October 2025

Facilitation in the AI Era

A Community Roadmap for Technologies to Support Practitioners

A collaboration between Jigsaw and 22 global facilitators

JIGSAW

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

At a time when meaningful conversations across divides are rarer than ever, AI technologies offer powerful new ways of supporting facilitators in their work to strengthen communities through dialogue and deliberation

This report is based on a detailed study of 22 facilitators from around the world, representing many different backgrounds and traditions. It offers practical guidance for funders, facilitators, and technology developers on creating AI tools that can help people have better, more meaningful group conversations.

We identify five untapped, high-value opportunities for AI to support facilitators: by *scaling access*, offering *dynamic learning*, generating *live synthesis* and *sensemaking*, helping with *futurecasting*, and improving *public sensemaking* outputs. All opportunities should be explored in partnership with facilitators and publics, to build trust in the technology and ensure that it augments the transformational experience of deliberation, rather than replacing it.

Facilitators know that good process design lies at the heart of successful conversations – and that the best tools and technologies vary depending on the process goals. We distinguish three process types to help illuminate relevant needs: *transformative processes* (affecting participants), *generative processes* (gathering or generating ideas), and *deliberative processes* (coming to an agreement or making decisions).

Many facilitators are currently using many different technologies to support their work, including experimenting with AI, although few tools are designed specifically for the needs of facilitators. Better integration, usability, and technical support with existing products are major unmet needs. We argue that facilitators' practical expertise is critical for building new AI tools for collective dialogues, through codesign and other partnerships, but may also help inspire better online discourse more generally.

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About the authors

This report originated from an ethnographic research study in Spring 2025 led by Ian Beacock and Emily Saltz at Jigsaw, a technology incubator within Google. 22 facilitators representing a range of geographies, organizations, and traditions participated. This findings report has been authored collaboratively by facilitators from the original study and the Jigsaw researchers.

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See the Appendix for full author biographies.

1 Introduction

> We're trying to challenge... the most critical and debilitating syndrome in democratic societies right now: the inversion that has led us to see the public as a risk we need to manage rather than a resource we should tap.
>
> — Facilitator P9

1 Introduction

As civic discourse has become more divided and less productive, policymakers and communities alike are seeking new ways of having constructive conversations. Methods like deliberative democracy and participatory peacebuilding are rising to the occasion,[1] grounded in the wisdom of professional facilitators. Against this backdrop, generative AI is rapidly transforming our sense of what is possible with technology. This moment offers an opportunity for practitioners, researchers, and technologists to guide the development of AI features that can meaningfully enhance collective dialogues and scale their impact.

Technology is rapidly changing facilitation, opening new horizons of scale and speed while also creating new risks for trust and democratic legitimacy. Many practitioners are experimenting with digital platforms and AI tools in their work, while technologists and developers are building LLM-powered features intended to enhance or scale the effects of facilitation. Yet not all components of facilitation or discussion are well-suited to AI support. And introducing novel technologies like AI into sensitive conversations, especially in communities affected by conflict, is unlikely to succeed without addressing concerns about bias, errors, privacy, and trust.

We believe that the time is ripe to take stock of AI's potential to support facilitation, by considering the technology's capabilities and most promising opportunities alongside critical guardrails found in the practical and lived experiences of facilitators. Together, we represent a diverse array of facilitation experiences, approaches, and needs. We know that AI opportunities will never be one-size-fits-all. But by creating this public roadmap together, we hope to inspire AI products that meaningfully help facilitators rather than hinder them, augmenting the work rather than replacing it. By amplifying the voices of expert facilitators from around the globe, we aim to enrich the creative work already being done by researchers, developers, practitioners, and funders to enhance collective dialogues in the age of AI.

[1] On the "deliberative wave," see OECD, 2020. On participatory peacebuilding: Pauls, 2023.

We know that AI opportunities will never be one-size-fits-all. But by drafting this public roadmap together, we hope to inspire AI products that meaningfully help other facilitators

Facilitation and facilitators

There is no universally agreed-upon definition of facilitation. Here, we treat it as an intentionally broad category that includes **all people who help lead structured group conversations to successful outcomes**. With this universal definition, we have been able to learn from a wide range of facilitation styles, cultures, and contexts.

For some practitioners, facilitation means taking on a very active role as a conductor or pilot of a conversation. In other cases, facilitation might be about enforcing rules as a referee or traffic cop. Still others see facilitation as the task of "holding" a group during its deliberations, serving as a "container."[2] Some practitioners (including some participants in our study) do not describe themselves as facilitators at all. We recognize that the term evokes different meanings for each practitioner, and focus on the common work being done to enable constructive conversations.

Our approach and methods

In February and March 2025, researchers at Jigsaw (an incubator and research lab at Google) conducted **an ethnographic study on expert facilitation**. We interviewed 22 professional facilitators on 6 continents. Their expertise included deliberative democracy, peacebuilding, mediation, corporate facilitation, and community engagement. We sought participants with expertise inclusive of the Global South, active conflict resolution, and post-conflict regions. Facilitators also varied widely in their use of large-scale digital platforms, technology, and AI.[3] We supplemented interviews with an extensive literature review across academic disciplines like political theory, political science, and peace and conflict studies, as well as policy reports, practitioner handbooks, and guides to community activism. Finally, we observed processes in the U.S., Australia, and Canada to understand facilitation in context.

This approach was designed in response to several longstanding needs among researchers and practitioners of facilitation and collective

[2] On definitions and frameworks, see, e.g., Landwehr, 2014; Escobar, 2019; maree brown, 2021.
[3] Short descriptions of participants by facilitator type are included in the Appendix. We refer to these participants using ID numbers (P1, P2, etc.) throughout this document.

dialogue. First, deep ethnographic or empirical research on facilitation is relatively rare, contributing to a view of facilitation as a "black box" that is crucial yet poorly understood.[4] Our findings here are especially timely as they include emerging facilitator approaches to technology and AI. Second, this research draws different domains of facilitation together, with particular representation from deliberative democracy and peacebuilding, combining experiences and insights that may too often be separate. We hope as a result that these findings can be useful for other practitioners themselves, helping build bridges and share key learnings across different areas of expertise.

