

CHAOS OR

COMMUNITY:

THRIVING IN THE FACE OF COMPLEXITY.



An online Group Relations Conference studying the intersection of representation and democracy

June 23 - 25, 2023

Conference Overview

THE BALANCE OF CHAOS AND COMMUNITY is key to supporting democracy. Studying the intersection of representation (the intersection of identity and authority) and democracy (power and leadership) can help create more inclusive and equitable environments for all. These intersections are complex, and the projection onto those in power can reinforce societal norms and exclude marginalized communities. A truly democratic society represents all voices and identities, working to dismantle oppressive structures of power. The success of democracy can create challenges, such as complacency and self-centeredness, which can lead to a decline in civic engagement and ultimately, a collapse of democratic institutions. To maintain a balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility, we must stay vigilant and committed to the principles of democracy.

This conference is designed to study, experientially, what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. offered in his book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, with the saying “...We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools.” The choice between chaos and community is a choice between fear and hope. We must reject fear and embrace hope, recognizing that we have the power to shape our collective future. I challenge us to take up the task, together.

-Tyrome Smith



TYROME SMITH
Director

BETSY HASEGAWA
Associate Director

AMBER WILLIAMS
Director of Administration

Group Relations Conference

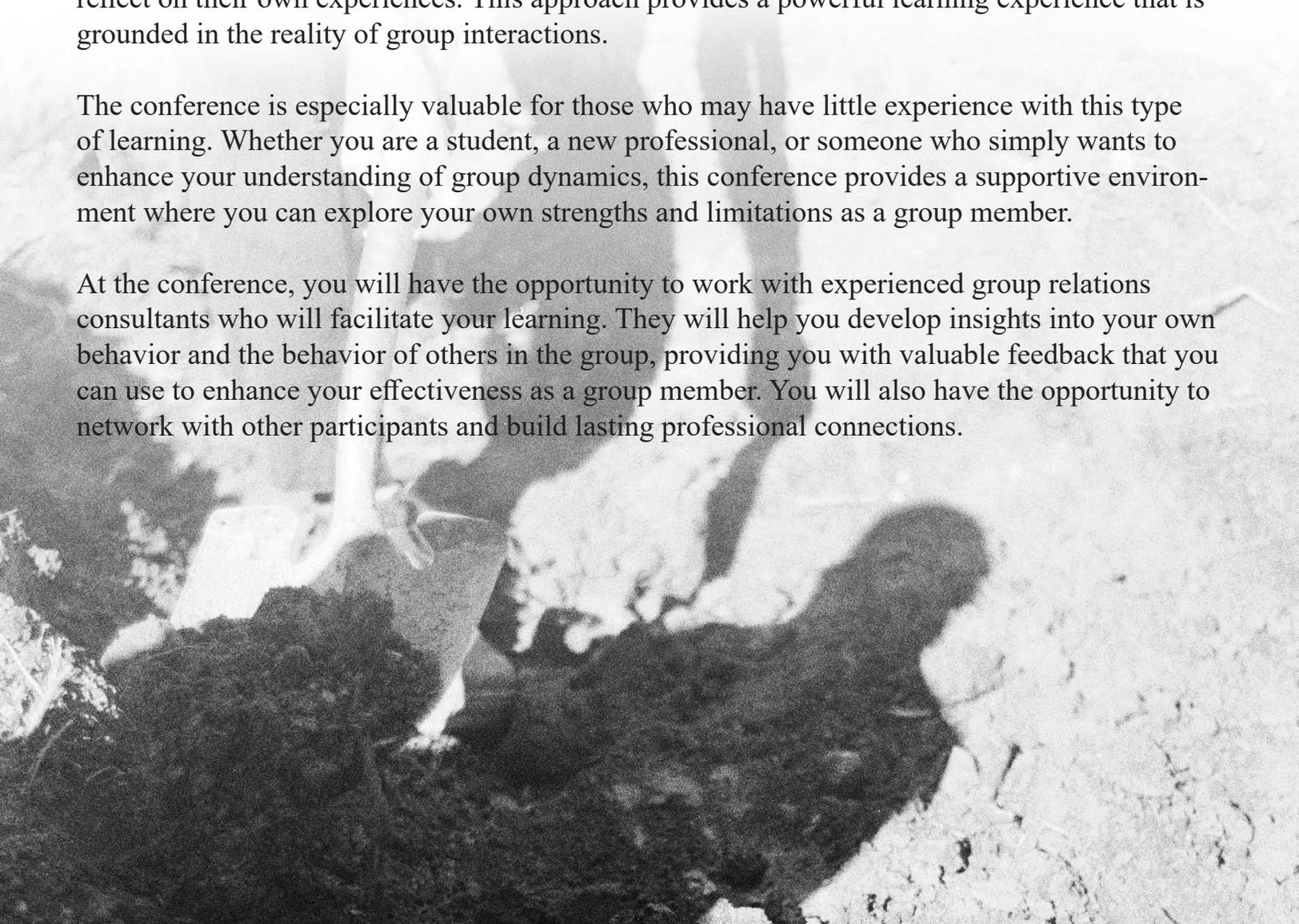
Welcome to the Washington-Baltimore Center for the Study of Group Relations in the Tavistock tradition! This unique event is designed to offer participants the opportunity to explore and understand the unconscious dynamics of groups with respect to authority, leadership, democracy, and power. The conference will help you gain insights into the complexities of group interactions and enhance your ability to function in groups effectively.

