

CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING WORKING TOWARD A COMMON GOAL

KNN Bridging Demonstration Project Convening Report

In Chicago, Illinois, from October 17-18, 2024, the Kern National Network for Flourishing in Medicine's (KNN) convening brought together 15 participants from seven academic medicine institutions to focus on bridging across differences through the KNN Bridging Demonstration Project.

Through interactive activities, discussion and action planning grounded in the Wise Crowd¹ process — a collaborative process intended to evoke collective peer feedback and problem-solving — the convening aimed to support sharing of knowledge and experience and to generate new ideas.

The convening began with opening remarks from key leaders in the KNN that grounded all participants in the connection between bridging across differences and flourishing. The remarks provided participants an opportunity to reflect on the convening's aims and their own aspirations for the time together. Participants then engaged in an introductory activity in which each participant shared their name and affiliation along with one word that was top of mind for them related to bridging in medical and health professions education.

The convening was designed with the intention of fostering meaningful connections and a sense of community among participants that would extend beyond the event itself. It aimed to create a space where attendees could begin learning from and supporting one another's work within a growing community of practice. The goals included gaining a deeper understanding of the bridging initiatives at each institution, collaboratively designing plans to move from current to future states with feedback from peers facing similar challenges, and recognizing that, regardless of where participants are in their journey, this convening marked the beginning of an ongoing knowledge-sharing and practice community.

In addition to fostering relationships, the first day of the convening centered on the KNN Framework for Flourishing, with a focus on how bridging across differences is essential to flourishing. KNN leaders provided an overview of the KNN Framework, emphasizing the definition of flourishing and exploring how the most common pathways of community through which people experience flourishing — family, work, education and religion² — may also be the pathways in which bridging is most essential. This strengths-based perspective introduced a fresh lens through which participants could approach the rest of the convening.

Prior to the first interactive activity, the participants were invited to review a set of behaviors that would support brave discussions throughout the convening —

¹ Based on the book *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki and the exercise referenced in the book *The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures* by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless.

² VanderWeele, T.J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, U.S.A., 31:8148-8156.

Convening Intentions and Aspirations

- Foster connection and community building that strengthen and grow beyond this convening
- Begin to learn and support one another's work to continue in the community of practice
- Better understand what each institution is planning for their bridging work
- Design a plan for moving from current state to future state with the feedback of colleagues who are facing similar challenges
- Recognize that wherever you are in your journey, this is just the beginning



described as **brave mindsets** (commitments to make to themselves) and **guideposts for the environment** (commitments to one another). The intention was to help all participants uphold the collective responsibility to create an optimal environment for learning, idea-sharing, personal reflection and nurturing of relationships.

After the opening segment, participants were guided through a reflective exercise designed to help them articulate their own identities and then to practice active listening and find common ground as they met one another. Using the *Ethos of Bridge Building* worksheet, each participant shared an identity-based introduction with a partner, practicing active and attentive listening. These introductions fostered mutual understanding and set the stage for a round robin where partners introduced one another to the larger group. This activity invited participants to explore their motivations for engaging in bridge-building conversations, encouraging them to reflect on how their identities, values and traditions inform their approach to bridging divides. The exercise concluded with participants drafting a personal statement in response to the question: "What calls you to bridge?"

Building on these reflections, participants then engaged in an exercise that asked, "What is the connection between flourishing and bridging?". They were encouraged to distill the key themes into three main areas of opportunity: understanding what flourishing looks and feels like, depicting how bridging across differences contributes to flourishing, and identifying pathways for shifting the discourse in this area.

Guideposts for the Environment



Sources: Brave Mindset Adapted from: Victoria Stubbs, University of Maryland School of Social Work. Community Guidelines Adapted from: Constructive Dialogue Institute.

Opening Word Cloud Prompt and Responses

The one word that is top of mind for me related to bridging in medical and health professions education is...



KNN Bridging Demonstration Project Visioning and Journey Map Design

On day two of the convening, participants collaborated both within their institutional teams and across institutions to generate new ideas and leverage their collective wisdom to refine approaches and overcome challenges in their bridging projects. In breakout groups, project teams had a visioning discussion to share ideas about their vision for bridging at their institutions. Then, using the Wise Crowd process, each team prepared and presented their project plans, discussed challenges and described intended outcomes, while receiving feedback from colleagues. As James Surowiecki writes in *The Wisdom of Crowds*, "The collective wisdom of a diverse group is more likely to be right." Following this principle, the Wise Crowd approach invited participants to bring their unique perspectives in providing feedback on one another's project plans. The process was designed

to encourage creative problem-solving by tapping into the diversity of perspectives, fostering a spirit of collaboration and maximizing the strengths of independent thought, consistent with the principles of bridging that the KNN seeks to cultivate.