[4] On facilitation as a "black box," see von Schneidemesser et al., 2023. Other calls for more qualitative research into facilitation practices, mental models, and motivations: Moore, 2012; Wall and Dunne, 2012; Landwehr, 2014; Escobar, 2019. Key qualitative facilitation research includes Mansbridge et al., 2006; Ryfe, 2006; Dillard, 2013; Waldman, 2024.

2 Facilitator Insights

> The design of a process goes beyond [the] selection of a platform. The devil is in the details.
>
> — Facilitator P9

2.1 Why process design matters

Most of facilitation is process design – what happens "in the room" or during a conversation is just the tip of the iceberg

Facilitators across traditions and contexts agreed that thoughtful, intentional process design is most of the work. **Conditions for a successful conversation are often set before entering a room or kicking off a digital process.** Facilitators play many overlapping roles, but many said that stewarding or designing a process were the most crucial (e.g. architect, guide, pilot, dinner party host).

The best process design emerges when everyone is crystal-clear about the desired aims of the conversation – and then works backwards to ensure that all design elements are deployed or customized to serve those objectives. When participants, commissioning bodies, facilitators, and funders agree on outcomes, it helps them see the process as legitimate and trustworthy.

Peacebuilding facilitators in particular commented that **a process may have clear goals without having predetermined *outputs***. In community peacebuilding contexts, for example, committing to deliver specific (donor-defined) outputs could be unhelpful or destructive for local groups. A better goal might be to equip communities to decide on outputs for themselves.

> "As a facilitator, you really have to understand what your objective is for the path that you're on, whether it's a multi-step arc or a single event. And then: Are the tools you're using to get there efficient and appropriate? That's the important thing to keep in mind. And then you have to adapt as you go. You have to be flexible."
>
> —Facilitator P18

2.2 Three core process types

Across traditions and contexts, we found that structured conversations may be categorized according to 3 different primary objectives

TRANSFORMATIVE
Affecting people and relationships

GENERATIVE
Gathering or generating ideas

DELIBERATIVE
Coming to agreement and/or decision

These 3 objectives are best understood as ideal types, highlighting the key distinguishing features that set one kind of conversation apart from another. They are not meant to capture everything that occurs in a given process type, but to clarify design decisions – especially for technologists building digital tools or scaled hybrid processes.

Each objective is met by combining different process elements (e.g. public input, in-person discussion, expert presentations, etc.). The same set of activities is therefore not required for every structured conversation. In fact, elements not aligned with the primary objective can feel unnecessary to participants, or even undermine group trust.

Multiple types may be combined or sequenced to achieve a more complex or longitudinal goal. One common approach is the divergence-convergence "double-diamond" pattern: toggling between wide-angle generative moments and focused deliberative phases. This model is particularly valuable in complex peacebuilding and governance. Here, a facilitator might, for instance, (1) strengthen relationships among conflicting parties with a transformative stage, then (2) map values and priorities with a generative process, before finally having the group (3) agree on specific propositions with a deliberative exercise.

Many citizens' assemblies explicitly join transformative and deliberative goals, and many facilitators see deliberation as necessarily transformative. Facilitators are exploring generative phases within civic deliberation models, to set agendas or bring publics along on the emotional journey being experienced by a more deeply engaged conversation group.

2.2 Three core process types, continued

TRANSFORMATIVE

OBJECTIVE

To affect participants as individuals or as a group, e.g. learning, growth, empathy or capacity-building, or in some cases opinion change.

No decision or agreement required.

CAVEATS

Value is more difficult to explain, as concrete policy outcomes are not necessary. May be challenging to scale, given the need for iterative conversation among participants.

EXAMPLES

- A trust-building dialogue between urban residents and Indigenous groups
- A small process (IRL or remote) to build empathy and deeper understanding for others' lived experiences or policy views, or to drive civic participation

GENERATIVE

OBJECTIVE

To solicit a range of ideas and/or map the opinion landscape. Transformative effects may occur, but are not the primary goal.

No decision or agreement required.

CAVEATS

Weaker without a commitment to influence decisions. Can be seen as "more talk, no action." May feel extractive if opinions are used by others but not activated for or with participants. Can be difficult to track individual ideas.

EXAMPLES

- A traditional town hall meeting requesting feedback on policy
- A large digital conversation inviting submissions or votes from participants

DELIBERATIVE

OBJECTIVE

To achieve a group task together, (e.g. judgment, decision, making recommendations) through active discussion and learning.

Decision or agreement is required.

CAVEATS

Requires design expertise, time, and resourcing to achieve the full effects. Recruitment or sortition of a representative sample is critical. Significant knowledge or capacity-building may be required. Requires a clear pathway to action and topic or remit suited to deliberation.

EXAMPLES

- A deliberative mini-public (e.g. citizens' assembly) on a policy topic involving trade-offs, that requires a collective decision

2.3 Better digital public squares

Facilitators possess insights into conversation mechanics that could be inspiration for product teams and engineers working on improving online discourse

Across our study, we observed **3 tactics used by facilitators to unlock better conversations that might also help technologists reimagine our digital public squares**. After all, the social internet is far from its original utopian promise of connecting people at scale. Jigsaw has a longstanding interest in making digital discourse more constructive and democratic, in partnership with communities.[5]

Large-scale online discourse works differently than smaller dialogues or conversations, and much that works "in the room" may not scale. But certain facilitation tactics could be useful provocations for product teams building technologies for online discourse, helping them to develop new affordances or design principles to replicate facilitation effects at scale.

[5] On AI for digital public squares, see Goldberg et al., 2024.

Keeping the decision window open

WHAT FACILITATORS DO

Some facilitators intervene not to guide a group to a decision, but to hold it back from deciding too quickly. This means keeping the judgment space open as long as possible and encouraging reflection, curiosity, and learning. This might involve adding complexity, playing devil's advocate, suggesting critical thinking prompts, stressing that there is not one "right" answer, or inviting people to weigh implications of expert claims. Keeping the window open also gives groups time to develop the empathy and trust needed to explore a topic or problem collectively, not as opponents.

TECH & PRODUCT IMPLICATIONS

Online discourse is frequently characterized by a rush to judgment and group pressure to pick one side over another, fuelled by emotion and engagement. Social media has evolved to enable the broadcast of opinions to audiences (e.g. influencers) over the shaping and revision of ideas through dialogue (e.g. forums).

