CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON DIGITAL DISCOURSE FOR A THRIVING DEMOCRACY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Blueprint for Action

CONVERGENCE

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON DIGITAL DISCOURSE

Acknowledgements

About Convergence

Convergence is the leading organization bridging divides to solve critical challenges through collaborative problem solving across ideological, political, and cultural lines. For more than a decade, Convergence has brought together leaders, doers, and experts to build trusting relationships, identify breakthrough solutions, and form unlikely alliances for constructive change on seemingly intractable issues. Our process is improving the lives of Americans and strengthening democracy for a more resilient and collaborative future.

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CONVERGENCE

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Our Consensus

We support this set of solutions as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this report, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes. This consensus process resulted in the strongest support for our vision and solutions. We urge leaders across sectors to act on these solutions and accompanying proposals.

The following individuals, though not officially part of the consensus group, contributed critical insights that informed the final vision and recommendations in this report.

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The digital environment can be fertile ground for disinformation and misinformation, psychological and behavioral manipulation, polarization, radicalization, surveillance, and addiction. Recognizing the reach and depth of these harms, the public increasingly supports recalibrating digital discourse to reduce them and to enable a trustworthy digital ecosystem that enhances user agency, constructive interaction, and resilience.

The ***Convergence Collaborative on Digital Discourse for a Thriving Democracy and Resilient Communities*** convened us — representatives from academia, tech platforms, policy, health, media, community-based and bridge-building organizations, alternative social networks, those personally impacted by digital harms, and more — to tackle these deep challenges around digital discourse. From September 2022 – September 2023, we met regularly under Convergence's auspices to craft solutions that foster resilience, connectedness, and wellbeing in our democracy and communities while maintaining free speech.

We started by aligning around a shared vision of an ecosystem of social media platforms, users, and information providers that mitigates digital harms and improves digital discourse. The vision rests upon three pillars that create the conditions necessary for this ideal ecosystem to thrive. We then forged consensus around a set of solutions aligned with these three pillars.

Social media design that facilitates choice and encourages constructive interaction. To make this possible, we recommend the following actions:

➤ Support voluntary research into, experimentation with, and adoption of content-neutral **designs and tools** that increase user agency, constructive online interactions, and pluralistic and diverse dialogue.

➤ Establish a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder **coalition** to promote design choices and tools within the tech sector that enhance user agency.

➤ Raise **awareness among users** about choices they can make and tools they can use to better manage their online experiences and foster broad-based user demand for higher quality platform designs and tools.

➤ Explore and support the adoption of content-neutral **policies** that promote transparency, interoperability, designs that optimize for user choice, and digital public infrastructure, while respecting free speech.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizens with the awareness and social and cognitive skills to navigate, connect with and understand each other, and act constructively online. To make this possible, we recommend the following action:

→ Pilot an innovative education package that empowers users with the social and cognitive **skills** to leverage the positive features of social media, build resilience to digital harms, and engage with information and each other more constructively and responsibly.

Trustworthy news and information providers who promote shared facts and understanding and meet community needs. To make this possible, we recommend the following actions:

→ Forge new, mutually beneficial **models and partnerships** among news providers, advertisers and intermediaries, funders, social media companies and AI companies to ensure diversified, sustained, and transparent support for news providers.

→ Support the **development of** evidence-based trust-building interventions and best practices for news providers, especially as we head into the 2024 election cycle.

→ Support the development of a multifunctional **tool** that gives users more understanding of ethical journalism and provides users with choice among ethical information sources.

→ Support an independent and voluntary **certification process** for ethical journalism, one that rewards transparency, accuracy, viewpoint-neutrality, diversity, and plurality, and safeguards press freedom.

→ Support the development of **policies** that offer fair payment options between platforms and news providers while respecting free speech.

Historically, attempts to address the challenges of digital discourse have often pitted sectors, institutions, and individuals against each other, making the development and execution of solutions even more difficult. This solution set is uniquely credible and implementable because our group worked together across sectors and ideologies to thoughtfully reassess what types of long-term investments and policies will best address the challenges of digital discourse.

We invite you now to read the Collaborative's full Blueprint for Action, which contains more detail about the vision and solutions presented here, including specific calls to action and proposals for advancing these solutions. We encourage an active reading of this report, keeping in mind ways you can stand alongside us – no matter what role you occupy in the online ecosystem – to address the seemingly intractable issues facing our internet, our democracy, and our communities.

There is a role for every player in every industry, from platform users all the way up to CEOs. Each of the solutions described in this Blueprint for Action is specifically designed to be modular and scalable. The potential for impact grows as more stakeholders step up and affirm their commitment to better online spaces, empowered users, a stronger democracy, and more resilient communities.

"Bringing together people from across differences and divides to discuss and learn from each other and come up with policy solutions together as opposed to doing so in ideological silos – That process is really powerful and is more likely to get us to policy solutions that will actually work."

Dr. Céline Gounder
KFF

Blueprint Consensus Solutions

Design
Social media design that facilitates choice and encourages constructive interaction.

Awareness and Skills:
Create bottom-up educational resources that address how users interface with platforms, information, and each other.

News and Information:
Trustworthy news and information providers who promote shared facts and understanding and meet community needs.

How Convergence Successfully Bridges Divides and Forges Solutions in the Face of Gridlock

Convergence is the leading organization bridging divides to solve critical challenges through collaborative problem-solving across ideological, political, and cultural lines. For more than a decade, Convergence has brought together leaders, doers, and experts to build trusting relationships, identify breakthrough solutions, and form unlikely alliances for constructive change on seemingly intractable issues.

Convergence's **evidence-based approach to collaborative problem-solving** is informed by many years of practice and continued advances in contact theory, neuroscience, and psychology, as well as significant adaptation of best practices from the disciplines of facilitation, mediation, deliberative democracy, bridgebuilding, and international peacebuilding. This approach has allowed Convergence to **regularly succeed** in forging trust among even the most improbable collaborators. Our process is improving the lives of Americans and strengthening democracy for a more resilient and collaborative future.
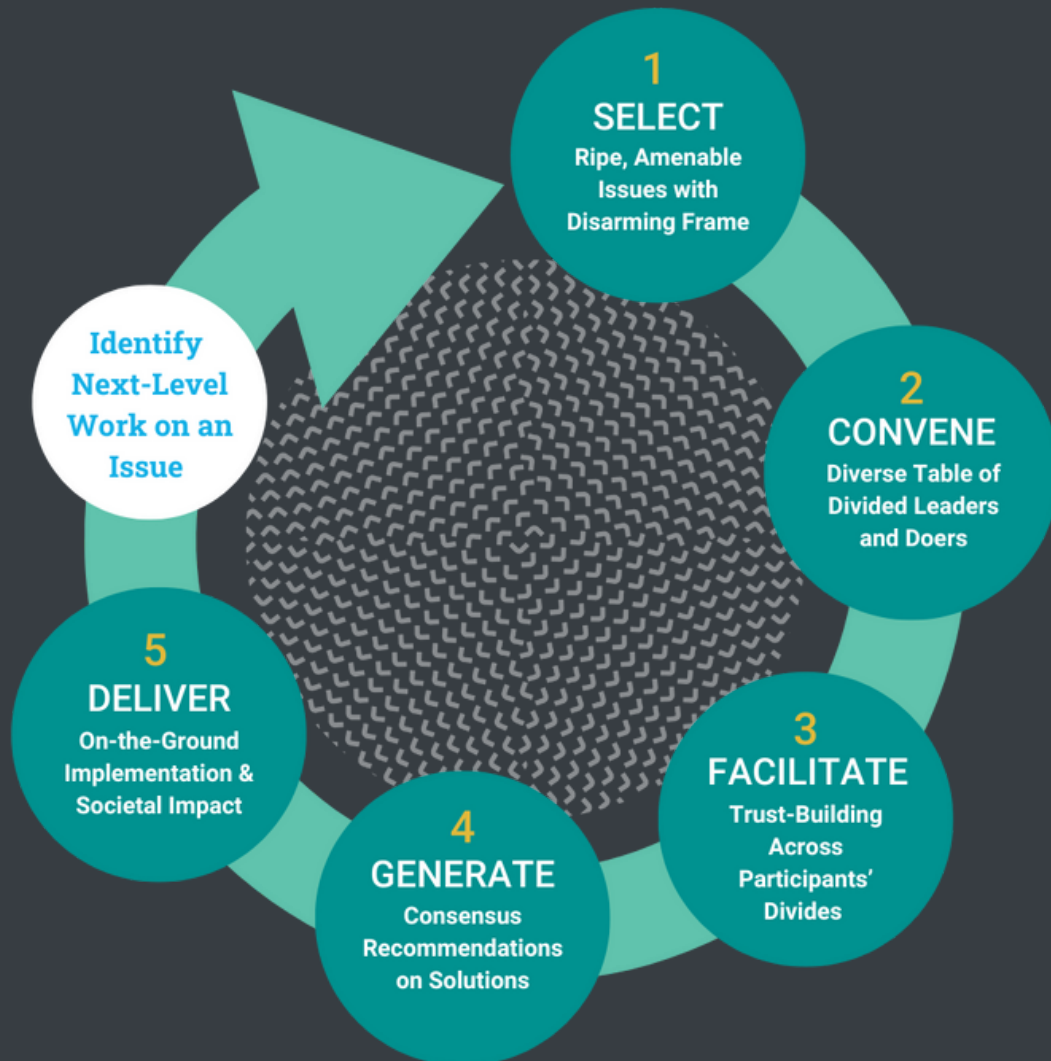
About the Collaborative

In 2022, **Convergence interviewed over 200 experts**, conducted a literature review, tracked almost 600 pieces of state and federal legislation, hosted three multi-stakeholder workshops for subsets of experts and practitioners, and mapped existing research and activities in the space all to explore how our digital information environment and digital phenomena (such as disinformation and misinformation) affect the production and consumption of information, and in turn, people and communities. This discovery distilled the multifaceted and complex landscape of issues around digital discourse and clarified the opportunity for a Convergence collaborative problem-solving process.

The *Convergence Collaborative on Digital Discourse* brought together a diverse and influential group of 20 participants representing academia, tech platforms, policy, health, media, community-based and bridge-building organizations, alternative social networks, those personally impacted by digital harms, and more. For just over a year, from Fall 2022 through Fall 2023, the multi-stakeholder collaborative met regularly to tackle deep challenges around digital discourse and to craft solutions that foster resilience, connectedness, and wellbeing in our democracy and communities while maintaining free speech.

Within our Collaborative there were differing priorities, which caused tension when considering various challenges and solutions. The needs and interests of tech companies, users, and information providers, for example, often seemed in conflict with one another. It was critical that all perspectives were represented in the group and that participants worked together to integrate those priorities. Another area of tension was the balance between voluntary action and public mandates. Participants had to resolve significant differences on the role of government, First Amendment parameters, and the role of the tech sector in creating and solving digital discourse challenges.

