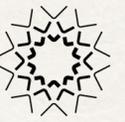




CONVERGENCE

Tales of Togetherness

❧ 2025 ❧



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Foreword

Once upon a time, there was a world without collaboration. Politicians **fought** on live television, business partners **argued** and did not listen, and council members grew weary from **growing division**. Friends spoke over one another, or worse, stopped speaking at all.

Between the clamor of chaos and suffocating silence, a number of voices began to wonder: **What if things were different?** These voices were part of Convergence, a community of change-makers dedicated to answering this question by building solutions to bridge the real divides faced by leaders, community members, politicians and friends like themselves.

Tales of Togetherness is a collection fairy tales come true **thanks to Convergence community members like you**. While each of these stories may have storybook endings, they all began with a seemingly insurmountable conflict, and each one is 100% true. We hope you enjoy reading them and consider **sharing your own story!**

Thank you.

-The Convergence Team



A Great Convener by David Fairman



David Fairman

*“Convergence invites people into the space to be more than their job self, more than their advocate or positional self, but to come as a **full person** and to experience the people around the table as also full people.”*

During the [Convergence Collaborative on Supports for Working Families](#), David was inspired when Abby McCloskey’s skillful convening created a remarkably ideologically diverse group and helped them find the shared purpose to become unlikely allies.

“Abby’s gift is to be unabashedly clear on her own perspective and values, while being very much able to bring everyone else’s perspective in in a respectful way.” The Collaborative also benefitted from exercises that encouraged participants to share personal experiences and interests, unstructured social time at lunches and dinners, and opportunities to ask about each other’s views with the sole goal of **improving understanding**. David believes these relationship-building moments created the foundation for real collaboration on challenging family policy issues: “I think what’s so central to all of the Convergence processes that I’ve worked on, is **the conscious effort and strategy to invite people into the space to be more than their job self, more than their advocate or positional self, but to come as a full person** and to experience the people around the table as also full people.”



David recalled the surprise of participants when they realized that behind the voice they'd grown accustomed to ignoring, there was a **real person with intriguing, resonant, and authentic motivations**. One participant noted during the process that, for the first time, they understood why their peer held certain views, something that previous panel debates, filled with talking points, had never made possible.

As the group advanced into difficult policy territory, this foundation helped them **reach consensus** on several major pillars needed for American families to flourish: meaningful paid leave, more robust child allowances, and significantly expanded childcare support. These ideas, and **the proof that leaders with disparate beliefs could find common ground**, laid the groundwork for similar projects in several states. This development reflects what David noticed from the first step of the Collaborative: that nationwide change begins with small groups committed to **both relationship building and problem solving**, with conveners and facilitators who can create safe and constructive space and keep the conversation focused.

David Fairman

Convergence Leadership Council

Senior Mediator, Consensus Building Institute

With 36 years of experience facilitating consensus on divisive economic, social, environmental, and global development issues worldwide, David's work focuses on expanding economic opportunity, improving public housing, advancing incarceration and reentry reform, strengthening democratic institutions, and shaping responsible social media governance. David has facilitated public consensus building across more than 20 countries.





The Mix of Many Voices by Faith Roessel



Faith Roessel

“I find in Convergence we are always striving for that greater good, embracing each other’s humanity, and communicating with an open heart.”

As she grows older, Faith finds herself returning to the teachings she learned as a child. How you treat others reflects how you wish to be treated. The greater good outweighs personal preference. For whom much is given, much is expected.

These values, Faith says, are desperately needed in the world. And in Convergence, she sees a space where they are not only upheld, but actively lived out. **“We are always striving for that greater good, embracing each other’s humanity and communicating with an open heart.”** Faith has watched the “Convergence way” bring groups together, bridge differences, open streams of communication, and lay the groundwork for collective progress.

One moment in particular stands out. She and Rob Ferish were talking about her background, and she shared that she is Navajo, raised in Round Rock, Arizona, on the Navajo Nation. She described how she grew up **learning to look out for one another**, honoring elders as knowledge keepers, resolving conflict by talking it out, and seeking consensus rather than majority rule. Justice, Faith says, is restored through **healing rather than punishment**.



By maintaining harmony, we allow ourselves to continue treating one another as relatives.

Rob listened with curiosity, and that conversation and soon after asked her to join Convergence. What struck Faith most was not simply the invitation, but **the sense that her lived experience and cultural grounding had a place at Convergence.** Faith's voice, shaped by a perspective others rarely hear, and born from a language her government once tried to banish, has "standing" she said, "in the mix of the many voices that form Convergence."