How might we redesign online conversations to slow decisions and keep people in a state of suspended judgment? What would it look like to help people share active thinking or change their minds, not just issue declarative takes?

Group tasks for group cohesion

WHAT FACILITATORS DO

Structured dialogues work when participants feel invested in the process and the quality of their outputs. Collective action can unlock this investment. Achieving even small, seemingly trivial tasks together (e.g. selecting experts, arranging the room) can drive group cohesion, establishing norms and enabling collaboration on more substantial tasks later in the process.

TECH & PRODUCT IMPLICATIONS

Shared tasks do not play a major role in online discourse on social media at scale. Users share views to large audiences, while others respond with comments or likes that may or may not be seen by original posters. It is unsurprising that we now see a retreat into smaller communities (e.g. Discord, Reddit) & closed group chats.

How might we build cohesion and investment in online discourse spaces by introducing small moments of collaborative work or decision?

Letting go and moving forward

WHAT FACILITATORS DO

Having instant access to more information (about the topic, or even earlier phases of a discussion) does not always make it easier for groups to find agreement. Facilitators often rely on people's tendency to let go, adjusting their views or priorities as a process goes on. This releasing of past concerns allows people to find big-picture agreement or evolve their thinking. Here, the infinite recall abilities of AI are not necessarily a virtue, as they could lead people to rabbit-hole unproductively or recall specific disagreements instead of moving on.

TECH & PRODUCT IMPLICATIONS

On social media feeds, prior posts can always be found and are never truly forgotten. And in unstructured online settings, access to infinite information makes rabbit-holing easy. Certain modes of online discourse have a reputation for fixating on small errors or nitpicking facts rather than engaging on substantive issues or grappling with necessary tradeoffs.

How might we make it easier for people to let go and move on in online conversations? What AI tools or features could help people focus on the bigger picture, not the details?

3 Technology & Facilitation

> The main question is: what kind of cases are actually suited to use technology at all? [It] has huge potential... but you need to be aware that you are introducing new kinds of risks and barriers, connected with digital literacy, connectivity, mobile costs, issues of trust.

— Facilitator P4

3.1 Off-label uses

Facilitators integrating tech are often forced to use multiple tools in "off-label" ways, so would value an interoperable, easy-to-use modular toolkit

Many facilitators use technology in their work – either with participants, or behind the scenes. But **they are often using tools or products not built for structured conversations**. It is not uncommon for facilitators to use a combination of productivity tools (e.g. Google Docs, Zoom), translation or transcription tools (e.g. DeepL, Otter.ai), project management dashboards (e.g. Basecamp), workshop tools (e.g. SessionLab), social media apps (e.g. WhatsApp), community discussion platforms (e.g. Mighty Networks), and interactive polls or templates for group input (e.g. Mentimeter, GroupMap).

Some facilitators we spoke with indicated they were experimenting with AI chatbots, specifically ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot. We heard of facilitators using AI tools for live summarization of participant questions or opinions as well as categorizing group ideas and priorities into themes. Some facilitators have built custom GPTs as conversational libraries to help participants access expert knowledge. AI tools built for the specific needs of facilitators (e.g. Dembrane), are only now emerging.

Because of these "off-label" uses, **facilitators are often juggling multiple tools or platforms with little easy integration**. This results in clunky, time-consuming workflows, a large number of accounts and passwords to manage, and difficulty onboarding participants to the tools. Even if facilitators are primarily using digital platforms for large-scale conversations, several different systems might be needed at different stages (e.g. Talk to the City, then Polis, then Remesh).

Facilitators would highly value an interoperable toolkit of modular tools designed for and with facilitators, allowing them to adapt the technology to the needs of a given conversation. More technical support and greater usability would make it easier for them and the public to benefit from and incorporate new technologies. (See Section 3.3 on accessibility and trust.)

> "If I want people to be able to share their views and actually get to see what people think of them, then Polis would be a really good tool. If I want just to get sheer numbers of volume in terms of majority vs. minority, Talk To The City would be an awesome one... [for] people to be able to vote and rank things once everybody puts them in place, then Remesh is going to be awesome."
>
> —Facilitator P6

3.2 Augmentation > automation

Most facilitators think that the true value of AI lies in augmenting their work and opening up new possibilities, more than automation and timesaving

While feelings were mixed, **most facilitators told us that AI was most valuable in its ability to enable new kinds of conversations, versus automating tasks or accelerating the work of deliberation**. Augmenting analog processes with novel abilities (e.g. soliciting input from the public, helping groups find lost insights or conversation threads, or tailoring learning materials to participant needs) was more appealing than replacing existing workflows.

One key exception was processes in which facilitators handle large quantities of data or public input – for instance, participatory budgeting processes or large-scale online dialogues. Here, the ability of LLMs to rapidly categorize and sort submitted ideas struck many facilitators as gamechanging. Some observed that these processes would likely find the easiest "buy-in" among participants and stakeholders for the use of AI, since the need would be so clear.

Across the board, facilitators stressed that **timesaving isn't always useful for structured conversations**. It is often crucial for participants to spend time together doing the "hard work" of thinking critically, listening, asking questions, changing their minds, or making compromises. This is especially true in protracted conflicts, where trauma may be a core barrier to discussion. Meaningful dialogue can be difficult and requires time, but the friction and group investment is what delivers results. Automating or accelerating this work may undermine not only the effects of the conversation, but its legitimacy and staying power.

> "The social production of knowledge and consensus... is the source of democratic legitimacy. This is more than just saying long division is a kind of good in itself. This is actually saying: there are attributes that are lost when people don't have the shared experience of finding it."
>
> **—Facilitator P9**

3.3 Building trust, ensuring access

Transparency, codesign, and equitable access are paramount for facilitators, to make sure that new technologies like AI enhance trust instead of undermining it

Trust is key for any successful conversation: among participants, facilitators, stakeholders, decisionmakers, and the wider community. In deliberations, for instance, participants need to trust that their voice and work will matter. In more polarized settings, trust in the fairness and legitimacy of the process itself can make or break a conversation. Facilitators are laser-focused on ensuring that the process is worthy of trust.

Using AI within structured conversations may provoke questions and concerns. Broader social concerns about AI can translate into skepticism or mistrust. Perceived or real bias in the models, or hallucinations and errors in AI outputs, can erode confidence in the fairness of the process and the legitimacy of outcomes. When asked to use AI tools, people may also wonder about privacy, storage, and ownership of their data. Facilitators noted that people's discomfort or concern around AI features could affect their participation in the broader process.