The Tavistock tradition is rooted in the work of psychoanalysts and social scientists who recognized the importance of understanding the unconscious dynamics that underpin group behavior. The conference draws on this rich heritage to provide a safe and supportive environment where participants can explore their own assumptions, attitudes, and behavior patterns in relation to group dynamics.

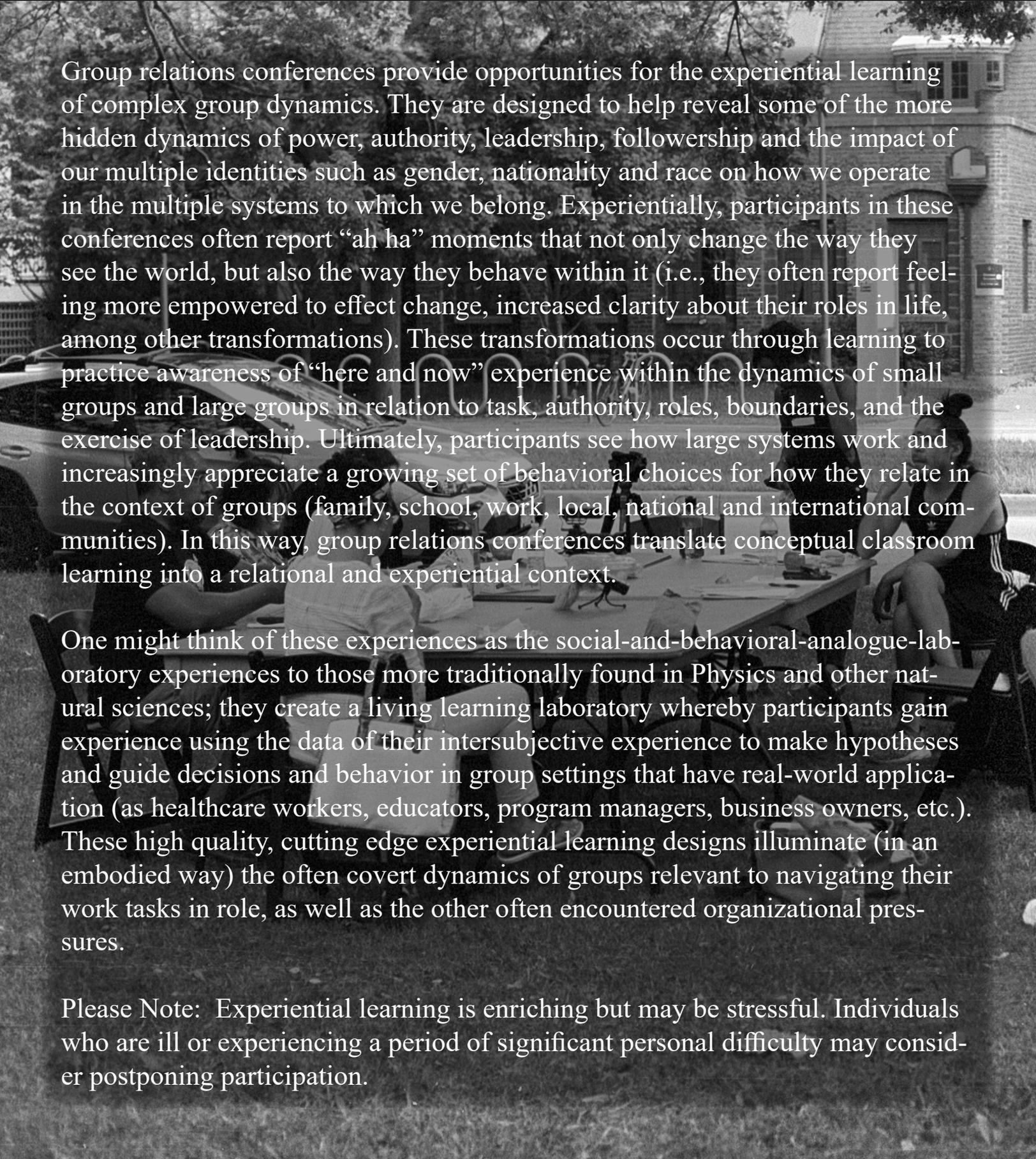
The conference is designed as an experiential learning opportunity. Rather than relying on lectures and presentations, participants engage in group activities and discussions to explore and reflect on their own experiences. This approach provides a powerful learning experience that is grounded in the reality of group interactions.

