

VIRTUAL/REALITY: PEACEBUILDING IN THE POST-COVID ERA

DIGITAL DIALOGUE

The Digital Dialogue was a 90-minute convening and workshop session including Kroc IPJ partners, peacebuilders, and outside experts and practitioners held on **Feb. 18, 2022** at 9am PT / 12pm ET

For more information on the event, the series or the project, please contact John Porten jporten@sandiego.edu.

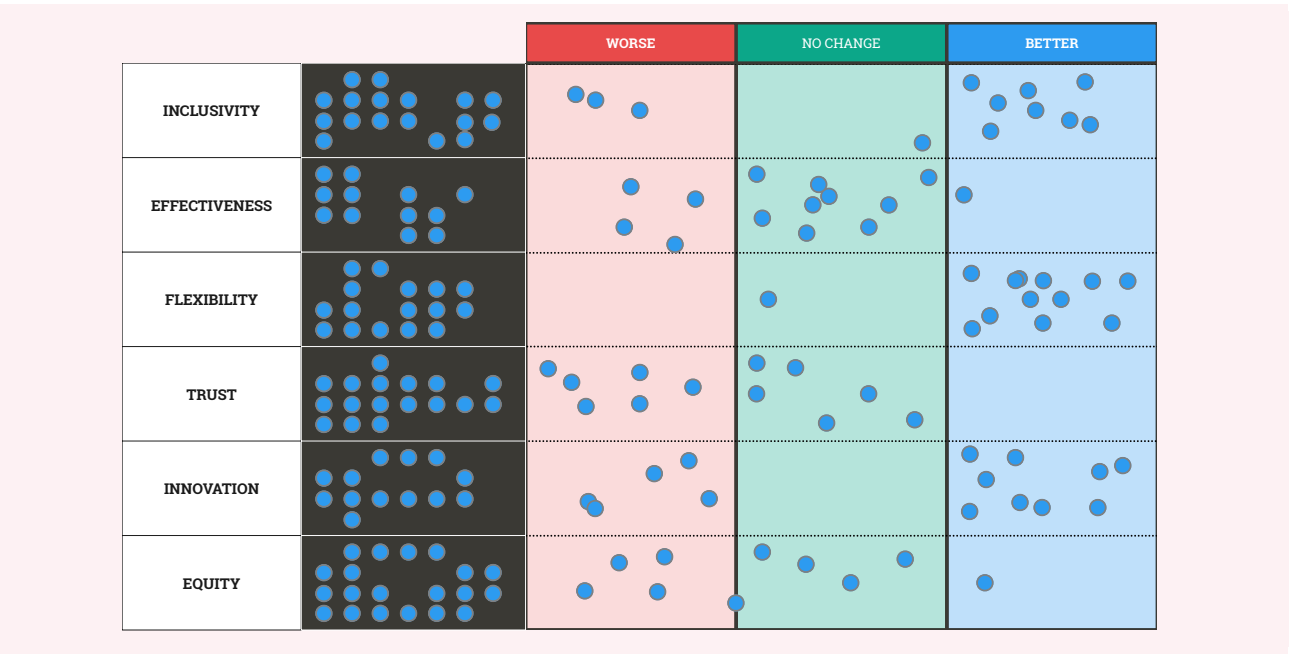
THE DOWNLOAD

Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice hosted “Virtual/Reality: a Digital Dialogue,” the first in a series of conversations about the impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding. The hasty change to virtual gatherings has generated substantial frustration and confusion, but has prompted meaningful questions about inclusion, justice, and efficacy in our old ways of working. Intentionally building the future of peacebuilding requires careful questions, and careful answers.

Practitioners in the peace and justice community met to talk about these issues with digital anthropologists, metaverse designers, educators, and telework experts. Following an interactive survey and panel, discussion groups considered pressing problems and new opportunities and transformed them into best practices.

These conversations support the **FACE Peace Initiative** at Kroc IPJ, a two year project supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The ultimate goal? To generate a sophisticated understanding of when and how to convene and collaborate in-person, virtually, or in hybrid spaces. We will develop evidence-based, interactive tools to allow peacebuilders to embrace the **F**uture of **A**ctivities, **C**ollaborations, and **E**vents – to thoughtfully design their gatherings and collaborations to achieve a range of goals, from increasing trust to maximizing inclusion; from reducing carbon footprints to finalizing peace agreements.