Even more fundamentally, **technology may undermine a process if not all participants have equal access to its use or the guidance required to use it effectively.** Facilitators cautioned against assuming that all participants would have mobile devices, laptops, or even the internet. New technologies should bring more people into a discussion, not inadvertently exclude them. If participants have negative experiences with technology, or feel that they are unable to share the full experience with others because of access barriers, trust may be further eroded.

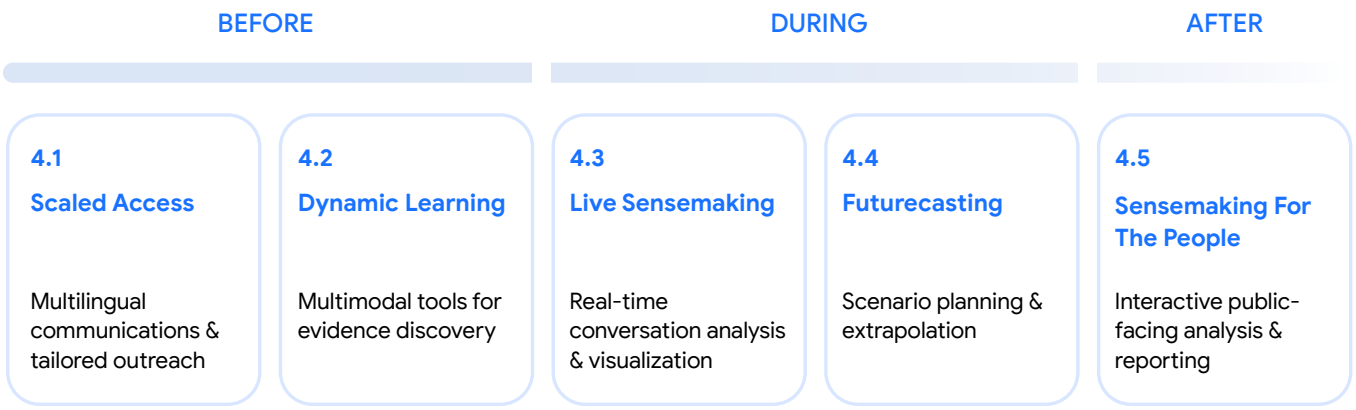
When applied within conversations, **AI technologies should address specific problems that participants and stakeholders can understand.** Many facilitators observed that in their past experiences, people were less receptive to AI integration without a clear line being drawn from an obvious root-cause concern or problem (e.g. a too-vast quantity of voting or input data) to the way in which a proposed AI approach could solve it and benefit the entire process.

Finally, **the principle of "nothing about us without us" should be rigorously applied with AI for facilitation**. New technologies for facilitators should always be built together with them via co-design methods. This will help ensure that the resulting features are not just fit-for-purpose, but that they are legitimate and do not cause unintended negative effects. Beyond traditional co-design methods (e.g. workshops, trusted tester cohorts, focus groups, etc.) deliberative or facilitated methods should be explored to help develop new technologies for conversations. AI tools may also help democratize the development process, as novel practices like vibe-coding can allow those without technical or engineering expertise to bring ideas to life.

4 Opportunity Areas

> Tech [that] helps us take vast amounts of information and bring it together in a way that works for people... that stuff is really transforming.
>
> — Facilitator P11

We have identified 5 untapped opportunity areas where technology can best support and enhance collective dialogues, grounded in the needs and advice of expert facilitators



NOTE: These opportunity areas and accompanying design visualizations are not products that Jigsaw is actively working on or necessarily planning to create. We offer them here, alongside our coauthors, as potential inspiration for others to build on!

We offer these recommendations as **a non-proprietary community roadmap to the most promising directions for investment and product development.** While some organizations are already exploring aspects of these opportunities, we hope that this roadmap can validate these specific ideas by grounding them in the expertise of facilitators across a wide range of traditions, processes, and global contexts.

These opportunities emerged from our conversations with facilitators about their practice. As part of these interviews, we introduced 10 lo-fi product concept ideas that could be relevant at different stages of a facilitated conversation process: before, during, and after.[6] We used these concepts as "thought-starters" with facilitators and used their reactions to help us calibrate our understanding of the most meaningful considerations when building AI solutions for facilitators.

[6] We developed these ideas by building on a framework around improving digital public squares outlined in Goldberg et al., 2024.

4.1 Scaled Access

Multilingual communications & tailored outreach

BEFORE

How might we reduce language and access barriers to participation in large-scale conversations?

Bringing the right people into a conversation is critical for its success, but it can be difficult to reach people where they are, help them overcome barriers to participation (e.g. cost, access, language), and enable them to participate. Facilitators need features enabling more tailored outreach and recruitment, but also tools to translate across languages and cultural contexts. Multimodal tools that enable and combine participation in different formats (e.g. audio, text, video) would also be valuable.

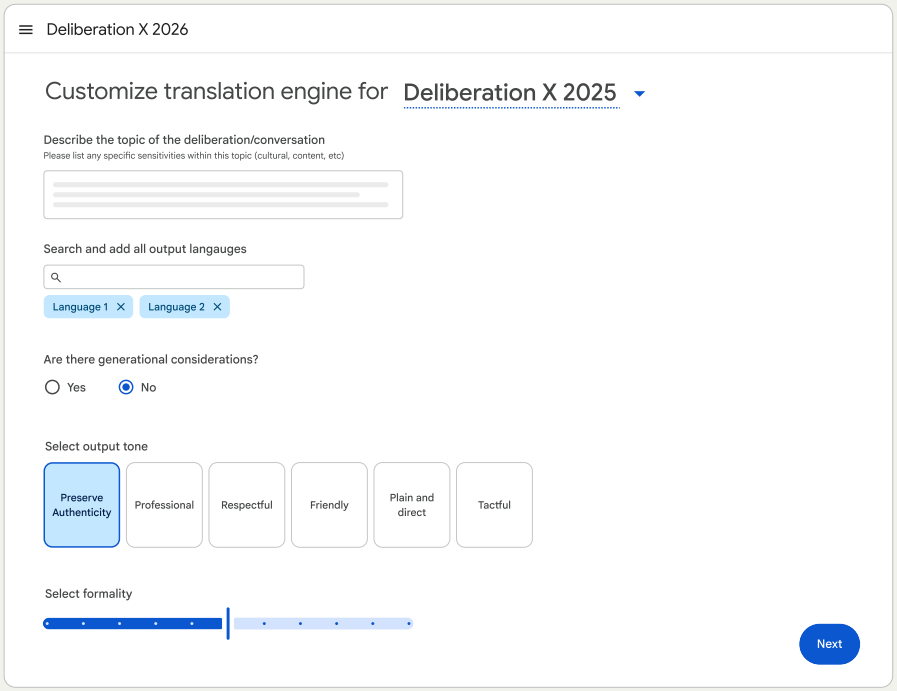
"A tool to notify all the targeted audience at the same time [because] what's challenging is outreach... We need a notification to just pop on whatever screen our target audience is looking at... We ran a number of Polis conversations [and] we did outreach using our WhatsApp chatbot."