The conference is especially valuable for those who may have little experience with this type of learning. Whether you are a student, a new professional, or someone who simply wants to enhance your understanding of group dynamics, this conference provides a supportive environment where you can explore your own strengths and limitations as a group member.

At the conference, you will have the opportunity to work with experienced group relations consultants who will facilitate your learning. They will help you develop insights into your own behavior and the behavior of others in the group, providing you with valuable feedback that you can use to enhance your effectiveness as a group member. You will also have the opportunity to network with other participants and build lasting professional connections.



What is Group Relations?



Group relations conferences provide opportunities for the experiential learning of complex group dynamics. They are designed to help reveal some of the more hidden dynamics of power, authority, leadership, followership and the impact of our multiple identities such as gender, nationality and race on how we operate in the multiple systems to which we belong. Experientially, participants in these conferences often report “ah ha” moments that not only change the way they see the world, but also the way they behave within it (i.e., they often report feeling more empowered to effect change, increased clarity about their roles in life, among other transformations). These transformations occur through learning to practice awareness of “here and now” experience within the dynamics of small groups and large groups in relation to task, authority, roles, boundaries, and the exercise of leadership. Ultimately, participants see how large systems work and increasingly appreciate a growing set of behavioral choices for how they relate in the context of groups (family, school, work, local, national and international communities). In this way, group relations conferences translate conceptual classroom learning into a relational and experiential context.

One might think of these experiences as the social-and-behavioral-analogue-laboratory experiences to those more traditionally found in Physics and other natural sciences; they create a living learning laboratory whereby participants gain experience using the data of their intersubjective experience to make hypotheses and guide decisions and behavior in group settings that have real-world application (as healthcare workers, educators, program managers, business owners, etc.). These high quality, cutting edge experiential learning designs illuminate (in an embodied way) the often covert dynamics of groups relevant to navigating their work tasks in role, as well as the other often encountered organizational pressures.