Information Providers

Refer to individuals, organizations, or platforms that supply or disseminate information, such as news providers, websites, social media, and other sources of data, news, or content to the public.

As our discussions proved, however, the opportunity to build trust and align around shared principles made it possible for consensus to emerge. Under Convergence's auspices, we worked together to solve problems and invent new options, and reached agreement on private, public, and policy recommendations to advance shared principles and goals.

THE COLLABORATIVE

The internet, in its infancy, was envisioned as a transformative technology that would democratize information, foster the free exchange of ideas, empower individuals, and create a truly global community. While the internet has met much of its early promise, it also has caused cascading harms, particularly as social media platforms have become central to our social life -- subtly eroding our agency, depreciating our social skills and cognitive resilience, and disrupting the very information ecosystems they were meant to enhance. Growing recognition of the reach and depth of these harms has led to increasing public support for a recalibration of digital discourse. There is an urgent need to shift social media platforms, user interactions, and information flows so that they foster greater connectedness, wellbeing, and free expression in our democracies and communities. To address these challenges, the Collaborative first arrived at a collective understanding of the current landscape, described below.

We live our digital lives within a system dominated by a few large players and designed to capture and monetize attention and engagement.

We communicate, play, and work within an **attention-centric** system that shapes how information is presented, consumed, and shared. With a handful of large platforms vying for our limited attention, there is a growing emphasis on the rapid dissemination of content that provokes immediate reactions and continuous engagement online. Further, our online interactions are mediated by algorithms and metrics, such as likes, shares, and views, that thrive on engagement, often at the expense of quality, plurality, reflection, and depth. Long-form content, nuanced discussions, and careful analysis struggle to gain traction.

We are ill-equipped to understand the architecture of the internet and our own psychosocial vulnerabilities.

Human cognitive and social vulnerabilities, such as the confirmation bias and our tendency to form "us versus them" groups, make us susceptible to false or manipulated information. Users are ill-equipped to understand the architecture, dynamics, and logic of the online information ecosystem, or to critically engage with content. For example, people share false narratives, whether passively or for partisan purposes, and readers confuse news and opinion sections of media coverage, a line the media itself has helped blur.

Our news and information ecosystems have been disrupted.

Preserving quality and trusted journalism has positive outcomes for communities and democracies. While television remains the most popular platform for the consumption of news and information at 49%, social media and online news outlets are close behind at 43%. Though media-driven dissemination of falsehoods and manipulations long predate the internet, what social media uniquely contributes is the acceleration, reach, and scale of inflammatory and false information.

49%
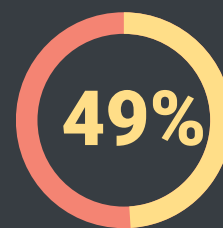
Percentage of individuals who receive their news from television.

Pew Research Center

43%
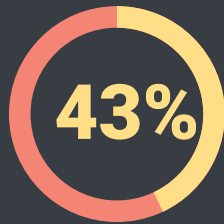
Percentage of Individuals who consume their news via social media and online news outlets.

Pew Research Center

People's **information ecosystems have been disrupted** by the financial collapse of news business models, the decline of local news, the rise of news deserts and information vacuums, and the news that fuels political and social polarization. While decades of hyper-partisan talk radio and cable news contributed to these trends, social media has dramatically accelerated and deepened their impact.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

The social media industry, public education, and policymaking systems are not meeting the challenges.

Social media industry players today continue to pursue user engagement (time and activity on social media platforms) as a key business goal, but most fail to balance its usefulness and genuine value with its negative consequences. Individuals are left without critical skills to navigate an increasingly complex digital and information landscape due to insufficient digital, media, and psychosocial literacy. While several pieces of legislation have been proposed to address the core issues, critics worry about free speech and censorship, impeding the provision of personalized products and services that people want and pay for, and other unintended effects. Additionally, despite an **extensive and bipartisan debate on reforming Section 230** liability protections for platforms, experts agree that the debate has been mostly performative, unproductive, and riddled with unachievable or harmful proposals.

There are many strong, albeit siloed, efforts tackling this problem – however, consensus has not been identified across these siloes.

Various initiatives have emerged in recent years to: forecast how **social media will impact society**, propose a **roadmap for platform regulation**, tackle disinformation, outline **bipartisan fixes for transparency and research into platforms**, leverage the internet to **promote social cohesion**, examine the **intersection between psychology and technology**, and explore **policy solutions to the negative mental, civic, and public health impacts of social media**. While some proposals seek to reformulate digital spaces within the existing landscape, others aim to transform the system itself. There are diverse and, at times, conflicting ideas about how to improve digital discourse.

No one organization can cover this complex terrain on its own – this work will require multi-stakeholder alignment, collaboration, and parallel efforts. Our Convergence report provides a unique vision and set of consensus solutions for improving digital discourse, with the aim of supporting a thriving democracy and resilient users and communities.

OUR VISION

We envision an ecosystem of social media platforms, users, and information providers that mitigates digital harms and improves digital discourse. Together, these stakeholders can enhance agency and constructive interaction, build cognitive resilience, and support a trustworthy information environment while preserving free speech and the positive benefits of network connectivity. This ecosystem rests on three pillars:

Social media design that allows for choice and encourages constructive interaction

Citizens with the awareness and the social and cognitive skills to navigate, connect, understand, and act constructively

Trustworthy news and information providers that promote shared facts and understanding and meet community needs

Design

Psychology

Information

The rationale behind these three pillars is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between design, psychology, and information.

Design

The first pillar centers on how profoundly design influences user behavior and wellbeing, information flow, and discourse dynamics. We must create and continuously improve social media platforms and tools that empower users while mitigating digital harms and protecting free speech. Designing platforms for user agency can foster a sense of ownership and autonomy, enhance intrinsic motivation for responsible engagement, and make users aware of the choices they can make and the likely impact of their choices on themselves and others.

Psychology

The second pillar places an emphasis on the psychosocial elements of the problem, and the broader trends of declining social and institutional trust and increasing societal divides. Today, **71% of Americans think that the internet does more to divide us than bring us together**, triggering distrust and isolation along racial, religious, socioeconomic, partisan, and geographic lines. The engagement-driven systems described above take advantage of human psychological vulnerabilities to make a profit. By cultivating their own social and cognitive skills, users can more responsibly navigate these systems and engage more critically and empathetically with information, and each other.
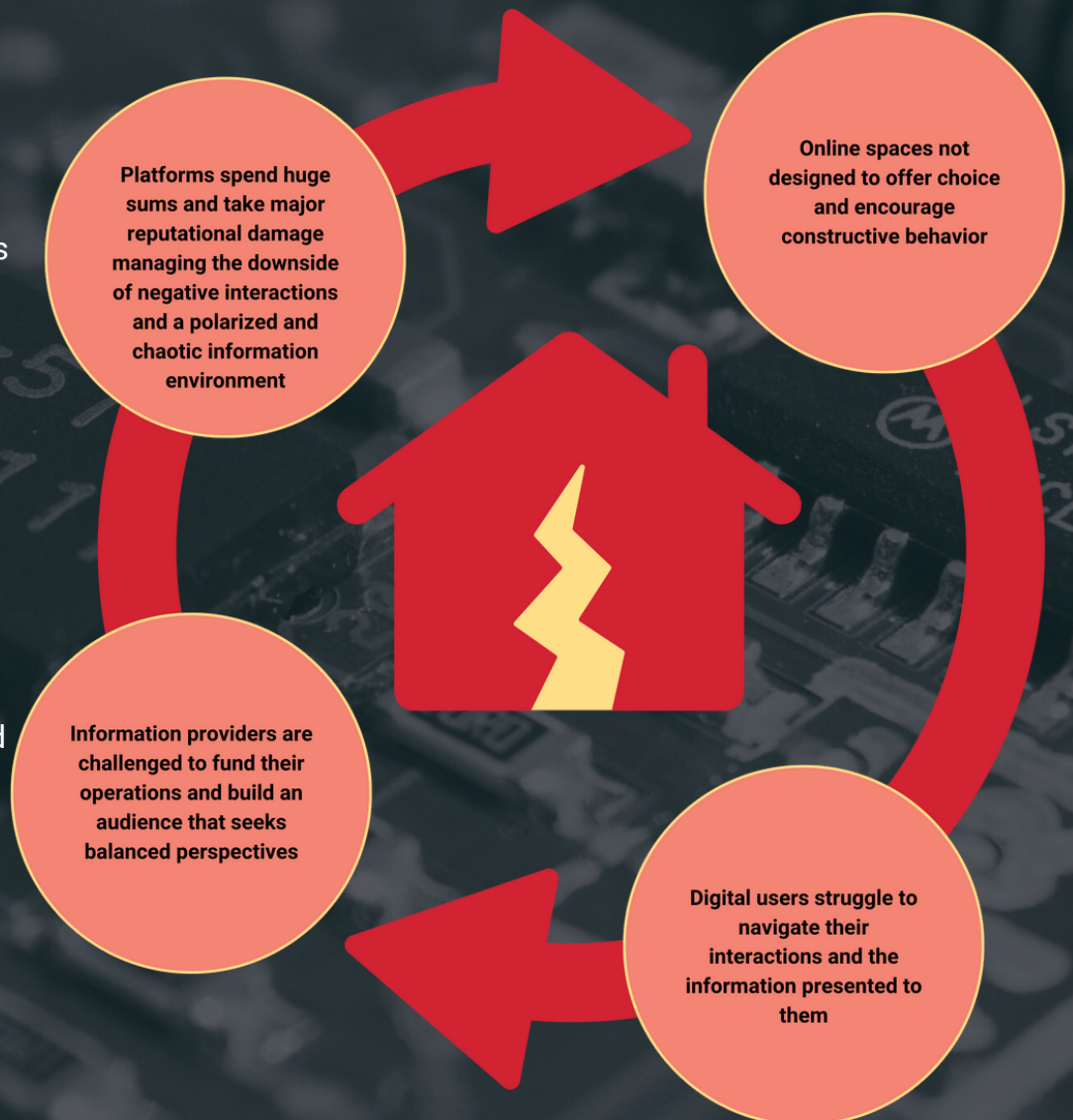
Information

The third pillar recognizes how fundamental the psychology of trust is when receiving and processing news and public information. Amidst a disrupted information ecosystem, sustainability for news providers at all levels must be prioritized by society. Providers, in turn, must focus on building trust through transparency, diversity, and ethics, or democratic and societal discourse will suffer.

DESTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

These design, psychological, and informational dimensions are mutually reinforcing. One feedback loop is destructive – without online spaces designed to offer choice and encourage constructive behavior, digital users struggle to navigate their interactions and the information presented to them; information providers are challenged to fund their operations and build an audience that seeks balanced perspectives; and the platforms spend huge sums and suffer major reputational damage managing the downside of negative interactions and a polarized and chaotic information environment.

