrators.

“SHS STUDENTS FIND CONNECTION THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY,” SHERIDAN PRESS

[Read the Full Article HERE](#)

THE SHERIDAN PRESS thesheridanpress.com

In Sheridan, Wyoming, a new project called the Essential Photovoice Club helped Sheridan High School students connect with one another through photography and dialogue.

The Center for a Vital Community (CVC) partnered with Essential Partners and Interfaith Photovoice to pilot the program. Seventeen students participated, taking photos based on the theme "The Story of Me," which included sub-themes like "appreciation" and "connectivity."

THANKS FOR READING—AND FOR SUPPORTING OUR MISSION.