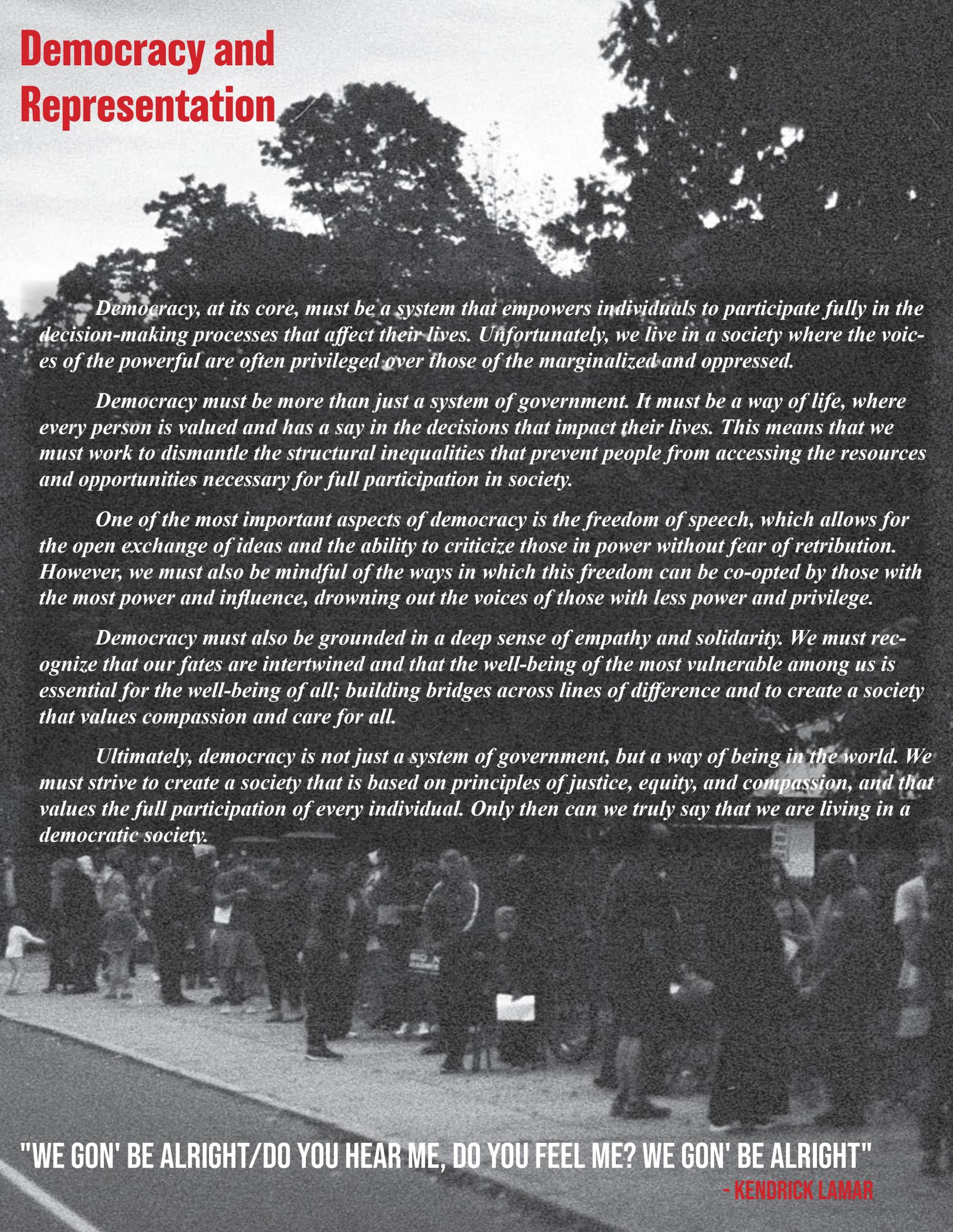
Please Note: Experiential learning is enriching but may be stressful. Individuals who are ill or experiencing a period of significant personal difficulty may consider postponing participation.

Primary Task

THE PRIMARY TASK and purpose of a group relations conference is to provide a space for individuals to explore the complexities of group and organizational behavior. By utilizing systems psychodynamics as a theoretical framework, participants gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and unconscious forces that shape group dynamics. By bringing together a diverse group of people from various backgrounds and professions, we create a unique learning environment where participants can examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to group dynamics. Through experiential learning, participants learn to recognize the the conscious and unconscious forces that influence how groups form, evolve, and disintegrate over time. This includes exploring issues of representation (the intersection of identity and authority) and democracy (power and leadership).