Platforms spend huge sums and take major reputational damage managing the downside of negative interactions and a polarized and chaotic information environment

Online spaces not designed to offer choice and encourage constructive behavior

Information providers are challenged to fund their operations and build an audience that seeks balanced perspectives

Digital users struggle to navigate their interactions and the information presented to them

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CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

Our vision is for a constructive feedback loop - platforms design their environments and tools to give users more choices about the ways they interact and about the news and information they consume, along with clear guidance on those choices and their impacts; users have the understanding and skills they need to make well-informed choices about how they want to interact on social media and how to seek, interpret, and share news and information; news and information providers have viable financial, operational, and ethical models for providing trustworthy information and opinion through social media, based on their value to platforms and to users.

By pursuing these pillars in an integrated way, we lay the groundwork for an online ecosystem where empowered and resilient users can capitalize on its transformative potential, while mitigating harms and fostering a culture of constructive digital discourse and dissent.

This vision, bolstered by the consensus solutions below, rallies together multiple disciplines to serve as a starting point for fresh action. We call for action that reinforces and connects work that is underway, catalyzes new efforts, and adds our voices to ongoing advocacy.

Our consensus solutions consider and promote two key enablers for a thriving and resilient digital future where all people belong – free speech and equity. The Collaborative recognizes that protecting free speech and securing the wellbeing of users and communities vulnerable to harm are mutually reinforcing. Both our process and solutions were developed to ensure users have a meaningful voice in and the opportunity to share their digital world.

Free speech

In addition to the reality that social media can be leveraged as a tool for disinformation and misinformation, psychological and behavioral manipulation, division, radicalization, and surveillance, digital discourse today poses risks of censorship, both formal and informal. "Cancel culture" has become a deeply debated idea in the political discourse of the US, and there are partisan and ideological differences in how Americans define it – as a call for accountability, as censorship, or as a phenomenon that does not exist at all. Conservative Republicans were more likely than other groups to see it as a form of censorship than more moderate or liberal Republicans and all Democrats.

"Cancel culture" has become a **deeply debated idea** in the political discourse of the US.

With the exchange of information and ideas occurring on a global scale through various online platforms, promoting free expression remains crucial for a rich and innovative internet. Free speech, as codified in the First Amendment in the US, is a fundamental democratic principle that allows individuals to express ideas and opinions, engage in public discourse, and hold those in power accountable. Free speech also protects the voices of marginalized and underrepresented communities most at risk of over-moderation, unaccountable and non-transparent moderation decisions, and censorship. It allows groups outside the status quo to dissent. It encourages innovation and competition, critical thinking and the exchange of diverse ideas, and the free flow of diverse information.

Our ideologically and politically diverse multistakeholder dialogue was informed by the above free speech considerations. Our consensus solutions protect and promote free speech – we propose design innovations and tools that are content-agnostic, cognitive and social skills that encourage deliberation across differences and idea-testing, and the preservation of independent and diverse news and information resources. We focus on minimizing the reach and impact of disinformation and misinformation, reducing the need for content moderation, and building social norms and individual skills that enable debate and strong disagreement without crossing the line into harm or censorship.

FREE SPEECH AND EQUITY IN OUR PROCESS AND SOLUTIONS

Equity

As we advanced work on each of the three pillars above, we were highly conscious that some communities are disproportionately impacted by digital harms, and, further, that not all marginalized groups suffer these harms in the same ways. We recognize that various facets of an individual's identity differentially impact and compound their experiences with technology.

Nearly 90% of Americans agree that social media enables the spread of misinformation, extremism, harassment, and other types of harmful content and interaction. Within that group, Black Americans and women express higher concern about hurtful content compared to white Americans and men, respectively. Not only are historically marginalized groups disproportionately impacted by disinformation, but they are also more likely to be censored by efforts to moderate disinformation. The experts we interviewed mentioned black and Latinx communities, the LGBTQ+ community, religious minorities, activists, sex workers, those from a lower socioeconomic class, and rural Americans, among others, as most impacted.

90%

of Americans agree that social media enables the spread of misinformation, extremism, harassment, and other types of harmful content and interaction.

Knight Foundation

Because the perspectives of marginalized groups are often not included in key stakeholder discussions and the formulation of solutions, those solutions frequently do not meet their needs and can sometimes even exacerbate the problem. The Collaborative addressed this potential challenge by:

➡ **Ensuring the participation** of individuals from marginalized communities;

➡ **Explicitly identifying** where the needs of marginalized communities require special attention;

➡ If not at the table, **ensuring relevant research** on the impact of digital discourse issues on marginalized communities was considered, and that marginalized perspectives or trusted voices from their communities were consulted during research interviews. Convergence, Civic Genius, More in Common, and Interfaith America **partnered to bring together citizens across diverse US cities, experts and leaders, and faith-based voices** in deliberative problem-solving to identify and build common ground on digital disinformation;

➡ **Finding opportunities** to hear directly from people with lived experience at the community level, including through our partnerships with Civic Genius, More in Common, and Interfaith America; and,

➡ **Clarifying**, in this Blueprint for Action, how the group's proposals will drive digital discourse that is more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Though addressing the digital divide fell outside the scope of our work, unequal access to the internet and technology must be resolved so all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geography, can leverage the benefits of social media.

Given the above considerations around equity and fairness, our consensus solutions are community and user-centric, focused on offering users expanded choice, skills, and information so they are empowered to curate and navigate their digital spaces, as well as enabling a supporting environment that encourages thoughtful and constructive engagement with information and each other.

The Collaborative proposes solutions for improving digital discourse aligned with the three pillars described above:

Design
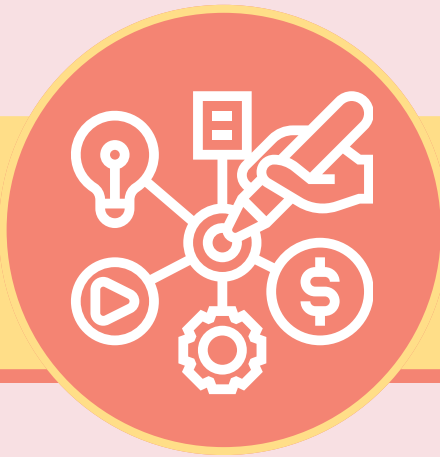**Social media design that facilitates choice and encourages constructive interaction;**

Skills
Helping citizens build social and cognitive skills to navigate, connect with and understand each other, and act constructively; and,

News and Information Ecosystem
Fostering a trustworthy news and information ecosystem that promotes shared facts and understanding and meets community needs.

AREAS OF CONSENSUS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

FOCUS ON DESIGN AND TOOLS

Pillar 1: Social media design that facilitates choice and encourages constructive interaction

Solution 1: Support voluntary research into, experimentation with, and adoption of content-neutral designs and tools that increase user agency, constructive online interactions, and pluralistic and diverse dialogue.

There are compelling reasons for this solution:

➡ Recent trends show **users are vulnerable to manipulation by opaque algorithms and platform architectures**, as well as **harassment, hate speech, and cyberbullying** that deters them from participating in online discussions (with certain communities harmed more than others).

➡ Users can benefit from increased autonomy and choice, engagement in forums that enable discussions, debates, and exchanges of ideas across a diversity of voices, while promoting norms of constructive discourse and limiting the opportunity for harmful interactions.

➡ Economic success for social media platforms and independent software providers can harmonize with ethical responsibility to users and society, encouraging platforms to vie for user trust through increased choice and constructive engagement, rather than divisive tactics.

There are several existing and fresh ideas that can serve as best practices to point platforms, developers, and product designers in the direction of design choices that benefit users, online communities, and society. Turning these options into our defaults can change behaviors, encouraging more constructive interactions.

The group identified a mix of existing and fresh design improvements that help platforms, developers and product designers strike a balance among positive impact, minimizing the risk of inadvertent harm, technical feasibility, minimizing the risk of legal challenges, and preserving free speech. Our solutions are:

Content-neutral designs: Designs for digital platforms and tools that do not favor or bias any specific content, ideology, or viewpoint. They aim to provide users with a diverse and plural online experience.

Designs and tools: Decisions made by product designers and managers, and developers when creating digital platforms and services, including technologies, features, settings, algorithms, and user interfaces.

User agency: An individual's ability to make informed choices and take actions according to their preferences and values within a digital environment.

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➡ Develop **designs** that optimize for what users want, healthier interactions, and pluralistic dialogue.

- Allow users to easily and explicitly indicate content they do or do not want to see. For example, in 2022, Facebook began to roll out a "show more/show less" feature.

- Respect users' explicit preferences even if contradicted by users' engagement. Researchers have proposed a variety of ways to model preference, including surveys, AI, and human facilitation.

- For content that users deem important or sensitive, for example about politics, religion, race, or sexuality, replace engagement optimizations, such as view time, comments, shares, and ad distribution, with optimizations for user-perceived quality.

- Allow users to straightforwardly opt-out of revenue-maximizing design features, such as time spent, infinite scroll, and auto-play, disincentivizing hyper-engagement and offering tools to right-size our online engagement for healthier outcomes. Make these opt-out settings the default for minors.

- Provide public rate-limiting codes for new, untrusted users.

- Make public the results of product tests that have significant implications for constructive discourse and online harms.

> **Public rate-limiting codes** refer to limits on high usage of certain functionalities by new, untrusted users, such as friend requests, messaging strangers, inviting others to groups, among others.
>
> **Affordances** refer to how the features and design of a technology or digital tool enable certain uses.

➡ Develop **tools and governance models** that empower users to leverage the positive affordances of social media:

- Create and provide resources, games, and apps that help users understand how the internet works, and how they can be responsible digital citizens. For example:
  - TrollBusters created a **curriculum for Generation Zeitgeist** to empower young people to engage in digital spaces on their terms.
  - The Electronic Frontier Foundation developed **Privacy Badger**, a free and open-source browser extension that stops advertisers and other third parties from secretly tracking where you go and what pages you look at online.

- Incentivize user engagement in platform governance, including their design and operation. For example:
  - Reddit's **voting system** allows users to upvote content they find valuable and downvote content they find unhelpful, encouraging diverse viewpoints to be heard, converge, and disagree, and collectively moderate content.
  - **Wikipedia** enforces a neutral point of view in its content creation, requiring contributors to present information fairly and without bias, which is evidenced in it being perceived as a trustworthy and reliable source of information.
  - OpenAI **released the GPT-3 Application Programming Interface (API)** to support external developers in building applications leveraging GPT-3's capabilities, fostering innovation and interoperability, and subsequently expanding user choice.

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CALL TO ACTION

There is an enormous depth of knowledge about platform design within the tech industry and in academia, and we want to encourage the voluntary sharing, amplification, and implementation of these insights.