—Facilitator P7

"[We need] an AI that is culturally sensitive to certain terms we use, understanding the power dynamic of the language itself... For sensitive dialogues, that could be helpful."

—Facilitator P8

Design Exploration
Customizable translation engine



What about... an AI-powered translation tool that could be customized to recognize and adapt to specific contexts, conversation registers, or tones, starting from recruitment and outreach?

4.2 Dynamic Learning

Multimodal tools for evidence discovery

BEFORE

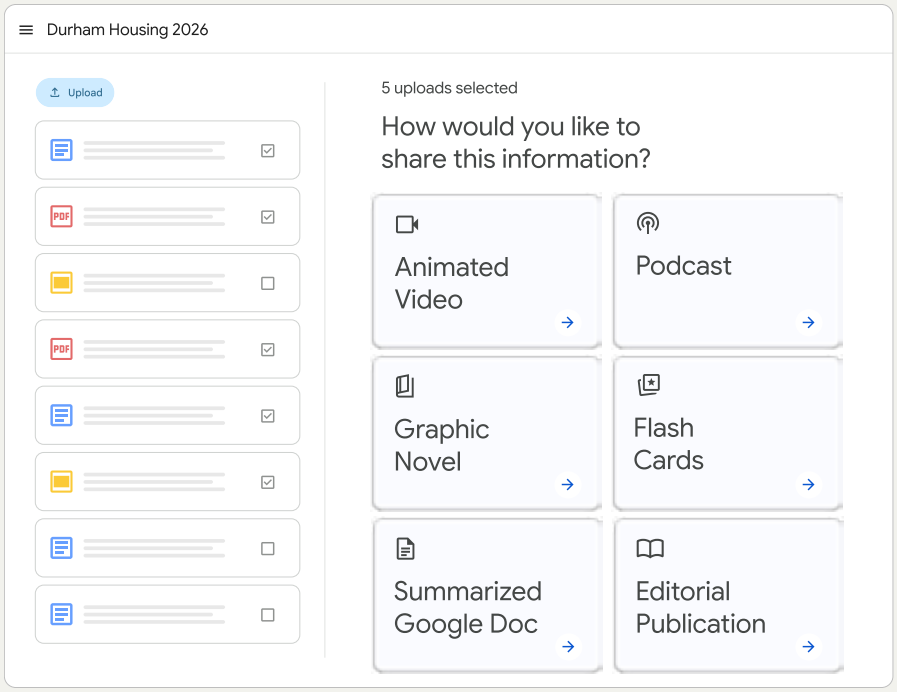
How might we make learning fully customizable and more engaging, while keeping everyone on the same page?

Many participants in structured conversations find it challenging to process and keep track of the information they are given. In some cases, the topics may be too technical and complex; in other cases, the sheer volume of information can be daunting. Facilitators would benefit from AI tools that could provide information to people in more interactive ways, as well as across a wider range of multimodal formats to cater to other learning styles using video, visualizations, and audio as well as text. What is also crucial, however, is ensuring consistency of AI generated outputs so that, despite varied formats, everyone in the group receives the same information.

> "Stories are how people learn... [Tools] that help us help people learn, but not have to read – that's what we're looking for at the moment, because our work to date has been very heavy on the written and it's not how people learn."
>
> **—Facilitator P11**

> "We need to get better at more engaging materials that are easier. But it's also the conversational element of [AI] that encourages inquiry... some kind of chat interface where you could query it and learn about [the topic]."
>
> **—Facilitator P20**

Design Exploration
Multimodal briefing synthesizer



What about... an AI-powered tool to turn complex source materials into engaging formats for different learning styles?

4.3 Live Sensemaking

Real-time conversation analysis & visualization

DURING

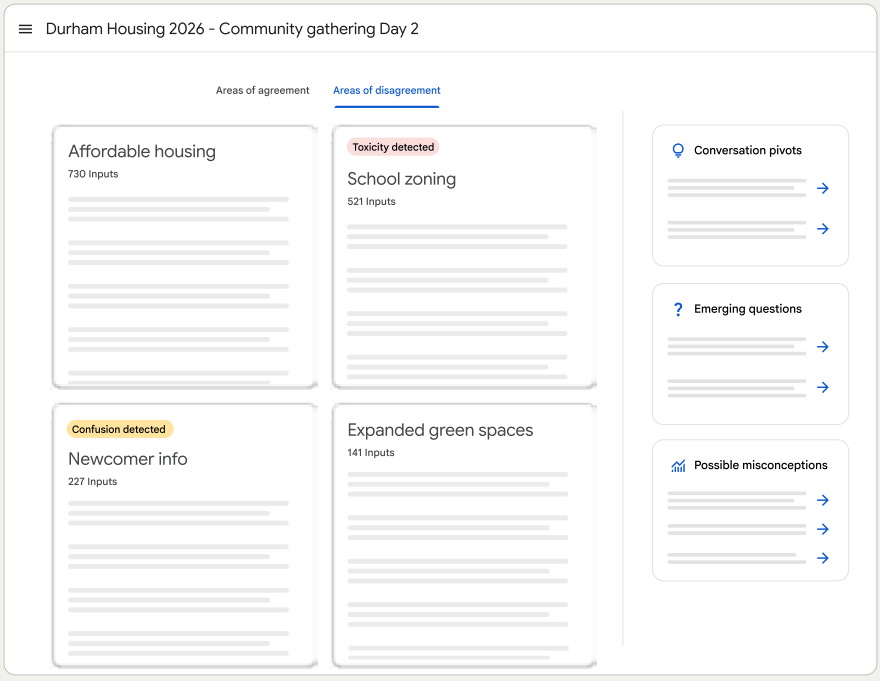
How might we help facilitators analyze conversations in real-time so they can better help the group achieve its goals?

