

CULTIVATING COLLABORATION TO INFLUENCE THE HEALTH ECOSYSTEM

KNN Cultivating Collaborative Networks for Flourishing Convening Report

In Nashville, Tennessee, the Kern National Network for Flourishing in Medicine (KNN) hosted a two-day convening of 20 leaders from 18 forward-thinking organizations engaged in improving the culture and environment across the healthcare ecosystem. In a first of its kind gathering, the KNN brought together these organizations with the intention of creating space to build relationships and to lean into each other's strengths toward the shared goal of driving systemic change. In their efforts to explore flourishing as a potential common aim, participants were encouraged to consider the “adjacent possible”: the possibilities on the fringes of what we already do, what is already present but that we have not yet seen (Johnson, 2011; Rubin, 2023).



Through reflective time, interactive activities and collaborative discussions, participants were invited to devise potential solutions to shared challenges, with the aim of potentially developing national initiatives to pursue jointly. Drawing on Palmer's (2009) work in leadership and social change, the agenda supported both inner and outer work. Inner work included opportunities to reflect individually and journal thoughts before engaging in discussions or sharing with others. The outer work of collaboration was then grounded in these individual insights. This combination of inner and outer work supported the goal of exploring collaborative interventions and approaches together while still honoring each organization's unique identity.

Framework-Grounded Activities Promote Collaboration

Over the course of two days, the convening included multiple practices grounded in the KNN Framework for Flourishing and its elements of character, caring and practical wisdom toward flourishing. Participants were encouraged to use the time together to connect and get to know one another and the goals and missions of the various organizations. While recognizing the seriousness of the work and complexity of the times in which we live, participants were encouraged to be creative and exploratory in their approach to collaboration.

Guest Speaker

During dinner, Wes Ely, MD, MPH, a Co-Director at the Center for Critical Illness, Brain Dysfunction, and Survivorship at the Vanderbilt Memory and Alzheimer Center and author of “Every Deep-Drawn Breath,” spoke to the group and shared several stories of personal reflection that have led to critical



changes in the way he practices medicine. His central message was that physicians are allowed into the sacred spaces of people’s lives and therefore hold a special position of trust. For this reason, he argues, the science of medicine alone will never be enough to heal or care for people.

Facilitated Discussion

Throughout the convening, participants were asked to think about the biggest challenges to the work of their organizations and to find links among themselves both in terms of challenges and potential solutions. They were encouraged to consider ways not just to tackle common challenges but to do so through collaborative efforts that could become more than the sum of their parts. This goal was facilitated through a multi-step process that included inner work of individual reflection on personal and organizational values and purpose, as well as outer work of making connections, shared brainstorming and explorations of creative opportunities.

Inner Work: Reflection on Personal and Organizational Values and Purpose

First, participants were asked to identify opportunities to amplify flourishing in the context of their organization’s work. Through individual reflection they considered two guiding questions:

- 1. What issues are impacting flourishing in our community or organization?
- 2. What opportunities exist for enhancing flourishing?



Outer Work: Making Connections, Shared Brainstorming and Exploring Opportunities

Following this reflection activity, they participated in a gallery walk to explore potential creative opportunities to address needs together. They learned about the other organizations present through exploring small posters hanging around the space and drew connections between the missions and values of those organizations and the vision casting they had just completed. Adding to the gallery, they shared notes on potential areas for collaboration as well as questions for the other organizations present, as summarized below.

Potential Collaboration Points	Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offering each other’s curriculum to stakeholders• Developing train-the-trainer workshops to share curriculum across organizations• Holding joint convenings with members from multiple organizations• Collaboratively recognizing educators• Cross-promoting each other’s work and fellowship programs• Submitting joint workshops at national conferences• Sharing research that also supports other organizations’ missions• Sharing space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What career stage are your members?• How can I get connected with your organization’s resources?• Is your organization interested in character development?• How does your organization define wisdom?• Would your audience be interested in joining my organization?• How did you become a formalized center at your university, and what are the advantages?• What might a flourishing portfolio for promotion and tenure review look like?• What are flourishing best practices?• What are your organization’s long term (5- or 10-year) goals?• How can we create ongoing dialog?• How to we ensure that a focus on flourishing doesn’t become a self-focused outlook toward career development?

Using an impact versus feasibility matrix, participants worked in small groups to determine commonalities in their personal reflections and notes from the gallery walk. They found common opportunities and discussed both the potential impact and the relative feasibility of the projects. In this conversation they considered each organization's unique strengths and resources and also how the KNN could potentially support the proposed solutions. Participants began to focus on ways that their organizations could view and address issues in the field of medicine through a shared lens. Conversations underscored the importance of collaboration, patient involvement, and addressing well-being, especially following the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health, as well as meaningful work in the healthcare ecosystem.

Resource Sharing: Several representatives noted ways in which their resources could support members of other participating organizations. It was noted that this sort of sharing could shift the professional mindset from one of scarcity to that of abundance. Resources sharing will be made more effective if a common vocabulary is adopted and more efficient if leadership for the work of creating and sustaining new resources and partnerships is distributed.

Influence on Medical Education: There were discussions of influencing medical education both through student-facing curriculum improvements and faculty training. Some pointed out that curriculum changes would be most effective if they began at the pre-medical school level to lay a foundation for the expectations of medical school. A group focused on education could explore continuity of programs across the medical curriculum and also support the dissemination of existing faculty training and leadership development courses.



Action Steps and Recommendations

By engaging in activities and making connections, participants generated two types of suggestions: 1) action steps to be taken by participating groups in collaboration with each other, and 2) recommendations for how the KNN could support joint endeavors.



Action Steps:

- Collaborative outreach programs and resource cataloging
- Development of shared educational resources and programs
- Standardizing faculty development and leadership training
- Advocacy and idea dissemination

Recommendations:

- Creating opportunities to continue the discussion
- Developing multi-organization sphere of influence and assets maps

Closing

Individually, participating organizations are already making a difference in areas spanning across the healthcare continuum, and coming together creates an opportunity to magnify that impact to bring about meaningful, lasting transformation in healthcare. Rallying around a powerful shared aim and taking steps to share resources and launch collaborative initiatives could unlock new possibilities. We extend our gratitude to all convening participants and look forward to ongoing collaboration and ideation toward collective action.



Acknowledgments

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References

- Johnson, S. (2011). *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*. Penguin.
- Palmer, P. J. (2009). *Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Rubin, R. (2023). *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*. Penguin Press.

KNN Cultivating Collaborative Networks for Flourishing Convening Participants

27 total attendees, including KNN leaders and coordinating facilitators noted with asterisks

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