📢 We call on **experts within the tech industry** to support these design affordances on multiple levels, including research and identifying metrics for what works best, experimenting with these design features, and eventually implementing them.

📢 **Tech companies and digital platforms** should invest in research and development efforts to create and experiment with content-neutral and user-centered designs and tools.

📢 **Tech developers** should anticipate vulnerabilities and challenges in the design phase to proactively mitigate risks.

📢 **Academics and research institutions** should conduct research into the impact of these innovations in partnership with tech companies. Governments should provide funding for this research to limit the appearance of conflict of interest in sources of funding for research.

📢 **User communities** themselves should actively use, support, and promote platforms and tools that offer them choice and encourage them to connect with information and one another online.

See our design code for social media (**Appendix A**) for more details. This code can be used to encourage product designers, managers, and developers to implement these features in a variety of ways when creating digital platforms and services.

Solution 2: Establish a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder coalition to promote design choices and tools within the tech sector that enhance user agency.

This solution reinforces Solution 1. It aims to build an influential coalition – including the tech industry – for designing online spaces that optimize for user agency rather than potentially harmful engagement. The design choices made by tech companies have a profound impact on user behavior, information consumption, discourse dynamics, and news and information markets. There is immense opportunity for a group focused on online community design to shift industry practices, priorities, and behaviors to align with broader societal needs.

→ A coalition open to both major established platforms and alternative platforms can create "friendly competition" based on pre-competitive sharing of design concepts and tools. It will also send a credible signal encouraging various players to experiment with implementing user-centric features.

→ There is a universal advantage to a diverse multi-stakeholder group sharing the challenge, distributing responsibility, and coordinating a response.

→ It also can provide opportunities for academic and civil society researchers to track design experiments and their results.

→ This kind of coalition can provide benefits both to the industry and the public as a learning lab and a forum to increase dialogue and transparency about design choices and their impacts.

Any coalition should include "first movers" and experts at the forefront of these innovations and thought leadership, as well as industry executives who oversee design decisions, middleware providers, digital citizenship experts, and users themselves to demo these innovations and catalyze the broader industry shift.

CALL TO ACTION

📢 **Innovators, social media companies, and other technology organizations** should join up to model the feasibility and impact of design choices and user tools that amplify user agency, promote constructive interaction, and diversity in dialogue, while respecting free speech and remaining neutral regarding political content.

📢 **Researchers and scholars** should collaborate with industry to provide insights (e.g., from cognitive science, social psychology, and cultural and digital anthropology), conduct audits, and develop ethical guidelines for design choices.

📢 **Consumer advocacy organizations and users** themselves should be engaged to share perspectives and values on what constitutes constructive digital discourse, as participants in design experiments, and as reviewers and interpreters of the results.

See our proposal for a joint design innovation coalition and education package (**Appendix B**) for more details, which can be used to catalyze first movers, designers, funders, experts, and others in movement-building.

Solution 3: Raise awareness among users about choices they can make and tools they can use to better manage their online experiences and foster broad-based user demand for higher quality platform designs and tools.

This solution pairs with **Solution 2**, emphasizing a bottom-up shift in the public narrative and understanding in tandem to the industry shift. It centers on users and communities, and the impact "voting with their feet" can have on the market and society. When users are aware of their choices and use tools effectively, they can demand ethical and user-centric technology products and services and potenially influence market dynamics.

Specific activities include raising users' understanding of the choices, features, and tools at their disposal to actively curate their online experiences, managing the content and interactions encountered on digital platforms. Users should have the knowledge and know-how to effectively protect their interests. Their actions should reflect a deep understanding of the digital landscape and the consequences of their choices and interactions.

CALL TO ACTION

Consumer advocacy organizations and civil society should advocate for the cultural shift described above by raising awareness and providing resources to users so they can better manage their online experiences and demand better technologies and tools.

Education organizations should focus on programming that develops this knowledge, and **tech companies** should participate in these education efforts by proactively showing users the tools and features available to them to better navigate online spaces.

Platforms, alongside the media that cover them and the agencies that regulate them, can better promote, and make accessible existing tools.

See our proposal for a joint design innovation coalition and education package (**Appendix B**) for more details, which can be used to catalyze first movers, designers, funders, experts, and others in movement-building.

Solution 4: Explore and support the adoption of content-neutral policies that promote transparency, interoperability, designs that optimize for user choice, and digital public infrastructure, while respecting free speech.

Our first three solutions focus on voluntary approaches by the tech industry and stakeholders with a shared interest in constructive digital discourse. With substantial engagement by the industry, voluntary approaches could dramatically improve the quality of user experience on social media platforms.

At the same time, we recognize that there may be appropriate and constructive roles for public policy and regulation, whether as a complement to or a substitute for voluntary action. Policy that focuses on enabling healthy competition in the tech industry can complement voluntary initiatives. Where needed, regulatory requirements can ensure that minimum standards are met and create greater public transparency regarding industry design decisions and their impacts.

Our policy recommendations reflect the group's disciplinary diversity and the wide array of perspectives at this table. Our dialogue on the role of government policy and on specific policy options leads us to offer policy ideas that balance free speech, user empowerment, and innovation.

➤ Content-agnostic policies provide a framework for achieving balance between empowering users and mitigating harms, and they also respect and uphold First Amendment free speech protections.

➤ User empowerment means that users should be able to make informed decisions about the platforms they use, the content they consume, and the digital interactions they have, without undue influence or manipulation by the tech industry, the government, or other social and political actors.

➤ Innovation means that policy should shape the commercial environment for the tech industry in ways that make it clear what impacts platforms are having on users and society and incentivize responsiveness to evidence of both positive and negative impacts.

➤ In addition to staying within content neutral and First Amendment bounds, policies should not carve out different rules for different platforms.

Content-neutral policies: Policies that do not discriminate based on the content or viewpoints of digital disinformation.

Transparency: Transparency in the digital realm refers to making algorithms, data collection practices, and content moderation policies more visible and understandable to researchers and the public.

Interoperability: Interoperability refers to the capability of different digital platforms and services to work together seamlessly. In this context, it means ensuring that users can easily move their data or content from one platform to another without restrictions, or that middleware providers can interoperate with platforms to provide additional functionalities.

Consistent with these policy goals, we propose several high-level mechanisms that policymakers can consider both as modifications of existing proposals on national and state levels. We also offer fresher suggestions that we believe have a higher chance of receiving broad-based support than, for example, Section 230 amendments. We frame these ideas primarily as incentives, rather than mandates.

➡ **Transparency:** Policy should provide incentives, if not requirements, for platforms to allow outside researchers access to data on how platform design and user tools affect user experiences with online discourse – both harmful and positive. Safe harbor provisions should allow platforms to share data with researchers while preserving competitiveness and protecting privileged data. While transparency is essential, accountability and due process requirements for platforms also may be appropriate where platforms have demonstrably failed to rectify known harms that were within their power to address.

➡ **Interoperability:** Governments can enact laws that ensure platforms facilitate interoperability and data portability, allowing users to access and export their data, content, and connections easily; this encourages competition and innovation, prevents lock-in, and expands user choice. Limiting platform statutory liability for misuse or misconduct by users of third-party apps or extensions via the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) and Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) can allow middleware providers to flourish. Government can also prioritize funding for those that use shared and open protocols. This funding can take the form of research grants or fellowships through the **NTIA, FCC, NSF**, and other **grant-making agencies**. Of note, the NTIA has already established the **"Innovation Fund"** to develop interoperable cellular networks. Tax breaks and incentives for platforms who voluntarily adhere to the principles of interoperability are also options. Proposals around interoperability should anticipate and account for vulnerabilities so they do not inadvertently expand harassing and brigading campaigns across platforms. Encouraging tech developers to anticipate vulnerabilities and challenges in the design phase fosters proactive problem-solving and risk mitigation.

➡ **Designs for user choice:** The goal is to encourage the principles of user agency in digital interactions by regulating design practices. Governments can pass laws that stipulate default privacy settings for digital platforms, maximizing user privacy, data protection, and content control. Users should be given the choice to opt into data collection and sharing, rather than having to opt out. Opt-in requirements supported by plain language explanations of user privacy choices can bring the platforms closer to the goal of ensuring informed consent. Legislators can also establish standards that require digital platforms to adopt user-centric interface designs, that prioritize clarity, accessibility, and user control over content and data.

➡ **Digital (and local) public infrastructure:** Governments can disburse public funding, grants, and technological support for the development and maintenance of platforms that are locally developed and controlled, and that service communities.

CALL TO ACTION

The adoption of such policies should involve a collective effort from governments, tech companies, and civil society to ensure a more transparent and equitable digital landscape.

We encourage **government bodies** to enact content-neutral polices that enable transparency and interoperability, promote user choice, and invest in digital public spaces.

Tech companies should make their data and processes more accessible, optimize for user choice rather than certain engagement signals, and provide access to external researchers and developers.

Civil society groups can hold regulators and digital platforms accountable for adhering to content-neutral policies.

See our **policy document** (**Appendix C**) for more details, which can be used to brief legislators and other influential actors on these statutory issues.

FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Pillar 2: Citizens with the awareness and social and cognitive skills to navigate, connect with and understand each other, and act constructively online

Solution 5: Pilot an innovative education package that empowers users with the social and cognitive skills to leverage the positive features of social media, build resilience to digital harms, and engage with information and each other more constructively and responsibly.

This solution dovetails with **Solution 3**, focusing on user and educator-side solutions. It emphasizes the need to integrate social and cognitive skills with traditional digital and media literacy skills to effectively empower users to take advantage of the beneficial aspects of social media, such as connecting with others, appreciating diverse perspectives, and sharing information and experiences. This also entails participating in online interactions and discussions in a manner that promotes healthy discourse, empathy, and responsible behavior.

Our group learned from several existing efforts that equip users with digital skills. **PEN America** runs digital and media literacy workshops, listening sessions, and train-the-trainer workshops that are community-oriented and multilingual. **Street Epistemology** has self-directed learning courses and trainings for the workplace that teach the Socratic method and dialogue. The **Cognitive Immunology Research Collaborative (CIRCE)** has workshops and resources that build mental immunity and teach the Socratic method and healing dialogue, targeted towards organizations, workplaces, classrooms, and teams. **Finland** implemented a comprehensive media literacy program in schools that effectively made students more discerning when critically evaluating online content. **Miami Freedom Project** has multilingual civic engagement programs to combat disinformation and misinformation. **Stanford University's Strengthening Democracy Challenge** identified 25 effective, short interventions that reduce anti-democratic attitudes, and support for partisan violence and partisan animosity.

There are opportunities to build on these and other efforts and to deepen the integration of insights from cognitive science and social psychology into skill-building programs. To help users build the awareness and skills necessary to avoid toxicity and engage constructively in digital and media literacy requires strategies from cognitive science, social psychology, and the bridge-building field. The first differentiator of our proposal is that it integrates evidence-based insights from these disciplines that address the psychological, socio-affective, and technical aspects of toxic digital discourse. The second core innovation is raising users' awareness about their own psychosocial limitations with cues from their digital environment, such as learning nudges.