Knowing the "temperature of the room" is essential for good facilitation, but real-time analog sensemaking can be a bottleneck as facilitators review worksheets, notes, or whiteboards. It can also be difficult to retrieve details from past sessions. In scaled conversations, reporting is often made available at the end of a process. Facilitators valued live overviews of conversation dynamics, but cautioned that making them available to participants could bias reactions, steer outcomes, or reinforce tensions. Facilitators felt that participants should be able to review the AI summaries to endorse or challenge them, aware that too much text could be overwhelming. It would be crucial for facilitators to easily and quickly train any live sensemaking feature on the nuances of a specific conversation. Any model should also be grounded to avoid hallucinations and give facilitators confidence in the outputs.

> "At scale [I want a] cheaper way to have notes in front of people, rather than flip charts... one, just to reflect it back to them, but also so they could correct it... Give me my 'Star Trek board.'"
>
> **—Facilitator P19**

> "I think [using ChatGPT to summarize questions] is hugely powerful for us as facilitators, but for participants as well. It enables [us] to interact with feedback data in real time in a way we haven't been able to prior."
>
> **—Facilitator P16/17**

Design Exploration
Live sensemaking dashboard



What about... a real-time dashboard for facilitators that visualizes the shape of an ongoing conversation, summarizing key themes, questions, and areas of alignment or disagreement?

4.4

Futurecasting

Scenario planning & extrapolation

AFTER

How might we help people see the potential risks and benefits of the decisions they are being asked to make?

Participants in deliberative dialogues, tasked with solving a problem or coming to an agreement on recommendations, may find it difficult to weigh the future implications of a decision they are asked to make. They could benefit from features to help them consider tradeoffs and potential degrees of impact, or creatively imagine and/or experience possible consequences – especially when multiple options are incompatible. This could help strengthen confidence in their ability to make judgments. While powerful, this kind of tool would need to be transparent and adjustable. Facilitators would need to be able to shape the tool's assessment logic, and show the workings to external stakeholders and participants, to maintain trust and legitimacy in the process.

"It's hard when we have to get people to make the turn from listing or identifying problems... towards solutions... there's always a natural group hesitancy... especially [on] an issue that they don't have a lot of authority over... to act as agents."

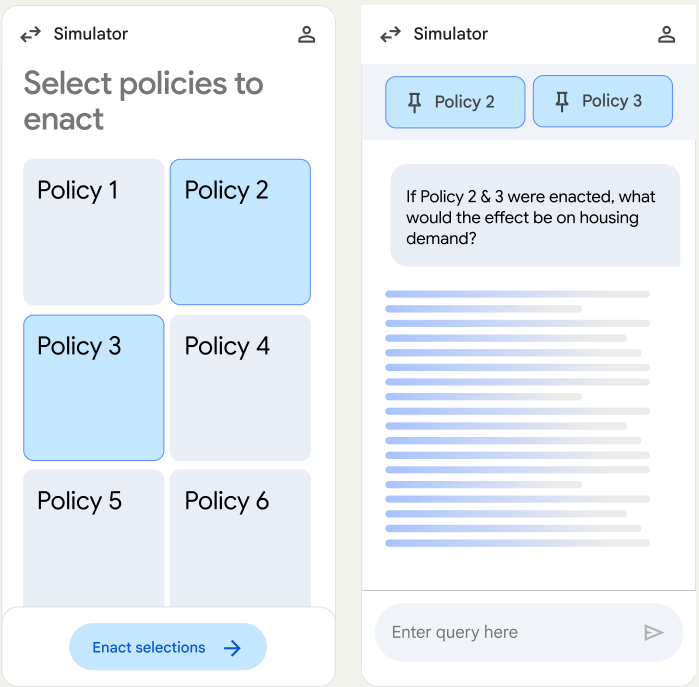
—Facilitator P10

"I think that [a tradeoff wizard] would be useful for really complex topics... If we [had] a way of visualizing and thinking about the future and the trade-offs that we make right now and [what] that means, that would be really helpful."

—Facilitator P13

Design Exploration

Policy trade-off wizard



What about... an interactive tool designed to help participants explore the potential long-term impacts and trade-offs of various policy proposals in a structured way?

4.5 Sensemaking For The People

Real-time conversation analysis & visualization

AFTER

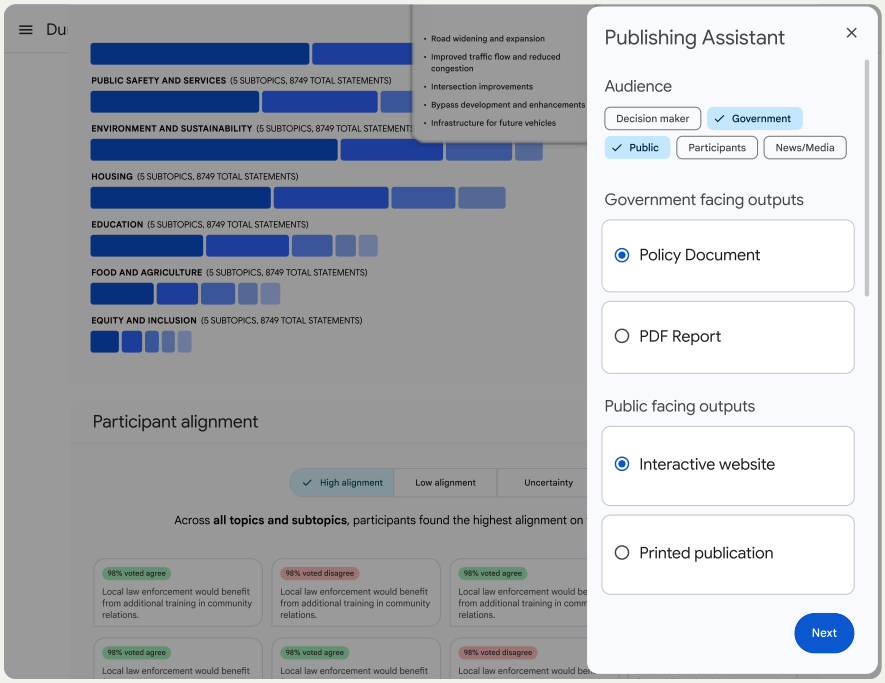
How might we give participants more power to shape reporting and drive impact?