Institutional team representatives each used a design tool to map their project's journey over the next two years. The teams then presented their plan to other participants in the small group so as to benefit from the collective wisdom of peers and generate ideas for refining their institutional strategies. Interactions during meals and breaks allowed deeper exploration of shared learnings and growing understanding among the group about the good ideas and responses to challenges coming from other sites. The whole process identified broader opportunities and challenges that could be addressed across institutions.

Participants concluded the day with a clearer sense of how to move forward with their projects and an appreciation for the power of bringing diverse perspectives together. Participants also were encouraged to translate what they learned from their collaborative work throughout the convening into concrete next steps that could inform their direction and progress. They were prompted to reflect on their key takeaways and consider, "What is your concrete next step in the next month?". This call to action reinforced the importance of applying the insights gained during the convening to their ongoing projects, ensuring that the momentum from the event leads to meaningful progress in the near term.

Further, several participants shared that they felt energized to pursue next steps, recognizing that bridging differences and fostering collaboration are essential to achieving lasting impact. The word cloud below displays other words that participants shared at the close of the convening.

Closing Word Cloud Prompt and Responses

The one word that is top of mind for me as we close the convening is...

Themes Surfaced in Discussion and Project Journey Mapping

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM VISIONING DISCUSSION

- **Trust and Collaboration as Foundations**
 - Build and rebuild trust between faculty, learners and leadership.
 - Foster an environment where shared success is prioritized over individual achievements.
 - Encourage trust-based civil interactions as the foundation for a flourishing community.

- **Culture Change and Role Models**
 - Cultivate role models who demonstrate bridging and embody the desired cultural shifts.
 - Reduce hierarchical barriers, with leaders modeling collaborative behaviors.
 - Promote a culture of collaboration across silos and reduce divisions between departments and roles.

- **Freedom of Expression and Greater Comfort with Difficult Dialogue**
 - Increase comfort with disagreement, emphasizing the importance of spirited, constructive dialogue.
 - Create a culture where freedom to voice opinions is protected and encouraged, without fear of retaliation.
 - Teach skills for effective and respectful argumentation, bridging divides in discourse.
- **Empowerment and Co-Creation**
 - Empower learners through co-creation of solutions and initiatives.
 - Build models that allow learners to actively participate in bridging efforts and take ownership of outcomes.
 - Encourage leaders and learners to work together in designing sustainable solutions beyond training.
- **Relationship-Building and Human Connection**
 - Prioritize relationship-building, ensuring that personal connections are valued as highly as work.
 - Create intentional “people time” for faculty, learners and leaders to connect and build trust.
 - Encourage student-faculty interactions outside of clinical settings, showing humanity and fostering connection.
- **Cultural Strength**
 - Establish cultural endurance that sustains bridging efforts long-term.
 - Ensure that the principles of collaboration and trust-building remain central to institutional practices.
 - Focus on developing a cadre of champions who will uphold these values and drive change forward.
- **Generational and Moral Bridging**
 - Bridge generational gaps, fostering collaboration and understanding across different age groups.
 - Shift to a mindset of assuming best intentions in others, reducing suspicion and enhancing cooperation.
 - Increase focus on moral and ethical development across the institution, creating a cohesive culture of values.

With many commonalities creating a shared vision, participants next began contemplating how to translate that into concrete steps for shifting the current national dialogue and existing approaches.



IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING BRIDGING EFFORTS

- **Strategic Communication and Engagement**
 - Develop and share targeted communications and marketing strategies to engage faculty, learners and leaders.
 - Create short, impactful two-minute videos to spread awareness and enthusiasm about Bridging work.

- **Anchoring Experiences Structurally in the Curriculum or Through Themes**

- Anchor the Bridging experience in specific themes or issues to create focused, meaningful engagement (e.g., discovery, feedback, team dynamics).
- Use thematic approaches to link Bridging experiences with practical, relatable challenges.

- **Integration into Daily Work and Orientations**

- Integrate Bridging experiences into orientations for both learners and faculty to embed these practices early.
- Protect time for Bridging activities by integrating them into daily work routines to ensure sustained participation.

- **Assessment and Continuous Improvement**

- Develop assessment tools to evaluate the Bridging experience, with a focus on changes in behaviors and skills after six months.
- Gather input from key stakeholders (faculty, learners, staff, patients) to refine and improve the experience.