Our group identified the following **skills** as the ones most crucial to teach:

Social and bridge-building skills:

- Active and empathetic listening
- Dialogue across differences
- Constructive conflict and non-violent communication

Cognitive skills:

- Adversarial idea-testing and problem-solving
- Resilience to identity-protective cognition
- Algorithmic and search literacy to recognize and resist persuasive or manipulative design tactics, and better evaluate information

We propose pilot testing an innovative education package that cultivates these cognitive and social skills for online spaces. Our group identified several target domains for skill-building programs:

Youth and youth-serving organizations, as youth are the most active online and the future of our society

Local governments, who must manage public meetings on polarizing issues
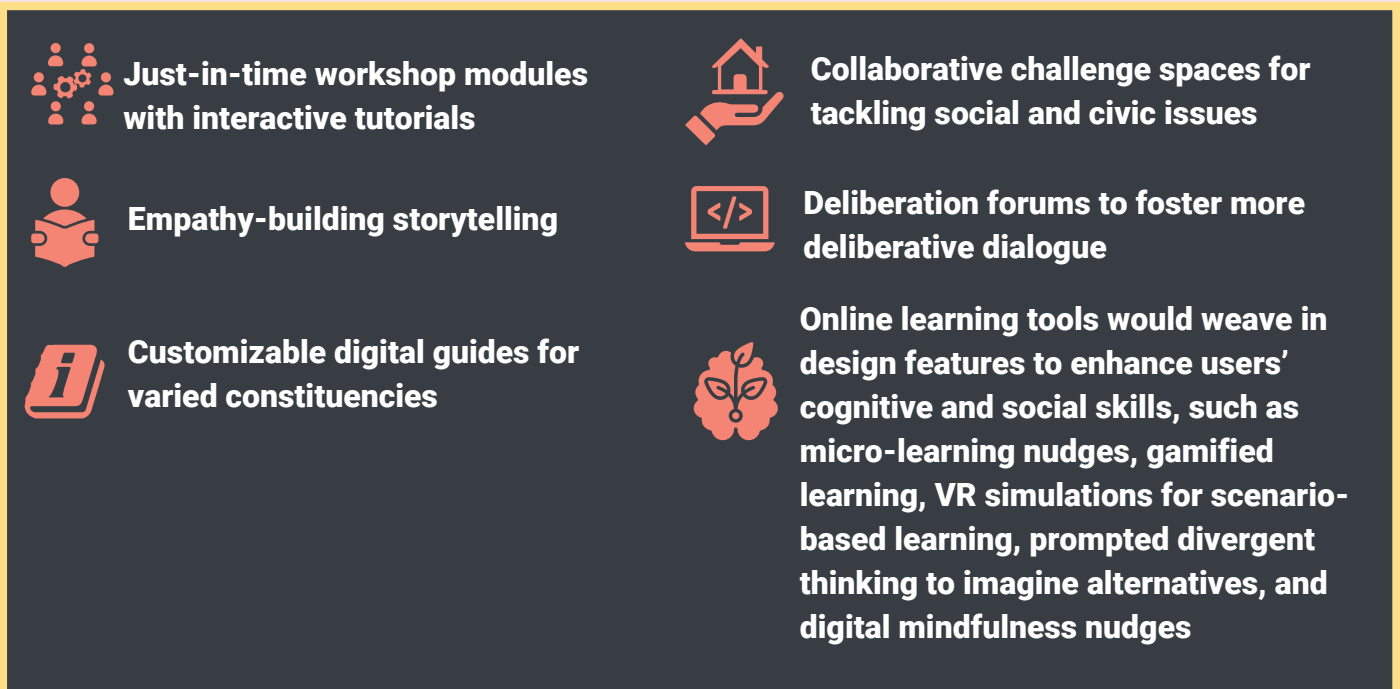
Workplaces, which are hubs where we are most likely to be exposed to different people and viewpoints

Online communities, which struggle to moderate and manage division and disinformation in their spaces

Illustratively, elements of this package would include:

Just-in-time workshop modules with interactive tutorials

Collaborative challenge spaces for tackling social and civic issues

Empathy-building storytelling

Deliberation forums to foster more deliberative dialogue

Customizable digital guides for varied constituencies

Online learning tools would weave in design features to enhance users' cognitive and social skills, such as micro-learning nudges, gamified learning, VR simulations for scenario-based learning, prompted divergent thinking to imagine alternatives, and digital mindfulness nudges

This package will be piloted and then refined with learnings from our target audiences.

CALL TO ACTION

Tech companies can develop tools, features, and resources to educate and support users in building social and cognitive skills.

Workplaces, local governments, community moderators and managers, community-based organizations and non-profits, and education institutions should serve as sites for teaching these skills.

Governments can pass legislation that allocates funding for this type of educational programming.

Civil society, education nonprofits and universities can curate, in a disciplined way, a warehouse of effective interventions and a community of practice on applying these tools to digital discourse.

See our **proposal for a joint design innovation coalition and education package** (Appendix B) for more details, which outlines a plan for workshops, guides, and design interventions that encourage the development and practice of the skills outlined above.

FOCUS ON NEWS AND INFORMATION

Pillar 3: Trustworthy news and information providers who promote shared facts and understanding, and meet community needs

Solution 6: Forge new, mutually beneficial models and partnerships among news providers, advertisers and intermediaries, funders, social media companies and AI companies to ensure diversified, sustained, and transparent support for news providers.

Sustainable and ethical journalism is vital for democracy – it provides citizens with reliable information to make informed decisions. The stakes to resolve these challenges are high, especially **during elections**.

The current news landscape faces significant challenges, characterized by disrupted traditional advertising-based business models, opaque and uncertain funding, the decline of local news, and the rise of news deserts and information vacuums. The result is a reduction in journalism and journalistic quality, with communities lacking access to vital news. The global digital advertising industry, **estimated to be $600 billion** and growing, grapples with **opacity from advertising technology companies and agencies obscuring bad actors and poor performance**, harming advertisers and society by funding disinformation. Many news providers are dependent on tech platforms for distribution, resulting in a lack of control over their content and revenue streams.

Tech platforms have established partnerships and offered support to news providers. For example, the **Meta Journalism Project** offers trainings, grants, and tools to news organizations, and the **Google News Initiative** provides funding for innovation, fact-checking initiatives, and digital tools for journalism. However, these are insufficient to guarantee longer-term sustainability for news providers. **Press Forward,** a coalition of 20 donors, formed a national initiative to support local news and information with over $500 million. Philanthropic giving is important, but insufficient – for-profit and other types of funding will be crucial.

We propose a complementary effort – an industry convening that is additive in its focus on all troubled media sectors, including legacy, local and non-profit; on platforms and digital spaces; and, creating more pluralistic, mutually beneficial, and revenue-producing funding models.

The industry – news organizations, advertisers, funders, tech platforms, and journalism and media ethics organizations – needs to collaborate on sufficient, diversified, and sustainable funding for ethical news. To unlock funding and build trust in news, the industry should explore:

➡️ **Strategies, models, and policies** that ensure sustained financial support for news providers;

➡️ **New collaborations and partnership opportunities** that ensure sustained financial support for news providers who are focused on local news, investigative news, and nonpartisan news;

➤ **AI-enabled revenue opportunities,** which includes what news organizations do with AI to make a profit, and opportunities for partnerships with AI companies, such as monetizing and sharing news content to train AI models;

➤ **Incentives and accountability for ethical reporting**, grounded in effective trust-building practices; and,

➤ Improved **dissemination of ethical journalism** on social media platforms.

Solutions should be:

➤ **Mutually beneficial** collaborative arrangements between various stakeholders.

➤ **Diversified** by a broad range of financial and structural support, spanning funding, advertising revenue, technology infrastructure, and distribution channels.

➤ **Sustainable**, by ensuring news providers receive consistent and long-term support to maintain their operations and protect ethical journalism, a key enabler of our democracy.

➤ **Transparent,** with funding for news being publicly accessible, clear, accountable, and free from undue influence to ensure its independence and integrity.

CALL TO ACTION

📢 **Social media companies** along with other **tech platforms** should continue to establish partnerships and provide financial support to news providers while ensuring transparency and editorial independence.

📢 **Advertisers and advertising intermediaries** can support news providers through advertising campaigns and by encouraging ethical advertising practices that align with quality journalism.

📢 **Funders,** including philanthropists, investors, cooperatives, publicly and privately-owned media, and foundations should partner with and fund these new collaborative models.

📢 **Intermediaries,** such as aggregators and content distributors, can collaborate with news providers to ensure fair compensation for content and promote quality journalism.

📢 **News providers** should actively seek out and engage in these partnerships and adapt to new business models while upholding journalistic standards and integrity. This should include news and information providers spanning local, national, and international levels, for-profit and nonprofit, and public and private organizations.

📢 **Journalism and media ethics organizations,** including fact-checkers, should contribute their expertise on what constitutes ethical reporting and what practices build trust with citizens.

📢 **Governments** can create policies that incentivize support for journalism, protect media diversity, and ensure fair competition in the digital advertising space.

See our proposal for an industry convening (Appendix D) for more details, which focuses on unlocking funding and trust in news.

Solution 7: Support the development of evidence-based trust-building interventions and best practices for news providers, especially during election cycles.

Even if we could flood the news ecosystem with accurate and credible information, what matters most is whether users perceive it to be trustworthy or not. This is a challenge because many communities, especially the most marginalized ones, have valid critiques of information providers that have led to trust deficits.

There is some research into practical interventions that build trust in information that can serve as a starting point. For example, the MIT Election Lab found that voters do not merely want to be told that elections are safe, even in a bipartisan message – factual videos explaining why elections are safe by following the steps election officials take to secure citizens' votes were most persuasive. The University of Texas at Austin found that that providing readers with supplementary information on how a journalist approached a story – an "explain your process" box – was effective in building trust of news organization.

We need research on both short-term factors that make people trust content and on a sustainable approach to maintaining credibility and a trustworthy brand identity in the longer term. We also need to measure these factors over time.

The Collaborative encourages further research into and uptake of learnings on effective best practices for immediate trust and longer-term trustworthiness. This includes:

Identifying key credibility indicators that lead a source or piece of content to be perceived as trustworthy.

Developing new interventions and strategies based on fresh research findings. This evidence base can be driven by news organizations, social anthropologists and psychologists, and communication and marketing experts.

Disseminating these findings to news providers and helping them adopt and implement trust-building practices.

Fostering collaboration between news providers to create a united front committed to rebuilding public trust.

Aggregating existing research on effective trust-building strategies, best practices, and case studies.

A/B testing to compare interventions and see what resonates best with information consumers.

