

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Introductory Call for the NCDD 2008 Conference Planning Team

January 21, 2008

Members of the 2008 Austin Conference were invited to participate in either of two conference calls. These notes summarize remarks made during the conference call on January 21, 2008.

### On the Call (29 people):

Mike Aaron	J. Allen Johnson	Leanne Nurse
Tim Bonnemann	Dave Joseph	Beth Offenbacher
Cynthia Chang	Erin Kreeger	Avril Orloff
Terry Crain	Windy Lawrence	Polly Riddims
Steven Fearing	Sherry Lawry	Jake Schlachter
Rebecca Field	PJ Boone Edgerton Longoni	John Spady
Deborah Goldblatt	Deanna Martin	Madeleine Van Hecke
Kaliya Hamlin	Joseph McIntyre	Brandon WilliamsCraig
Sandy Heierbacher	Diane Miller	Taylor Willingham
Dale Ironson	Tina Nebatchi	

### Part I: Introductory Remarks by Sandy

Sandy Heierbacher facilitated the call, and she took about 10 minutes to provide an overview of NCDD conferences (what they are like, what makes them different from most conferences, a few things planning team members should know). She also shared some of her hopes for the 2008 conference with the group. Notes from this segment of the call are posted online at [www.thataway.org/events/?p=49](http://www.thataway.org/events/?p=49).

### Part II: Remarks by Participants

Each person participating in this phone call spent a couple of minutes introducing him or herself, and saying a few words about their work/background, and then commenting on why they joined the planning committee, or what they hoped to contribute or to gain from the experience. Information about the backgrounds of the planning team can be found on-line at [http://www.thataway.org/events/?page\\_id=39](http://www.thataway.org/events/?page_id=39)

Comments about planning team members' hopes/potential contributions/reasons for joining:

**Dave Joseph** hopes to increase the diversity of attendees at the conference; most conference attendees are liberal in their politics and "if I were more conservative, (some remarks made informally at the last conference) would have made me feel unwelcome." Dave hopes to have a more inclusive conference that is more welcoming of people with different political views.

**Deborah Goldblatt** wants to work towards including more younger people in the conference.

**Cynthia Chang** is also interested in involving more young people, spreading D and D ideas, and finding resources to support D and D work.

**Taylor Willingham** is interested in connecting the conference with the LBJ Library where she works, possibly by hosting a reception there one of the conference evenings, and with helping to provide graphic recordings of the conference.

**Dale Ironson** felt that his experience taking notes and preparing reports for the last NCDD conference gave him insights into the core issues that need to be emphasized in plenary sessions. He is also interested in the transformational power of the evolution of consciousness, especially in groups.

**Sherry Lowry** wants to contribute to the conference through outreach and marketing efforts; she hopes to encourage a viral-like spreading of the word about NCDD to other organizations.

**Joseph McIntyre** hopes to find new ways to apply ideas in organizational development and facilitation to different areas, particularly across the political spectrum.

**Avril Orloff** has used her talents as a graphic recorder to document past conferences and will do the same in the 2008 conference; she is looking for others to join her team. She is also especially interested in the intersection between dialogue and the arts, and the possible role of the arts in conflict transformation.

**Beth Offenbacher** is interested in technology as a tool to reach out to people unable to attend face-to-face meetings, in the digital divide issue, and in cross-cultural issues. She has been involved in research studying practices in 12 different countries.

**J. Allen Johnson's** passion is to work on ways to actually make progress on the issues that challenge us, such as environmental justice. How can we use the tools we have to impact these issues?

**Brandon Williamsraig** is committed to encouraging dialogue and deliberation as effective participatory practices – though he uses the term “process arts” to describe this kind of work.

**Tina Nabatchi** is interested in building bridges among the different academic disciplines as well as in developing research in these fields.

**Diane Miller** is the leader of the Central Texas team and hopes to build a local D and D network, show others what has already been accomplished in Texas, and find ways to bring D and D methods to solve community problems.

**Leanne Nurse**, who works for the EPA in Washington, has high hopes: “to change the course of history,” as Dr. Martin Luther King did. (Today we commemorate Martin Luther King).

**Polly Riddims** (Baltimore) wants to contribute by continuing to support the caring and welcoming aspects of the conference and is excited about moving beyond the basic questions of what/who NCDD is towards more action. She is especially interested in using the various tracks (threads) to connect issues.

**Jack Schlachter** hopes to encourage young people and increase their awareness of NCDD through his outreach efforts with UCLA students and also to contribute his technical computer skills. He's interested in the question: “how can you help people who don't know about dialogue and deliberation skills and who don't know that they need them?”

**Tim Bonnemann** would like to bring D and D to the web in somewhat the same way that current social software that creates a social web application used for group problem-solving.