For someone who has never attended a group relations conference or has no idea of what systems psychodynamics is, the learning can be invaluable and potentially unsettling. The conference is an opportunity for participants to engage in deep self-reflection and self-discovery. By exploring our own behaviors and beliefs in relation to group dynamics, we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and others. This self-awareness can be invaluable in both personal and professional contexts. By developing a greater awareness and deeper understanding of group dynamics, participants can become more effective leaders, collaborators, and team members. It therefore stands to reason that this kind of understanding could assist with issues in secondary and higher education, local and state government systems, think tanks, non-profits, creatives, etc.

Democracy and Representation



Democracy, at its core, must be a system that empowers individuals to participate fully in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Unfortunately, we live in a society where the voices of the powerful are often privileged over those of the marginalized and oppressed.

Democracy must be more than just a system of government. It must be a way of life, where every person is valued and has a say in the decisions that impact their lives. This means that we must work to dismantle the structural inequalities that prevent people from accessing the resources and opportunities necessary for full participation in society.

One of the most important aspects of democracy is the freedom of speech, which allows for the open exchange of ideas and the ability to criticize those in power without fear of retribution. However, we must also be mindful of the ways in which this freedom can be co-opted by those with the most power and influence, drowning out the voices of those with less power and privilege.

Democracy must also be grounded in a deep sense of empathy and solidarity. We must recognize that our fates are intertwined and that the well-being of the most vulnerable among us is essential for the well-being of all; building bridges across lines of difference and to create a society that values compassion and care for all.

Ultimately, democracy is not just a system of government, but a way of being in the world. We must strive to create a society that is based on principles of justice, equity, and compassion, and that values the full participation of every individual. Only then can we truly say that we are living in a democratic society.

"WE GON' BE ALRIGHT/DO YOU HEAR ME, DO YOU FEEL ME? WE GON' BE ALRIGHT"

- KENDRICK LAMAR



"DEMOCRACY IS NOT JUST A SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, IT IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT REQUIRES A DEEP AND ABIDING RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL."

- Shirley Chisholm

"DEMOCRACY IS NOT A STATE. IT IS AN ACT, AND EACH GENERATION MUST DO ITS PART TO HELP BUILD WHAT WE CALLED THE BELOVED COMMUNITY, A NATION AND WORLD SOCIETY AT PEACE WITH ITSELF."

- John Lewis

"DEMOCRACY IS THE ONLY SYSTEM CAPABLE OF REFLECTING THE HUMANIST PREMISE OF EQUILIBRIUM OR BALANCE. THE KEY TO ITS SECRET IS THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE CITIZEN."

- John Ralston Saul

"DEMOCRACY IS NOT JUST ABOUT VOTING FOR YOUR FAVORITE CANDIDATE; IT'S ABOUT STANDING UP FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN AND MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD."

- Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

"DEMOCRACY IS NOT PERFECT, BUT IT'S THE BEST SYSTEM WE HAVE. IT'S A SYSTEM WHERE MISTAKES CAN BE CORRECTED, INJUSTICES CAN BE RIGHTED, AND POWER CAN BE PEACEFULLY TRANSFERRED."

- Bill Clinton

Conference Events

CONFERENCE OPENING

Introduce conference members to the conference; its themes, structure, processes, and space for learning. It will also provide opportunities for members to share their experience crossing the boundary into the conference. As a result, the Conference Opening is the beginning of the staff and members to begin working.

CAUCUS

This event focuses on interpersonal and intergroup relations. The task of the group is to study behavior as it occurs in the here and now, that is with a focus on issues as they are happening presently in the group. Through the use of Open Space Technology, each member will have the opportunity to caucus with up to 10 members and a consultant with whom they choose to work. In this setting, participants explore how they relate to the formal authority of the consultant and how the dynamics of representation and democracy impacts their capacity to take up personal, as compared to formal and delegated, authority.