Turning final data or recommendations from a conversation into a compelling report that can be digested and implemented by stakeholders can be time-consuming and expensive, and it can also rely heavily on professional expertise and steering by facilitators. With larger-scale digital dialogues, there is frequently no easy or accessible way to share data with the public. Participants in more intensive dialogues would benefit from tools that empower them to play a greater role in creating reports or creative multimedia formats (e.g. videos). With large-scale conversations, both participants and publics would benefit from a clear and compelling way to interpret conversation results and see where their own ideas fit within the broader dialogue.

> "[The deliberative tech platform I use] is amazing, but data export is quite basic... it's an overnight process, [so] you're raising the cost of facilitating, but also from the participants' perspective... they've got to wait overnight... & that's frustrating."
>
> —**Facilitator P12**

> "Our reports are just written reports. How can they be more engaging, without having a big comms budget & a million cameras in the room? How can people talk to people to tell the stories? [...] Tech in the room to help us take vast amounts of information & bring it together in a way that works for people... to help report-writing, would be great."
>
> —**Facilitator P11**

Design Exploration
AI publishing assistant



What about... an AI-powered tool that helps facilitators and participants transform complex dialogue data into clear, compelling, and interactive reports for various audiences?

5 Future Research & Next Steps

> It’s critical to have a say in designing the system itself, not just being passive participants.
>
> — Facilitator P8

Built collaboratively by facilitators, technologists, researchers, and publics, these 5 AI technologies could enhance conversations in meaningful and inspiring ways

From sensemaking to futurecasting, facilitators and technologists are already exploring the AI opportunities we highlight here. We hope this community roadmap, grounded in the expertise of an uncommonly wide range of facilitators, provides **strong validation that these 5 product opportunities could deliver outsized impact for structured conversations.**

Novel AI technologies built for facilitators, or intended to enhance conversations, should be developed through codesign. Alongside workshops, sprints, and trusted tester programs, which can help ensure that any new tools run with the grain of facilitator needs and public trust, we recommend embracing novel democratic codesign methods. From deliberative processes to vibe coding (which can make it easier for those without technical backgrounds to bring ideas for AI products to life), we should be exploring ways to bring as many people as possible along on the journey of building technology in service of effective conversations.

Finally, the speed with which generative AI technologies are shaping public life makes it **critical that we more deeply understand the potential for misuse in dialogues and deliberations.** We encourage further research into ways in which AI technologies could be used by bad actors to disrupt or undermine structured conversations across cultural contexts and domains. Audits of potential harm vectors, as well as tools for facilitators and process designers to identify risks like infiltration and coordinated influence using AI during live processes, will be critical.

Facilitators and mediators have deep expertise not only in leading effective conversations, but in achieving collective tasks in ways that are inclusive and legitimate. What better partners for developing new applications of AI for civic discourse, public reasoning, and peace?

Appendix

Coauthor Biographies

Ian Beacock	Ian is a researcher at Jigsaw (Google), where he helps inspire teams building technology for public good by leading foundational ethnographic research in partnership with communities. He has expertise in journalism, technology, and product strategy, and was originally trained as a historian of democracy.
Emily Saltz	Emily Saltz is an independent UX researcher, strategist, and multimedia storyteller specializing in public interest technology. Formerly, she was a researcher at Jigsaw (Google) and the NYT R&D Lab – as well as a Research Fellow at the Partnership on AI, where she published work on topics like manipulated media labeling and the provenance of photojournalism. She thinks a lot about how to make digital infrastructure more humane, accessible, and fun.
Wasim Almasri	Wasim is the Director of Programs at the Alliance for Middle East Peace, with over a decade of experience in cross-border peacebuilding and civil society development. He has led regional programs, youth networks, and advocacy campaigns across Palestine, and holds a degree in public diplomacy and policy, with a focus on governance and institutional development.
Mahmoud Bastati	Mahmoud Bastati is a digital participation consultant and social media researcher working at the intersection of technology and civic engagement. He collaborates with international networks and local organizations to design participatory processes, build digital tools for dialogue, and strengthen collective action online. His work combines data-driven social media analysis with creative design approaches, focusing on how digital narratives shape public life and civic collaboration. He also leads and mentors teams developing working on online engagement, content strategy, and platform governance across diverse contexts. He currently serves as the SWANA Lead at Build Up.
Alessandra Cardaci	Alessandra is the Head of Programming and Operations at Debating Europe, the citizen engagement unit of Friends of Europe, a leading independent think tank in Brussels, Belgium. She leads the design and delivery of initiatives that bring citizens into the driving seat of policymaking. With a rich international background, Alessandra is a skilled facilitator with a passion for co-creation and participatory formats that amplify the voices of citizens. Prior to joining Debating Europe, she worked at the European Commission and several not-for-profit organisations in Brussels and Berlin, focusing on strategic communications, cross-border cooperation, and youth engagement.
Albert Cevallos	Albert Cevallos co-leads the Activist Intelligence program at CANVAS, a global school for activists and movements. The program empowers pro-democracy activists worldwide to understand and strategically use AI in their work. Albert facilitates workshops, conducts trainings, and develops AI tools that support human rights. A trained facilitator who also served in multiple diplomatic roles, he has also led complex negotiations and peace processes in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Coauthor Biographies

Cui Jia Wei

Cui Jia Wei is the community coordinator of the civic tech project *vTaiwan.tw*, dedicated to applying digital technologies to deliberative democracy and public discussion. Together with the *vTaiwan* community, he successfully received one of OpenAI's "Democratic Inputs to AI" grants in 2023 and organized Taiwan's first multi-stakeholder discussion on AI governance. Since 2024, Cui has led the *vTaiwan* community in collaborating with the Taiwan Network Information Center (TWNIC) to hold a series of deliberative discussions on AI and internet governance. In 2025, he served as a reviewer and mentor for the Taiwan Ministry of Education's annual program "Let's Talk," evaluating and guiding deliberative democracy teams across Taiwan on AI. He is also an ISF Global Fellow at the Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP).