Looking back, that moment continues to inspire Faith. It captures exactly why Convergence works: **Convergence is a place where every voice is welcomed, contributing to a collective wisdom guiding everyone on the path toward progress.**

Faith Roessel

**Convergence Leadership Council
President & Founder, CHEI**

Faith Roessel is an attorney and member of the Navajo Tribe of Indians originally from Round Rock, Navajo Nation (Arizona) and has served on the Leadership Council since its inception. Her work spans from her home community in Round Rock, Navajo Nation, to Washington, D.C. where she has served in government. She founded Collaborative for Harmony, Empowerment & Innovation, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to supporting Navajo youth, families, and communities





Carrying Connection Forward by Manar AlAqil



Manar AlAqil

*When she first arrived at Convergence, Manar expected to gain technical experience. What she did not expect was to learn what **connections** means to her.*

It was September 2025 during a convening for the [Convergence Collaborative on Social Factors of Health](#), when six states gathered to share strategies to create the best policy environment for local efforts and partnerships to improve household and community health.

Manar thought the conversations might turn into a competition (We know healthcare better than you!). Instead, the opposite happened. **Participants compared notes like old friends. And when the session ended, no one left.** “They just stayed there and kept talking. And it made me realize that it’s not just getting the job done, it’s about actually connecting, whether personally or professionally. It could potentially lead to a **lifelong relationship**. It also reminds me of all the other stories that I heard from Convergence. I thought **this is amazing, I’m seeing this in person.**”

Watching collaboration unfold in real time reminded Manar why Convergence’s work matters, but it wasn’t until she helped to assemble the 2023–2025 Impact Report that she began to understand how it related to her.



“When you're in the thick of it, you can forget that **you're doing something impactful**. To see those highlights, the events, the coverages, and the projects that are done and they're continuing to be done, and realize that I, even in a little way, helped in these events, just like the [Social Factors of Health](#), and did more than I realized, is just eye-opening. You're like, wow, it's actually having **nationwide impact**, and I'm really honored to be a part of this.”

She also found herself moved by something even more personal, her relationship with connection to others. “I wouldn't have been able to reach where I'm at today without **people's generosity and help**. So it feels like Convergence is that personified. I hope that I can reach that point where I can be someone who is useful to everyone in any way possible. It's just so lovely to connect.”



Manar AlAqil

Convergence Senior Communications Intern

Manar holds a BA in Linguistics and Translation from King Saud University in Saudi Arabia and is currently pursuing an MA in Language and Communication at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Manar brings a rich background in bilingual (Arabic and English) communications, with experience spanning government, art, and cultural sectors. She previously worked at APCO Worldwide in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where she contributed to strategic communications efforts, including graphic design, social media strategy, and risk management.



The Missing Link by Manu Meel



Manu Meel

*“That conference was **truly inspiring** for me because it demonstrated the power, the thought leadership, and the capacity that Convergence has.”*

During the recent Convergence Annual Summit conference in Washington, DC, Manu Meel gained a **deeper understanding** of what makes collaboration possible. As the room filled with funders, former members of Congress, and participants from across industries and years of Convergence’s history, Manu confronted Convergence’s unique ability to **bring together people** who, beyond sharing a common goal, would usually never even share a room.

“What was really inspiring about that was the fact that Convergence could convene people of such diverse backgrounds who were all united around the mission of trying to solve problems at a time when everyone is focused on politics.” For Manu, the conference was a Collaborative in itself, changemakers with disparate perspectives and convictions uniting to stand up for something bigger than their differences, their shared belief that **collaboration can transcend polarization.**

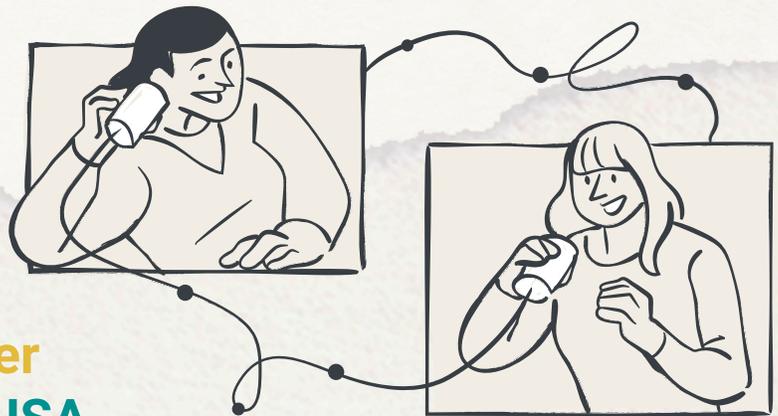


As Manu pondered what made this unlikely mix possible, he noticed something else, “(It) was fascinating to see how different people and positions of power looked up to Convergence at this time of crisis.” Despite their **shared desire to move past polarization**, lack of trust left leaders in silos.

Manu noticed stakeholders were united when they independently chose to trust a convener. In this way, **trust can have a domino effect, with unbiased conveners linking even the most unlikely collaborators through shared dialogue**. Manu reflected, “To reduce political polarization and resolve tough policy challenges, we’ll need more opportunities to engage stakeholders like that.”