Providing evaluation resources & tools that assist news providers in assessing and improving their trustworthiness.

Ensuring sensitivity to specific community contexts and needs, especially those that have historically distrusted news or found themselves in news deserts or information vacuums.

CALL TO ACTION

📢 **News organizations, academics and public interest researchers, and tech platforms** should partner to ensure a shared approach to definitions, methods, and data stewardship when conducting research on trust in news.

📢 **Experts across journalism, social anthropology, psychology, marketing, and communications** should apply a cross-disciplinary lens to the research to understand perceived credibility and the credibility gap between true and false articles.

📢 **Governments and tech platforms** should support this research by providing funding and other resources.

Solution 8: Support the development of a multifunctional tool that gives users more understanding of ethical journalism and provides users with choice among ethical information sources.

Users today are inundated with vast amounts of information, making it challenging to discern credible sources from unreliable ones and leading to confusion and mistrust. Fostering understanding of what constitutes trustworthy reporting can help users better navigate an overloaded and polluted information ecosystem.

This tool would aggregate several functions:

👁 **Make users aware of what kind of news they consume and how they consume it and empower them to curate their information feed** more mindfully. This involves signposting what constitutes ethical journalism to increase users' comprehension, as well as giving users the ability to select from a variety of sources that adhere to these standards.

🚩 **Point out false or misleading narratives, and the times that a news outlet published or spread them.** Credibility ratings can be quite polarizing and are subject to political bias, but there is value in pointing out sources that repeatedly spread false information.

▦ **Offer transparency** into who funds various news outlets.

🧑 **Facilitate the provision of user feedback** on the tool

⚖ **Assess the ideological bias** of articles, expose readers to a variety of sources, and nudge them towards considering other perspectives.

🤖 **Explain and make more transparent how AI is used** in the information landscape, for example, to manage your newsfeed, to write stories, and more.

👥 **Prompt users to engage with educational resources** that build digital and media literacy and critical thinking.

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON DIGITAL DISCOURSE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

This tool could take the form of a platform or an extension. There are existing tools that implement a few, but not all, of these features. **AllSides** assesses the political bias of prominent media outlets and gives readers a sampling of news stories on the same topic from the political left, center, and right. **Ad Fontes Media** and **NewsGuard** provide users with information about the credibility and bias of news sources, helping them make more informed choices.

CALL TO ACTION

Developers and media companies or organizations building these tools should craft a compelling narrative for potential funders, focusing on how the tool uniquely intersects design, user choice and empowerment, and digital and media literacy.

Funders, including philanthropic foundations, technology companies, media companies, and academic institutions should support the development of such tools as a relevant solution to promote better digital discourse.

Tech platforms should integrate these tools into their newsfeeds.

News organizations should collaborate with the builders of these tools to ensure their content is accessible through the multifunctional tool and adhere to ethical journalistic practices.

Educational institutions can incorporate the tool into digital and media literacy programs to empower students with skills to navigate the information landscape responsibly.

Solution 9: Support an independent and voluntary certification process for ethical journalism that rewards transparency, accuracy, viewpoint-neutrality, diversity, and plurality, and safeguards press freedom.

The current media landscape faces significant challenges with the acceleration of false and manipulated content, decades of hyper-partisan talk radio and cable news, and the **growth of partisan messaging masquerading as local news**. Communities struggle to find trusted and ethical sources of news. A certification process for ethical journalism would build public trust in journalism and promote a more empowered and informed citizenry. This process can incentivize ethical reporting, signal quality, protect journalists, and take the onus off platforms and advertisers when it comes to deciding what is credible and what is not.

There are several ethics efforts and standards in the news space. For example:

→ The Society of Professional Journalists has a voluntary **code of ethics** that functions as a guide that encourages everyone who engages in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium;

→ The Online News Association has a **build your own ethics code** project, which provides journalists and news organizations with the ownership and flexibility in creating an ethics code that meets their needs in a widely varied profession; and,

→ Several fact-checking organizations and media watchdogs assess news stories.

We acknowledge these existing efforts and encourage their continued development. We recommend that any ethics certification project consider the following features to make the process more comprehensive and tackle media integrity challenges at their roots:

➡️ The process should be **independent, voluntary, and viewpoint neutral, and be run by a diverse group of stakeholders.**

➡️ It should reward **transparency**.

➡️ It should reward **accuracy**.

➡️ It should reward **diversity** and **plurality**, both in terms of how information providers report on stories and the composition of newsrooms, but also in establishing the certification process itself. This approach will ensure the certification process accounts for factors that consumers find meaningful across urban and rural geographies, ideology, age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and more.

➡️ It should safeguard **press freedom**.

➡️ Consider the establishment of an **ethics board**, a body akin to the American Board of Internal Medicine, a non-profit that issues certifications to doctors, which conveys to their peers and to the public that they are equipped to deliver excellent patient care.

➡️ Establish **accountability signals and mechanism**s to incentivize adherence to ethical standards.

➡️ Make **flexible benchmarks** informed by the specific needs of communities of identity and place.

➡️ **Award certifications to less traditional information providers and platform**s, such as independent journalists, podcasts, newsletters, and Substack.

➡️ Pair the certification process with **educational signposts and initiatives** for information providers and consumers to cultivate a culture of ethical journalism and ethical information consumption.

➡️ Consider **design-based solutions** that make ethical journalism more accessible to readers. For example, one could build a widget that shows users who funds the news they read or facilitates interactions with writers and editors behind the stories.

➡️ Ensure the process ultimately **benefits news organizations** and does not create a net financial or reputational burden.

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON DIGITAL DISCOURSE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

CALL TO ACTION

📢 **National news outlets**, including traditional, non-traditional, for-profit, and non-profit, should seek out the certification to strengthen their credibility, set an industry standard for ethical journalism, and inspire others to follow suit. **National cable and radio** can rebuild public trust through the certification. **Local outlets** can elevate their reputation by adhering to guidelines and enhance their communities' resilience to toxic discourse and false or manipulated information.

📢 **Tech platforms** should use the certification to guide how they promote information, and nudge users towards ethical journalism. For example, [Microsoft partnered with the Trust Project](#), a non-profit consortium of news organizations, to create advertisements directing internet users to a list of trust indicators to assess a news site's credibility.

📢 **Community leaders** can socialize the certification via social media, community fora, and local events to build a broad base of citizens that understand how to use the ethics certification to seek out information and demand a certified news process. This should include an explicit focus on **youth and influencers** as well.

📢 **Advertisers** can support uptake of the certification in newsrooms, to build a more attuned audience, ensure their ads are placed on sites their consumers value, and satisfy their social impact goals.

📢 **Educational institutions** can partner with the body awarding the certifications to provide workshops on ethical reporting and decision-making to newsrooms, and digital and media literacy opportunities to readers.

Solution 10: Support the development of policies that offer fair payment options between platforms and news providers while respecting free speech.

The ongoing disruption of the journalism industry has raised concerns about the vitality of our democracy and the availability of ethical, reliable, and independent news. In response to this crisis, various proposals have emerged to establish compensation structures that require tech platforms to remunerate news organizations for the traffic they drive. While there is broad consensus on the need to support journalism financially, the implementation of such mechanisms has proven contentious, and has pitted the tech, journalism, and policy sectors against each other.

In the absence of meaningful industry action and collaboration and the complexities of designing viable legislation, we can reimagine the relationship between news providers and the platforms. There are potential policy opportunities that galvanize broader consensus and ensure a more just and sustainable future for news providers, while respecting free speech, avoiding entanglements with false and manipulated content, and safeguarding anti-competitive practices:

➡️ **Tax and distribute:** Rather than having platforms pay directly for certain articles or outlets, which runs the risk of compelling payment for harmful or false information, governments can tax platforms and redistribute the money to outlets that are measurably driving the most revenue and engagement on the platforms.

➡️ **Localized pro rata:** The above proposal can be paired with a pro-rata system, where local journalism is supported by a fund that is distributed to communities based on population.

➡️ **Copyright protections:** Extend or modify copyright protections to adequately protect and compensate the work of journalists.

➡️ **Grant and board systems:** Create systems that can differentiate between hard news and punditry, opinion, or "infotainment." While emphasizing that these forms of news are not always without value, distinguishing and exempting them from this program makes it clear that the focus is protecting and strengthening journalism. Funding support can be distributed akin to the NIH grant system. A board can also ensure that **freelance journalists, who represent 34% of the journalism industry, are not excluded from these proposals.**

➡️ **Retain platform autonomy:** **Legal scholars have argued** that prohibitions against viewpoint discrimination could make currently pending bills unconstitutional. The Journalism Competition and Preservation Act (JCPA), which would enable a compensation structure at the federal level and has made substantial progress abroad, has received **considerable opposition** from First Amendment and technology legal scholars due to **allowing for compelled speech**. However, there are ways policymakers could pursue this idea within constitutional bounds.

CALL TO ACTION

The adoption of such policies should involve a collective effort from governments, tech companies, and news organizations to ensure a fair and sustainable information landscape.

📢 We encourage **government bodies** to enact policies that reimagine the compensation structure between news providers and platforms and propose options that are mutually beneficial and respect free speech bounds.

📢 **Tech companies** should continue supporting the journalism sector and explore new collaborative partnerships and models that allow news to flourish.

📢 **Civil society groups** can hold regulators and digital platforms accountable for adhering to policies.

See our policy document (**Appendix E**) for more details, which can be used to brief legislators and other influential actors on these policy opportunities.

The *Convergence Collaborative on Digital Discourse* came together across sectoral and ideological divides to tackle deep challenges around digital discourse and to craft solutions that foster resilience, connectedness, and wellbeing in our democracy and communities while maintaining free speech. We identified several tools, pilots, convenings, and policies that can make our online and offline worlds more constructive, safe, and open. We calibrated these solutions to maximize effectiveness and feasibility by balancing perspectives across sectors.

DESIGN

We call on the tech industry, academia, consumer advocacy organizations, civil society, user communities, policymakers, and regulators to:

- ✓ Experiment with content-neutral designs that increase user agency, which can be carried forward by researchers and platforms of any size.

- ✓ Pair this experimentation with a coalition of platforms committed to these principles, creating both a moral and business imperative to designing and implementing these tools.

- ✓ Expand transparency, interoperability, pro-user optimizations, and digital public infrastructure.

AWARENESS AND SKILLS

We call on tech platforms, workplaces, local governments, community-based organizations, and schools to:

- ✓ Create bottom-up educational resources that address how users interface with platforms, information, and each other.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

We call on news and information providers of all types, tech platforms and the tech industry, AI companies, advertisers and intermediaries, funders, media ethics organizations, academia and experts, policymakers and regulators, community leaders, and civil society to:

- ✓ Create healthier financial relationships between news organizations and tech platforms through collaborative dialogue.
- ✓ Create a comprehensive landscape review of trust-building mechanisms.