CONVENTION

This event focuses on all members of the conference meeting together with the task of studying their own behavior in the here and now. Consultants assigned to the convention represent a diverse set of people who may have similar and contrasting backgrounds and opinions about democracy. In contrast to the caucus, the convention highlights dynamics that occur in representative democracies where personal interactions are limited.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION (DIA)

This event offers members and staff the opportunity to participate in and examine the entire institution of the conference as it evolves and unfolds. Members form their own representative groups that might be based on learning from both the caucus and convention. The groups are asked to interact with other groups including staff. Staff members are also available to provide consultation upon request. The task of this event is twofold: 1) to study the dynamics that develop between and among subgroups as they interact with one another and relate to the conference management and trying to understand the institution as a whole with respect to representation and democracy, while 2) working on a task that results in a conversation at the end of this event, to explore insights and emerging hypotheses.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION GROUPS (RAG)

Members are assigned to a group of about 6 people with the task of reviewing their experience in the conference with the assistance of a consultant. The review includes considerations for implications for members' practice in other groups and organizations. In addition, members will have an opportunity to understand the relationship between the roles they are taking up in the conference with the roles they hold in the outside world. Review and Application groups are not "here-and-now" events and the consultants will take up their role differently than in the conference events.

CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

In this event members and staff have an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their experiences in the conference as a whole. This event also allows all members and staff to collaborate in reviewing and analyzing their experience of the entire conference, and perhaps to discover patterns of action or deeper levels of significance that may have implications for one's behavior in other groups and organizations.

Conference Staff



TYROME 'TY' SMITH (HE/HIM)

Ty is the son of a lineage of 'black folk' that the legend says can be traced back to the original African that came on the boat that landed in Charleston SC. He is also the son of a family that was tied to a plantation with roots in 17th-century Germany. He has been involved in group relations for over 25 years and has most recently served in the role of VP, AKRI. His day job is as the Director of Strategic Partnership for the Common Mission Project. He also coaches Black and Brown startup founders. In terms of democracy, he is curious to reconcile the fundamental contradiction of American democratic traditions of "we hold these truths to be self-evident... Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" with evidence to the contrary.

BETSY HASEGAWA (SHE/HER)

Betsy (Ainu First People of Japan; Ed.D.; Pacific Northwest currently, born/raised in Chicago) serves as Special Advisor for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Community with Seattle Colleges District. Betsy's work has been to build community, develop leadership, and promote healing as part of a process to become an anti-racist college district. Betsy was raised in an intentional community and understands group membership as a winding pathway pebbled with love, unpredictability, confusion, heartbreak, beauty, and learning on the way to taking my place in something so much bigger than just me. Betsy is a Fellow of the AK Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems, a Co-creator with Group Relations International, and a member of GREX - An Organization for the Study of Authority, Leadership, and Group Dynamics. Betsy serves on the board of Ancestral Connections, a non-profit educational organization for Pacific Asian heritage people who are reclaiming our indigenous heritages.



AMBER WILLIAMS (THEY/SHE)

Amber is a Black American, born and raised in Philadelphia, whose adoptive family has roots in South Carolina. They work at the University of Pennsylvania in academic affairs, and have a variety of experience as a Higher Education professional over the past seven years. Amber finds democracy to be chaotic, often exclusionary and lacking the breath of its potential: yet necessary for the fullest version of community to be birthed. Amber is a GRI co-creator, AKRI member and former board member, and WBC member: having staffed a variety of Group Relations Conferences for four years.



YARO FONG-OLIVARES, M.S. (SHE/HER)

Yaro is an Afro-Caribbean and Chinese immigrant from the island of Hispaniola (now known as Dominican Republic and Haiti), Washington Heights, and now living in Massachusetts. Her most salient identity is as priest of Yemaya in the Lucumi spiritual tradition. Professionally, she serves as Executive Director, Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business, Bentley University; Organizational and Leadership Psychology PsyD candidate, William James College; M.S., Organizational Change Management, The New School; B.A. Sociology, Barnard College. Organizational development leader with a focus on racial justice, equity, and inclusion; Past President, Executive Committee, New York Center; Member, Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems; Co-Creator, Group Relations International; Certified Consultant, AK Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems. Yaro finds democracy to be both chaotic and communal, and while she has not seen democracy work for everyone, she is open to an emergent social system in which democracy can deliver on its promise of equity and freedom for all.