Caleb Gichuhi

Caleb is the Africa Lead at Build Up, where he manages digital conflict programs, digital platform governance, and depolarization projects in Africa. He also teaches data analytics for sustainable peacebuilding at the United Nations Systems Staff College (UNSSC) in Turin, Italy. He has worked across Africa to respond to online harms such as hate speech, dangerous speech, bullying and harassment, mis/disinformation and violent conflict. He is a Chevening Fellow and a U.S. State Department Fellow with IREX. Caleb also serves on the boards of PeaceRep (at the University of Edinburgh) and CommonThread.

Andrea Gallagher

Andrea is interested in the detailed mechanisms of group decision-making. She has advised a number of Web3 startups and accelerators who are working on governance and collaboration tools (e.g. Aragon, RnDAO, Harmonica, Negation Game). She approaches this work from a perspective of 30 years as a user experience researcher and information architect on web software, combined with her practice of structured facilitation methods in product design and innovation.

Beth Goldberg

Beth is the Head of R&D at Jigsaw, a non-profit Google incubator that builds technologies to give people agency over what comes next. Her team investigates and builds cutting edge technologies for the hardest civic challenges alongside academics, civil society, and technologists. Beth also teaches at Yale Graduate School of Global Affairs on Disinformation and AI.

Michele Holt-Shannon

Michele Holt-Shannon is the director and co-founder of the Center for Engaged Communities at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. For over 30 years, her work on- and off-campus has focused on community problem-solving, increasing engagement in the decisions that impact people's lives, and bringing skills and support for navigating conflict and controversy. Michele is a middle child from a mixed politics family. Her dog Pluto walks her daily.

Nicole Hunter

Nicole Hunter is Managing Director and co-founder of MosaicLab, with over a decade leading deliberative and facilitation projects. She is passionate about genuine democracy, skilled at activating groups, and recognised for helping people solve complex problems through collaborative and informed decision-making.

Coauthor Biographies

Emily Jenke	With almost 25 years of experience, Emily is one of Australia's most effective and experienced deliberative facilitators. Emily is the CoCEO of DemocracyCo, an Australian organisation that leads deliberative innovation. Emily has expertise in applying deliberative on highly charged issues and in peace-keeping environments in Australia, Europe and the Asia Pacific region. By creating the conditions for meaningful dialogue, Emily fosters the type of understanding and collaboration that creates powerful, lasting change.
Felix Kufus	Felix Kufus is an Advisor to the Finnish peacemaking organization CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. He works at the intersection of digital technology and conflict resolution, leveraging innovative approaches to enhance inclusion and foresight in peace processes. Previously with the UN DPPA Innovation Cell and UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Felix developed digital solutions for early warning and remote community engagement in conflict-affected regions.
Scott Lappan-Newton	Scott is the Director and Founder of Gauge Consulting, a boutique Australian firm specialising in collective decision-making and action. He designs and facilitates deep co-design and deliberation processes that deploy systems thinking, design thinking and behaviour change frameworks to enable groups of people or organisations to make a lasting impact, together.
Thea Mann	Thea is a UX Designer at Jigsaw, where she drives product design and co-design efforts focused on addressing complex civic issues. She specializes in creating thoughtful, intuitive, and delightful user experiences through collaborative design processes. Thea is passionate about human-centered design approaches that bring together diverse perspectives to tackle complex challenges in socially beneficial technology.
Alice Siu	Alice is Associate Director of the Deliberative Democracy Lab and Senior Research Fellow with the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of the Law, both at Stanford University. She received her Ph.D. from the Department of Communication at Stanford University, with a focus in political communication, deliberative democracy and public opinion. Alice has advised policymakers and political leaders around the world, at various levels of government, including leaders in China, Brazil, and Argentina. Her research interests in deliberative democracy include what happens inside deliberation, such as examining the effects of socio-economic class in deliberation, the quality of deliberation, and the quality of arguments in deliberation.

Concepts Tested

Concept Name	Description
AI Facilitator Trainer	Uses AI to scale up facilitator training with expert knowledge
AI-Generated Briefings	Converts complex topics into accessible materials
Language Bridge	Enables real-time multilingual discussions
Prompt Partner	Chatbot to suggest effective discussion questions & identify potential conversation pathways, e.g. helping elicit input from quiet participants
Dialogue Digest	Summarizes large-scale conversations into clear themes & patterns
Common Ground Finder	Identifies & synthesizes areas of agreement between different groups, e.g. generating multiple rounds of summaries to get to group agreement
Policy Synthesizer	Converts public input into actionable policy recommendations
Process Weaver	Connects different dialogue tools into seamless engagement processes
Scenario Simulator	Use AI chatbots in realistic scenarios traits as a training ground to practice for live dialogues/deliberations
Visual Storyteller	Transforms dialogue data into compelling visualizations for decision makers
Tradeoff Wizard	Helps participants wrestle with tradeoffs & implications of competing policy ideas or recommendations. Emerged in early interviews, then tested regularly.

Participants

Concept Name	Description	Region
P1	Founder of a peace dialogue organization	EMEA
P2	Experienced global peace mediator, trainer, & teacher	EMEA
P3	Advisor & facilitator at large peacebuilding organization	EMEA
P4	Advisor in digital peacemaking	EMEA
P5	Peacebuilder & digital action expert	LATAM
P6/7	Participatory peace digital process experts (interviewed together)	EMEA
P8	Collective peace/conflict dialogue facilitator	EMEA
P9	Experienced organizer of deliberative processes	AMER
P10	Civic deliberation facilitator	AMER
P11	Experienced deliberation & peace facilitator with global experience	APAC
P12	Policy advisor & facilitator for public policy lab	EMEA
P13	Deliberative polling researcher & facilitator	AMER
P14	Volunteer lead of civic technology movement	APAC
P15	Focus group facilitator with multilingual experience	EMEA
P16/17	Civic deliberation facilitators (interviewed together)	APAC
P18	Participatory budgeting specialist	AMER
P19	Facilitator & trainer for a civic dialogue/engagement initiative	AMER
P20	Corporate facilitation & systems design expert	APAC
P21	Activist training expert & peace facilitator	AMER
P22	Industry facilitator & decision researcher	AMER

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