- ✓ Develop a user tool, providing users with more information about ethical journalism, and more choice over the news they consume.

- ✓ Develop a comprehensive certification to expand consumer trust.

- ✓ Propose policies that offer fair payment options between platforms and news providers.

LOOKING FORWARD

To these ends, we have created briefing materials and proposals for any relevant stakeholder to advance at any level. There is a role for every player in every industry – from platform users all the way up to CEOs, and including editors, designers, product managers, teachers, lawmakers, and many more. Each of the solutions described in this Blueprint for Action is specifically designed to be modular and scalable – meaning any one solution, implemented at any level, is poised to have impact. This impact will grow exponentially as more stakeholders step up and affirm their commitment to better online spaces, empowered users, a stronger democracy, and more resilient communities.

We encourage stakeholders of all kinds to join us in advancing these proposals.

This Blueprint also offers more detailed proposals and resources you can start using today to improve digital discourse.

STAY UP TO DATE

Stay up to date with this project's future impact and Convergence's continued work on digital discourse, and democracy and civic engagement more broadly by **signing up for updates**.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Design Code for Social Media
APPENDIX B: Design Innovation Coalition and Education Package
APPENDIX C: Policy Opportunities to Support Better Social Media Design
APPENDIX D: Industry Convening on Unlocking Funding and Trust in News
APPENDIX E: Policy Opportunities for Unlocking Funding for News

PARTICIPANT BIOS

Alex Abdo, JD | Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University

Alex Abdo is the inaugural litigation director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University. He has been involved in nearly all of the Institute's legal projects, including a lawsuit challenging the government's system of "prepublication review," which requires millions of former intelligence agency employees to submit their manuscripts to government censors prior to publication; the Institute's challenge to the constitutionality of President Trump's blocking of critics from his @realDonaldTrump Twitter account; and the Institute's efforts to persuade Facebook to create a safe harbor for research and journalism focused on its platform.

Prior to joining the Institute, Abdo worked for eight years at the ACLU, where he argued the appeal that resulted in the Second Circuit's invalidation of the NSA's call-records program. Abdo graduated from Yale College and Harvard Law School. After law school, he clerked for the Hon. Barbara M.G. Lynn, U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas, and for the Hon. Rosemary Barkett, U.S. Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals.
Twitter: @alexanderabdo

Dan Ariely, PhD | Duke University

Dan Ariely is the James B. Duke Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University and a founding member of the **Center for Advanced Hindsight**. He does research in behavioral economics on the irrational ways people behave, described in plain language.

His immersive introduction to irrationality took place as he overcame injuries sustained in an explosion. During a **range of treatments** in the burn department he faced a variety of irrational behaviors that were immensely painful and persistent. He began researching ways to better deliver painful and unavoidable treatments to patients. Ariely became engrossed with the idea that we repeatedly and predictably make the wrong decisions in many aspects of our lives and that research could help change some of those patterns.

Irrationally Yours, **Predictably Irrational**, **The Upside of Irrationality**, **The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty**, the movie **Dishonesty**, and the card game **Irrational Game** are his attempt to describe his research findings in non-academic terms, so that more people will discover the excitement of behavioral economics and use some of the insights to enrich their own lives.

Roy Austin, Jr., JD | Meta

Roy Austin is Vice President of Civil Rights and Deputy General Counsel at Meta. Prior to joining Meta, Roy was with the law firm of Harris, Wiltshire & Grannis LLP, where he was a partner specializing in criminal defense and civil rights law. He has over 25 years of experience working as both a civil rights lawyer and advocate, having begun his career as an honors trial attorney with the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice. He spent many years in the federal government in several prominent roles, including as a Senior Assistant US Attorney in the Civil Rights Unit of the DC US Attorney's Office and as a Deputy Assistant Attorney General (DAAG) in the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division from 2010 to 2014.

Richard Baron, MD, MACP | American Board of Internal Medicine

Dr. Baron is board-certified in internal medicine and geriatrics and is president and CEO of the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) and the ABIM Foundation. Dr. Baron practiced general internal medicine and geriatrics in Philadelphia for almost 30 years at Greenhouse Internists, P.C., leaving practice to become the Group Director of Seamless Care Models at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Innovation Center, where he led efforts related to accountable care organizations and primary care. Until joining the federal government, Dr. Baron served on the board of the National Quality Forum as well as the Standards Committee of National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). Dr. Baron received an English degree from Harvard and his medical degree from Yale. He completed house staff training at New York University-Bellevue Medical Center and served a three-year obligation in the National Health Service Corps in rural Tennessee.
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Kathleen Carley, PhD | Carnegie Mellon University

Dr. Carley is a Professor of Societal Computing in the School of Computer Science and Director of the Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems (CASOS) and Informed Democracy & Social-cybersecurity (IDeaS) at Carnegie Mellon University. She is also an IEEE Fellow and CEO of Netanomics. BS Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ph.D. Harvard University, and H.D. University of Zurich.

She received the USGA Academic Award at GEOINT 2018 for her work on geo-spatially enabled network analytics, the Allen Newell award for research excellence, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Sociology and Computers Section of the ASA (2001), and the INSNA Simmel Award for advances in social networks (2011). Her research combines social science and computer science to address complex social and organizational issues. Her pioneering research led to the areas of computational social science, dynamic network analysis, and social cybersecurity, and to new technologies for text-mining (AutoMap & NetMapper), simulating networks (Construct), and high dimensional and dynamic network analysis and visualization (ORA-PRO,ORA-WEB). She has over 400 publications and has served on multiple National Academies panels.

Ari Cohn, JD | TechFreedom

Ari Cohn is a Chicago attorney who specializes in First Amendment, defamation, and **c**ontent moderation law. He is Free Speech Counsel at TechFreedom, where he works to ensure that technology policy and law comports with the First Amendment. Prior to joining TechFreedom, Ari has been an attorney with the U.S. Department of Education, Director of the Individual Rights Defense Project at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education and has been in private practice both as a solo practitioner and as an associate attorney at a large international law firm. He has practiced and authored briefs in federal and state courts across the country, and regularly presents to audiences at conferences and events throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Ari obtained his J.D. cum laude from Cornell Law School after receiving his B.A. at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
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Michelle Ferrier, PhD | TrollBusters

Dr. Ferrier is executive director of the Media Innovation Collaboratory, an incubator for media and technology communication solutions. She is the founder of TrollBusters, an educational service for journalists experiencing digital harms. Dr. Ferrier is an award-winning technologist, journalist, scholar, researcher, author and speaker around technology and digital/online spaces. Her pioneering research mapping media deserts and monitoring and modeling digital harms has won her grant support from organizations like the Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund, and others. Dr. Ferrier has won international, national, and professional recognition including three silver 2022 Anthem Awards, the AEJMC Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award for press freedom work, and the Dewey Community Service Award from SXSW. Named a 2018 Top 10 Educators to Watch by MediaShift, Dr. Ferrier has led hundreds of presentations on engaged journalism and digital technologies and developed curricula in digital media, media innovation and entrepreneurship, and online journalism.

Barbara Fister | Project Information Literacy

Barbara is a librarian who taught college students how information works for three decades before becoming a scholar-in-residence with **Project Information Literacy (PIL)**. She developed and taught courses, including "**Clickbait, Bias, and Propaganda in Information Networks**," and co-authored the 2020 PIL research report,*Information Literacy in the Age of Algorithms*. Her PIL Provocations essay, "**Lizard People in the Library**," was adapted into an article for *The Atlantic*. Her most recent publication for PIL is "**Principled Uncertainty: Why Learning to Ask Good Questions Matters More than Finding Answers**."

John Gable | AllSides

John Gable is the founder and CEO of AllSides. He often writes about bias, news media, polarization, and how technology impacts these things, or offers a perspective generally overlooked about controversial topics. Recently, his writings have been published by The Christian Science Monitor, The Huffington Post and The Cook Political Report. Most relevant to his current position, John was the PM Team Lead for Netscape Navigator, the iconic web browser, and previous to that had a career in politics. John was previously a Republican operative, working for three Senate majority leaders (Howard Baker, Trent Lott, and Mitch McConnell), the Republican National Committee, and George H.W. Bush. But most of John's career has been in technology. In addition to being on the original team for Mozilla while at Netscape, he also joined the original teams for Microsoft Office in Seattle and ZoneAlarm for Check Point Software in San Francisco. He also co-founded Kavi Corporation, an early provider of web-based applications and online collaboration.

Ed Goeas | The Tarrance Group

Ed Goeas is President and CEO of The Tarrance Group, one of the most respected and successful Republican survey research and strategy teams in American politics today. Widely recognized as one of the country's leading political strategists, Goeas is an often-sought-after consultant and strategist. In recognition of the number of winning campaigns conducted by The Tarrance Group, Ed Goeas and his partners have been awarded multiple "Republican Pollster of the Year" awards by the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC).

In addition to his campaign work, Goeas has worked in partnership with Democratic pollster Celinda Lake over the last 20 years on the nationally recognized and award-winning "Georgetown Institute of Politics and Public Service Battleground Poll." Lake and Goeas have also conducted an array of bipartisan issue work for organizations across the nation, providing a balanced, bipartisan perspective on the key issues facing the country.

Céline Gounder, MD, ScM, FIDSA | KFF

Dr. Gounder is a Senior Fellow and Editor-at-Large for Public Health at *KFF*. She's also the host and producer of *American Diagnosis* — a conversation about some of the biggest public health challenges across the United States, with insights on topics from teen mental health to opioids and gun violence highlighting the voices of experts and people on the ground working for the health of their communities — and *Epidemic*, a podcast about infectious disease epidemics and pandemics. Season 1 of *Epidemic* covered the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, and Season 2 will go back in time to cover smallpox eradication in South Asia. Dr. Gounder is also a CBS News Medical Contributor and a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and Bellevue Hospital. **Twitter:** *@CelineGounder*

Ravi Iyer, PhD | USC Marshall School Neely Center

Ravi Iyer is the managing director of the Psychology of Technology Institute, which is a project of University of Southern California's Neely Center. Before that, he led data science, research, and product teams across Facebook toward improving the societal impact of social media. He helped co-found and build the initial algorithms for Ranker.com, which is a profitable publisher of crowdsourced lists that serves tens of millions of unique visitors monthly and employs 125-plus people. He has a Ph.D. in social psychology from the University of Southern California and has coauthored of dozens of highly cited empirical articles about individual values, political opinions, polarization, and technology. He has worked with numerous nonprofits fighting polarization. His work across tech and academia has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Atlantic, South by Southwest and numerous other venues.