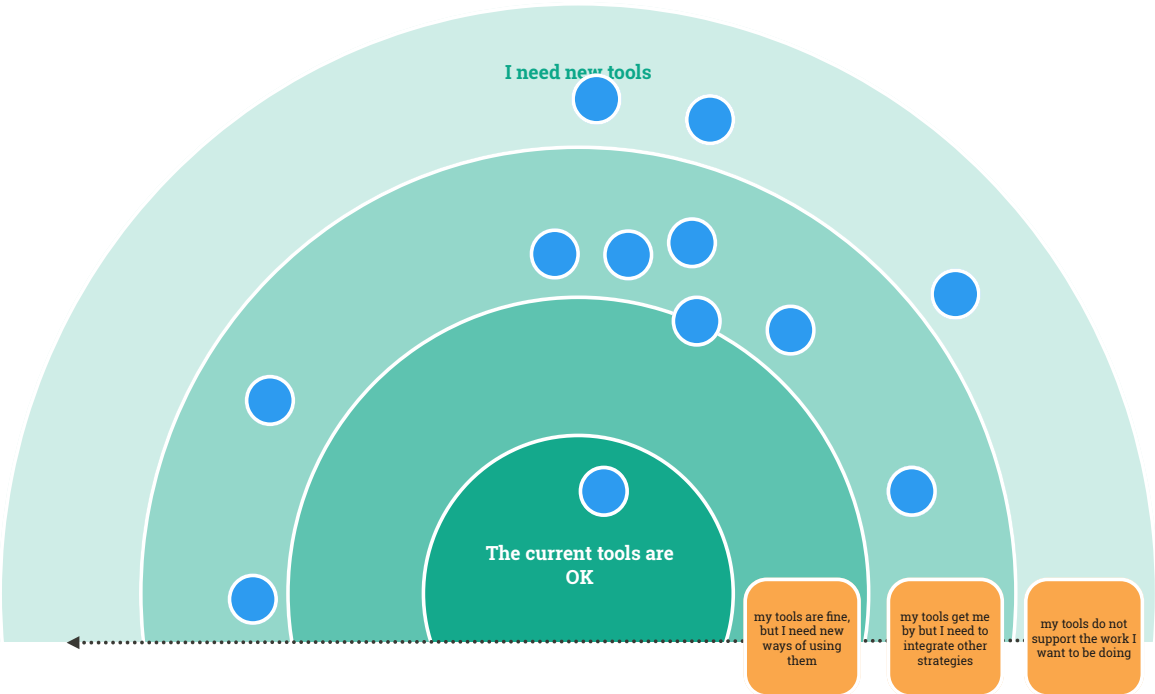
Fig. 1: Participants polled on telework technologies' effect on six characteristics of peacebuilding work.



- 58% of respondents felt levels of trust were unchanged to worse since adopting virtual/hybrid engagements.
- 92% were excited about the prospect of greater program flexibility through the use of hybrid work models.

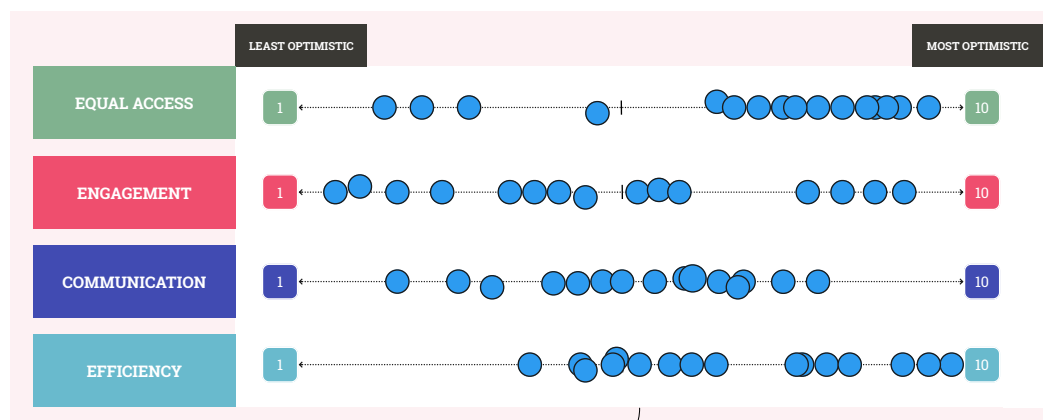
Participant Responses

Fig. 2: Participant responses to the adequacy of current tools and strategies for managing distanced peacebuilding.



- 92% of participants wanted new tools or strategies to manage the reality of hybrid peacebuilding.

Fig. 3: Participant optimism about the future of four characteristics of peacebuilding work.



- Participants offered a broad spectrum of responses as to their optimism about the future of peacebuilding. Most were skeptical about the future of engagement and communication quality. Participants were most optimistic about equity and efficiency.

WHAT WE HEARD

"When TV was invented, the first TV shows looked like someone had recorded a play. It took years to develop the visual vocabulary to make them look like TV today. That's where we are with meetings. We get online mimicking what would happen in person ... that will change a lot."

-Tim Maly, RISD

Upsides For Organizations + Initiatives

"We are hiring excellent people around the U.S. - [creating] greater diversity [in] our staff."

Organizations' initiatives are more "creative", "flexible", "inclusive."

We are building "convenings that might not otherwise have been created."

We are "able to focus on engaging specific groups that would have been impossible to engage in-person."

Best Practices

"We have to learn that digital sometimes doesn't work if we are trying to directly replicate in-person experiences."

"An all day in-person meeting doesn't need to [become] an all day Zoom."

"We are underutilizing the visual and auditory potential of digital media/convenings."

TAKE-AWAYS

The Good: Digital communication technology allows us to expand our networks and our thinking while lowering the cost, travel time, and environmental impact of our work.

The Bad: Building new and trusting relationships without spending time physically together is taxing and ineffective.

The Mixed: Old questions of accessibility and equity in peacebuilding have been replaced with digital versions. New technology raises expectations that we can level the peacebuilding playing field, without simultaneously providing obvious solutions to problems of power and resource imbalance.

The Promise: Hybrid collaboration offers the opportunity to better harness creativity, lower costs, and provide a healthier work environment, if we can embrace the opportunities that make the format unique. These new opportunities might include breaking up video conferences with exercise, multimedia elements, or other small moments that surprise us, make us more receptive to others, and restore our energy, creativity, and purpose.

NEXT STEPS

Over the coming months, the FACE Peace Initiative will examine best practices for hybrid peacebuilding collaborations by building case studies of the community's response to COVID, reviewing literature and existing solutions, and engaging in real-time research on continuing collaborations. Our goal: to generate a sophisticated understanding of when and how to convene and collaborate in in-person, virtual, and hybrid spaces and present to the peacebuilding community a design tool that leverages these practices to help it build the strongest collaborations possible.