- **Building a Flourishing Culture**

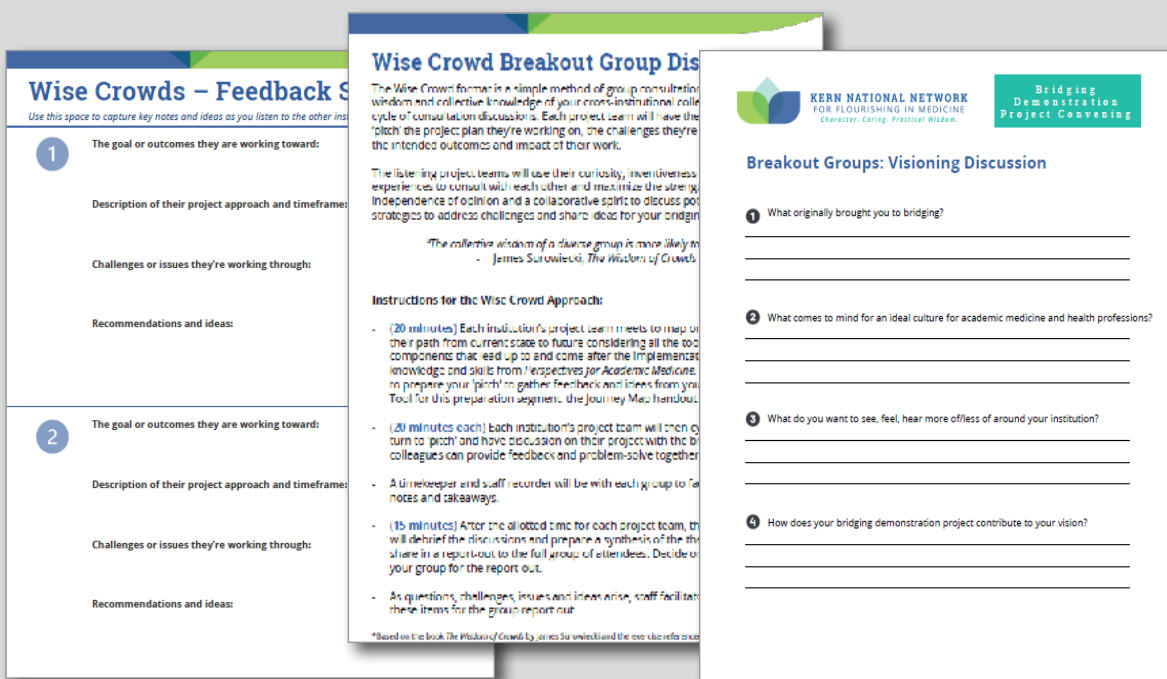
- Expand on the concept of flourishing to aim beyond simply avoiding mistreatment and focus on creating a thriving environment.
- Promote transparency, self-compassion and cultural shifts earlier in the educational process.

- **Sustained Engagement and Collaboration**

- Customize peer-to-peer learning opportunities for both learners and faculty.
- Build and sustain learning collaboratives, including scenarios for interprofessional interactions.
- Start and sustain a “Bridge Club” with guided discussions and regular monthly meetings to foster long-term commitment to Bridging principles.

- **Incentivizing Participation in the Learning Modules**

- Offer Continuing Medical Education credits for faculty who participate in *Perspectives for Academic Medicine* modules.
- Recognize learners with certificates or honors for completing related modules and additional Bridging experiences.



Next Steps

In support of these ideas, the KNN offered ongoing partnership through tailored institutional visits. These visits, customized to meet the unique needs of each institution, will involve listening sessions and collaborative meetings with project leaders, faculty and staff. With the KNN as facilitators, these sessions aim to explore opportunities for integration of bridging across various institutional environments.



Looking ahead, the KNN will also host a **Bridge Builders Intensive Train-the-Trainer** in September 2025, a one and half-day professional development experience preceding the 2025 KNN Conference in Minneapolis. This in-person, interactive session will equip participants with the deep knowledge and practical skills necessary to lead bridging efforts within their institutions and beyond, empowering them to become advocates for bridging practices.

In addition, the **Bridging Demonstrate Sites Community of Practice** will continue to gather in monthly virtual sessions designed to sustain the collaborative energy and support generated at the convening. These 60-minute sessions provide a dedicated space for project teams to connect, share resources and work through challenges together. Facilitated by the KNN, the Community of Practice is intended to be co-facilitated by project team members, allowing teams to bring real-time experiences to the group for discussion and collective problem-solving.

Together, these initiatives create a sustained pathway for bridging efforts, ensuring that participants will remain connected and continue making progress well beyond the convening.

Closing

Although there is much continued work ahead, the convening underscored a powerful, shared vision for bridging across differences toward flourishing in academic medicine — one rooted in trust and collaboration. Participants worked together to learn from one another and develop connections that can serve as a valuable resource in the coming years. Through the Community of Practice and other resources, demonstration site partners will have the opportunity to continue the momentum sparked at the convening and leverage peer support in navigating obstacles, sharing insights and developing sustainable practices for bridging.

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KNN Bridging Demonstration Project Convening Participants

15 project team representatives | 23 total attendees including KNN leaders, CDI partners and staff noted with asterisks

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