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Heidi Legg | Harvard University

An American Canadian (born and educated) journalist, Heidi has written extensively about the media landscape from Harvard University: The Fight Against Disinformation in America, A Landscape Study of Emerging US Models in Local News and a sweeping paper about Preserving America's Thought Leader Magazines. She has numerous OpEds explaining and championing pivotal industry topics: local news models, pros and cons of millionaire owners, Facebook's news feed failing local news, amending Section 230, urging transparency for political donations of media owners, and nimble news innovation in the UK published in The Boston Globe, CNN, The Atlantic, USA Today, The Press Gazette and more. Last year, she **indexed the entire US and Canadian Media Ownership landscape** including emerging nonprofits in news (240 and counting) from the Harvard IQSS. She is on the advisory board for University of Vermont's Community News service where college students receive credit for being local beat reporters, now rolling out across other states with funding from the Knight Foundation and Vice Chair of the Utah-based national high school essay competition called "Today's Students, Tomorrow's America" where students write about "Why Democracy Matters."

Jesse Littlewood | Common Cause

Jesse Littlewood is the Vice President for Campaigns with Common Cause, a national democracy advocacy group, and leads the Stopping Cyber Suppression program. Jesse's experience is at the intersection of movement building, democracy, and technology. Jesse has held leadership positions in technology, and the environmental and democracy movements, with organizations including Green Corps, The Public Interest Network and Echo & Co. His leadership in the field brought him to the Harvard Kennedy School of Government as a lecturer, where he designed and taught course titled "Social Change in the Digital Age." Jesse resides in Boston with his family, but these days mostly lives on Zoom calls.

Anthony Magnabosco | Street Epistemology International

Anthony Magnabosco is from San Antonio, Texas and is a Founder and the current Executive Director of the nonprofit Street Epistemology International (SEI), an educational organization that is committed to addressing dysfunction in public and private discourse by encouraging rationality through civil conversation. SEI's goal is to provide people with the resources needed to develop, practice, and promote Street Epistemology, a technique rebuttal approach that is proving to be effective in helping people reflect on the quality of their reasoning and update their confidence in their conclusions to more reasonable positions. Anthony has been involved with Street Epistemology since 2013, where he has given dozens of talks and workshops on Street Epistemology at conferences and events domestically and internationally. Many of his examples have been uploaded to YouTube and demonstrate how the SE approach can be applied to a variety of claims including religion, ghosts, karma, law of attraction, and other social and political topics. Today, tens of thousands of people regularly practice Street Epistemology, the findings from which could very well help to solve the misinformation and disinformation crisis that threatens humanity.

Manu Meel | BridgeUSA

Manu is passionate about empowering young people to bridge our political differences. He believes that the biggest threat to American democracy is negative polarization and growing misunderstanding between Americans. As CEO of BridgeUSA, Manu is currently building the largest and fastest growing student movement to bridge our differences and change how we talk politics. Manu contributes to several news outlets, works on pro-democracy efforts nationally, and advises political leaders on reducing polarization. In the past, Manu interned as an associate at the venture capital firm Amplo and at the Department of State as a political analyst in counterterrorism. His work has been featured in The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other media platforms. In 2022, Manu was recognized on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list for leading BridgeUSA.

Malika Mehrotra | Google

Malika Mehrotra has focused her career on civic engagement and fighting misinformation. She works as a Product Policy Lead at Google, focusing on Information Quality and specifically, Civics and Elections issues. She completed her undergraduate degree in Engineering at Stanford and obtained her MPP/MBA jointly from Harvard's Kennedy School and Stanford's GSB. During graduate school, she wrote her thesis on reducing polarization on social media platforms, with Facebook as her client. Before grad school, Malika worked as a Product Manager at OpenGov and held the role of Operational PM on Hillary Clinton's campaign for the White House. She's also one of the forces behind the Stanford Internet Observatory's **exhaustive report on misinformation in the 2020 Election** where she worked as a graduate Research Assistant.
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Amanda Quraishi | Writer

Q is an independent writer and digital creator. She previously worked as a technologist; educator; podcaster; digital humanist; she passionately advocates for digital privacy and First Amendment Rights; and a fine, upstanding citizen of Austin, Texas.

Kate Ruane | Center for Democracy and Technology

Kate Ruane is the Director of CDT's Free Expression Project. An attorney with a strong background in legal research, Kate is committed to the freedom of speech and to bringing focus to the ways in which strong protections for free expression benefit communities of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and other oft-censored groups. Kate's expertise is expansive and her work spans many issues including the intersection of civil rights and free speech protections, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, online privacy and surveillance, harassment, protecting children online, and disinformation.
**Twitter:** @kate_ruane

Costanza Sciubba Caniglia | Wikimedia Foundation

Costanza Sciubba Caniglia is the Anti-Disinformation Lead at the Wikimedia Foundation. Here, she is responsible for coordinating the Foundation's Anti-disinformation strategy, liaising with the communities and affiliates, and maintaining open lines of communication with governments, civil society organizations, and academia, working with these partners to advocate for effective policy responses to disinformation that support and protect free knowledge.

She previously worked in journalism and public information at the United Nations in New York, including as a spokesperson for Italy on the U.N. Security Council. She is affiliated with the Shorenstein Center at Harvard and is an editor and co-founder of the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review.

She regularly writes and speaks about disinformation and digital governance. She holds a Master of Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School, a B.A. and an M.A. in philosophy from the University La Sapienza of Rome, and a Master of International Relations from the Italian Society for International Organizations (SIOI).
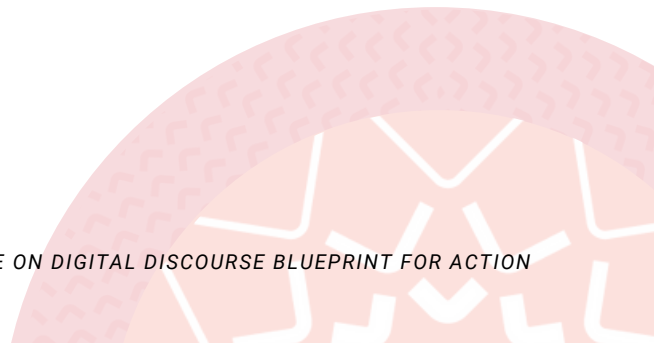
Steve Sloman | Brown University

Steven Sloman is a Professor of Cognitive, Linguistic, & Psychological Sciences. He has taught at Brown since 1992. In 2017 he created the Behavioral Decision Sciences concentration and is currently concentration advisor. He is a Fellow of the Cognitive Science Society, the Society of Experimental Psychologists, the American Psychological Society, and the Eastern Psychological Association. He is the 2020 INSEAD-Sorbonne Université Distinguished Visiting Chair in Behavioural Sciences. His published work includes a 2005 book Causal Models: How We Think about the World and Its Alternatives and a 2017 co-authored book entitled The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone, along with many peer-reviewed scholarly articles and editorials for the general public. His service includes a number of editorial stints including Editor-in-Chief of the journal Cognition from 2015-2018. Along with basic research on cognition, he has done collaborative work with computer scientists, philosophers, health professionals, and political scientists. He has done public and international outreach including serving on the Steering Committee, European Commission Joint Research Council, Enlightenment 2.0 Initiative 2018-2020 and speaking engagements with the Rhode Island Federal Court and the Rhode Island Supreme Court. He has been funded by NSF, NIH, NASA, Unilever Corporation, the John Templeton Foundations, and with other small grants.

Sloman Lab: https://sites.google.com/site/slomanlab/

Ana Sofia Peláez | Miami Freedom Project

Ana Sofia Peláez is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Miami Freedom Project, an organization committed to transforming South Florida's political culture through outreach, movement building, and communication strategies. An activist and award-winning food, culture, and political writer, Peláez has organized Latino get out the vote efforts since 2016. Her first cookbook The Cuban Table was nominated for a James Beard award and she contributed to The Immigrant Cookbook to benefit the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project. She currently works in the childhood nutrition space and is a frequent contributor to national media outlets.

Emma Steiner | Common Cause

Emma Steiner is Common Cause's Disinformation Analyst. She tracks disinformation and disinformation spaces to inform the election protection community about emerging threats to voters, and works with everyone from local election officials to social media platforms to ensure that voters have access to accurate and authoritative information about elections. Before joining Common Cause, Emma earned a Master of Arts in Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. She is from Houston, Texas.

Karin Tamerius | Smart Politics

Karin is a nationally recognized expert in political discourse. She is a social scientist who teaches the art of fruitful political conversation. She created the New York Times' Angry Uncle Bot and founded and runs Smart Politics. Since the 2016 election, Dr. Tamerius has focused on using therapeutic communication skills in political discussion, teaching activists how to depolarize conflicts and effectively share their message. She studied political psychology as a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellow at the University of Michigan and trained in psychiatry as a resident at UC San Francisco. Her work has been featured in a wide range of media outlets, including NPR, Fox and Friends, Business Insider, and Mother Jones.

Jason Van Driesche | Front Porch Forum

Jason is Chief of Staff at Front Porch Forum, Vermont's online neighbor network, where his job is to find new ways to help neighbors connect and build community. Before that, he worked for Local Motion, leading advocacy for safer biking and walking across Vermont. Jason is an expert in helping people figure out how to work together to make their communities better places. He loves working with people who are really good at what they do to build shared solutions to complex problems. He has a master's degree in urban and regional planning and a second master's in environmental science, both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Jason grew up mostly in a small town in western Massachusetts. He moved to Vermont with his family in 2008, and lives in Burlington's Five Sisters neighborhood. He is much happier biking and walking than driving, loves hiking along rivers, and spends slightly more time digging in his garden than makes sense.

Irving Washington | KFF

Irving Washington is a Senior Fellow for Misinformation and Trust at KFF, where he leads a new initiative focused on identifying health misinformation to improve understanding of critical health news and research and build trust among communities.

Before joining KFF, Washington was the CEO of the Online News Association (ONA), one of the world's largest membership organizations for digital journalists. At ONA, he led efforts to build a foundation for journalism's future by leveraging the power of new media technologies to raise up the next generation of diverse media leaders, which doubled the organization in size, scope, and reach. His leadership also advanced the mandate for protecting the integrity of online news

He began his career at the Radio Television Digital News Foundation, where he focused on improving internal systems to address equity gaps. Later, Washington advocated for black journalists working at the National Association of Black Journalists as part of a broader effort to shape diversity and inclusion in the media.

Washington is an advisor to the American Journalism Project, the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, Internews and the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). He's also active in ASAE as a Fellow, a designation reserved for the nation's top one percent of association executives, and a Diversity Executive Leadership Program (DELP) Scho

He's participated in the prestigious Punch Sulzberger Media Executive Leadership Program through Columbia University and served as an Executive Fellow through the Open Society Foundations' New Executive Fund and Fellowship.

Irving holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from Ball State University. He is also a Certified Association Executive (CAE).

Ryne Weiss | FIRE

Ryne Weiss is the Director of Research at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a non-partisan 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to freedom of expression, where he oversees research projects, administers a grant program, and writes on the intersection of technology and freedom of expression.

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