**Steven Fearing** is part of the Austin, Texas group. He's interested in continuing to focus on the “rigor and clarity of the streams” and applying these streams to issues in Central Texas.

**DeAnna Martin** is especially interested in taking the conference themes and applying the methods of the NCDD streams to them; and in finding ways in the conference to learn from what others have already done, as well as drawing on research and evaluation of programs.

**Rebecca Field** is interested in the evolution of consciousness, especially in groups; in ways of developing inclusiveness, and in collaborative methods.

**P.J. Longoni** values helping people understand themselves; she is interested in how to help diverse people feel comfortable enough to talk about difficult issues, especially racism.

**Madeleine Van Hecke** is interested in finding ways to help people who are poles apart from one another engage in meaningful dialogue.

*Some of the participants were new to NCDD and were looking to the phone call to explore where they might help with the conference. These included:*

**Windy Lawrence**, who is looking forward to meeting more people and “being inspired.”

**Erin Kreeger**, who is interested both in research and in how to connect organizational development (area of expertise) to other disciplines such as community change.

**Mike Aaron**, who doesn’t know yet what he can contribute but is “jumping in with both feet.”

**Terry Crain**, who is using the phone call as an opportunity to learn more about the conference and understand it better.

### **Part III: Open Discussion and Questions**

Some of the open discussion led to specific suggestions regarding conference events. These suggestions included:

- 1) Have an introductory “overview” workshop for first-time conference attendees;
- 2) Have sessions on how people’s local experiences in using D and D have worked out, especially the experiences of the Austin group; structure these sessions so that the Austin group can also gain from the expertise of those attending the session – a kind of “here’s what we did, any suggestions on what else we might do or what we might do differently next time” approach. This might be especially effective if people with expertise in different streams offered their insights.
- 3) Have a session related to the healing power of humor, the use of humor in lowering tension, etc.
- 4) Learn from a parallel organization, [nexusforchange.org](http://nexusforchange.org) – “we can learn from each other, steal each other’s stuff and offer each other gifts.”

Some of the discussion involved two general issues. One was the extent to which the conference would emphasize particular themes such as climate change; the other was whether or not to have a plenary session on the political divide, etc. These are each summarized below.

#### **1. To what extent should the conference adopt particular political issues, such as climate change, as a central theme?**

The discussion of this issue was introduced when Joseph McIntyre asked: “What is the overall objective of the conference? Is it primarily simply to bring people together, or to help individuals improve their competency in different D and D methods, or could it also be a place where larger political movements get started regarding particular issues?”

Sandy: The basic purpose of the conference is to unite and strengthen the D and D community. Helping people network, giving them opportunities to build skills and knowledge, allowing them to share their learnings with others – all of these things help strengthen the D&D community. But people come with many different goals, and some of their objectives might be political.

The main points in the discussion that followed were that up to this point, the D and D conference has not been used to spearhead political action regarding any particular political issue, and that in order to for the conference to appeal to and be of value to people who are committed to a large variety of different political issues, the emphasis needs to be on the ideas and practices that are common to D and D, that cut across the specific issues. Sandy clarified that references in notes from the first telephone conference to the idea of having

climate change be a conference theme doesn't mean that climate change (or any other particular issue) would become the main conference theme. Instead, the conference will seek to find ways to help people apply D and D to a variety of public issues. Sandy stated: "We're not going to have an issue as a theme; we need a broader emphasis so we don't exclude members of our community. But we might have some sessions devoted to a particular theme, such as climate change."

Dale Ironson added that another purpose of the conference is to build the D and D field, move the organization forward.

## **2. To what extent should we address or somehow use the upcoming presidential election as a focal point of the conference?**

Background: In the earlier conference call, it was suggested one plenary session be devoted to the topic of the political divide.

Summary of remarks: The upcoming Presidential election in the United States makes it very timely to possibly use the election as focal point of the conference. While candidates for major offices would not attend the NCDD conference so close to election time, we might be able to get contenders for more minor offices to come and participate in a dialogue rather than a debate. This could serve to demonstrate the effectiveness of dialogue in the political arena.

At the same time, since feelings are likely to be running high regarding the election, how can the conference be designed to help participants deal with those feelings – at the conference itself and/or following the election?

Since we want to increase diversity in political views at the conference, perhaps we could reach out to Ron Paul's people as a source of more conservative participants.

### **Concluding Remarks by Sandy:**

Based on the responses from our group, Sandy decided that we'll have another conference call focusing more on our vision of what the conference might be like. For that call, Sandy will probably provide a list of possibilities regarding various conference activities that we might react to. Sandy also pointed out that smaller task groups will continue to form and those groups will have an initial conference call with Sandy and can then continue on their own, with a point person who will report back to Sandy.