Manu Meel

Convergence Board Member
CEO & Co-Founder, BridgeUSA



Manu Meel leads BridgeUSA, a national organization investing in the future of democracy. With 108 chapters – totaling 21,000 students in 41 states – BridgeUSA is the fastest growing movement of young people fighting division through constructive dialogue. Through this important work, Manu and BridgeUSA are proving that what unites us is not agreement on policies, but a shared mindset.



The Keys to Resolution by Mark Zitter



Mark Zitter

*“We tend to assume that conflicts are based on rational differences and can only be solved with superior arguments, but, in fact, the emotional and relational aspects are **keys to resolution.**”*

During a conversation about the [Convergence Reentry Ready Collaborative](#), Mark was struck by how “participants who had little regard for one another at the outset not only learned from the others, but **grew to respect** them.”

Over time, “**deep listening led to relationships and opportunities to find solutions.**” As Mark watched relationships evolve and solutions emerge, he concluded, “We tend to assume that conflicts are based on rational differences and can only be solved with superior arguments, but in fact **the emotional and relational aspects are keys to resolution.**”

A similar moment occurred during a discussion of the [Convergence Project on Nutrition and Wellness](#). Public health and nutrition experts admitted that they **initially assumed** their business-oriented Collaborative peers, from fast-food chain leaders to convenience store representatives, were motivated only by profit. But as the nutrition experts and business leaders conversed, the nutrition experts were **delighted to learn** that the business leaders were eager to support their customers’ health.



There was plenty of room for everyone to win, and Mark believes that the goodwill generated during the process made it relatively easy to identify and pursue approaches that were beneficial for both business and health.

While many **conversations made an impact**, there is one discussion that particularly stays with Mark even today. He recalled when a participant nearly refused to enter a meeting room because she hated another participant. Later, she told Mark that the Convergence process allowed her to not only hear an opposing viewpoint, but to feel heard herself. “By the end, they had become friends and now regularly exchange holiday cards. It was inspiring and heartwarming, but even more so, it underscored for me **the importance of listening and sharing to create the relationships necessary for successfully tackling hard problems.**”



Mark Zitter

Convergence Leadership Council

Venture Partner, Board Member, Advisor, Mentor

Mark Zitter spent his career starting healthcare companies and now serves as a Venture Partner at two VC firms and board chair for both Reel Medicine Media and the Upstart Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. He is a Fellow at the American Leadership Forum and co-leader of SERGE, a private national entrepreneur’s group. Today, Mark is leading a philanthropic initiative to support the adoption of generative artificial intelligence at nonprofits.



Tools for Good by Romanita Hairston



Romanita Hairston

*“I don't believe you can get to human flourishing for the **common good** without organizations that are helping people to address intractable challenges.”*

Before Romanita joined Convergence's Board, she participated in one of the organization's earliest projects. Around her sat **leaders who rarely shared space**, all carrying deeply held values, opposing instincts, and strong convictions.

“When we first came together, we were unfamiliar with one another and started from different positions. As we worked through the process, the entire group, not just pairs of individuals, found our way to **common ground** that cut across our varying perspectives. That created genuine **community**. It wasn't simply about aligning on policy issues. People began seeing each other differently and reframing the problem itself. Instead of working against each other, we **worked together toward effective solutions to challenging problems**, recognizing the validity of multiple perspectives and that each person brought distinct value.”



Following a Convergence training session years later, Romanita asked fellow participants, what struck them most about the experience. One person responded, “I picked up so many tools. **If only people knew there were better ways to try to solve tough problems.**”

As Romanita participated in more Convergence activities, she noticed an emerging theme. Another participant reflected, “If communities had these **tools and capacity** to do this work, I think we would **solve issues faster.**”

“I was struck by that observations because these were people experiencing the work firsthand and seeing its impact. It underscored the importance of bridge-building when combined with the **tools that Convergence offers**—participants found building the capabilities essential.”

Romanita Hairston

Convergence Leadership Council
CEO, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust



Romanita draws on more than two decades of experience in the nonprofit, for profit, philanthropic, and board service sectors to help steward the mission of the foundation. Before joining the Trust, Romanita served in executive roles at Microsoft and World Vision, where she led global programs focused on economic empowerment, education, and community resilience. Throughout her career, Romanita has been recognized for her commitment to effective pluralism.

CONVERGENCE

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING REFLECTION EXERCISE

Identify *your* Tales of Togetherness

Reflect on a time in your life when you saw collaboration in action:

Who was present? What were their relevant identities?

Was there a **problem** or tension beforehand?

How did your identity or lived experience inform your **perspective**?

Did others **share** their experiences, feelings, or thoughts?

Did anyone's perspective **change**?

What **new** relationships were created?

Did this experience **change** or inform your personal philosophy?

Scan for more resources

Contact us to learn more

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Since 2009, Convergence has been a catalyst for change. We have been at the forefront of addressing America's most pressing challenges and demonstrating that despite big differences, it is possible to solve seemingly intractable issues without compromising our values. Our evidence-based process leads to higher-ground solutions and unlikely alliances never thought possible. With your support, we can build a more collaborative future, together.

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