NADIA GREENSPAN (SHE/HER)

Nadia is a performing improviser, an acting instructor, a psychological dramaturg and a resident psychotherapist of the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago. As a group therapist in private practice, she specializes in working with people in creative and expressive arts. Born in the Soviet Union, she is a proud Ukrainian, a recovering Jew, an outspoken disruptor of white patriarchal supremacy, and a practicing witch. She is a consultant-candidate of AKRI and a Co-Creator of Group Relations international. She's been involved in group relations work for the past thirteen years, attended and consulted at more than twenty conferences.



SETH HARKINS, EDD (HE/HIM)

Seth is a white American of German-Irish ancestry; 76; live in Palatine, IL; grew up suburban Chicago; mother an elementary teacher, father a Universalist-Unitarian minister, and social justice family values; retired from career in educational leadership; working in private practice as an educational systems consultant and researcher; other identities: straight, husband, father, grandfather, Twelve-Step practitioner; group relations since 1985; current president Midwest Center for Group Relations, member and past president Chicago Center for Group Relations, member and past board Member A.K. Rice Institute; I find democracy currently turbulent, polarized, chaotic, fragile, with root causes in oppressive, structural and systemic racism, and consequent socio-economic-political inequities and inequalities; I hold a hopeful vision of a multicultural global democracy with the core values of human dignity of all, respect for common humanity, and guided by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The now and future requires finding effective ways to collaborate and holding all of our collective parts.





KATHERINE HARDING (SHE/HER)

Dr. Katherine Harding is mixed race American with familial roots in Jamaica and the Southern United States. She was born and raised in The Bronx, New York. She is a psychologist in private practice in Chicago, Illinois, and received her doctorate at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology, where she focused on Forensic Psychology. She began her Group Relations work in 2002 while earning her Graduate degree and now serves as President of the Chicago Center for the Study of Groups and Organizations (CCSGO). She experiences the word “democracy” to be spoken often and practiced sparingly and suspects that its true potential is terrifying to most.

FRED SCHMIDT-ARENALES (HE/HIM)

Fred is an artist-filmmaker whose projects attempt to bring awareness to unconscious processes on the individual and group level. He has presented interdisciplinary installations, performances, and films internationally. Fred isn't sure that democracy is capable of producing structural quality, and resonates with Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 assessment that within U.S. democracy, equality "... is a quality that ever retreats before [us] without getting quite out of sight, and as it retreats it beckons [us] on to pursue." He has attended Group Relations Conferences for the past five years and co-organized a conference at the University of Pennsylvania in 2019, for which he also served as an administrator.



RODRIC SMITH, PHD (HE/HIM)

Rodric is an African American from the Bible Belt and Tornado Alley region of Oklahoma with generational roots in the cotton fields of northeast Arkansas. He serves as Director of Leadership Development using group relations theory to prepare educators to lead with racial equity and advance racial, social, and economic justice for the 34 community and technical colleges across Washington State. Dr. Smith recently retired as a Lieutenant Colonel after 24 years of service in various assignments in nuclear missile operations and in teaching, mentoring, coaching, facilitating, and consulting leadership at the US Air Force Academy to advance its mission to develop leaders of character. He locates exercised democracy in the space between chaos and community and views it as a potential developmental process to advance love, power, and justice for all. Dr. Smith is an AKRI Board member and GRI co-creator.



Schedule & Virtual Technology

	23 JUNE	24 JUNE	25 JUNE
0900 - 1000		Convention	DIA
1010 - 1020		Caucus	DIA
1030 - 1140		Democracy in Action (DIA) Opening	Democracy in Action (DIA) Discussion
1140 - 1200		LUNCH	LUNCH
1200 - 1300	Conference Opening	DIA	Caucus
1310 - 1410	Caucus	DIA	Convention
1420 - 1520	Convention	DIA	RAG
1530 - 1630	Caucus	DIA	Conference Discussion
1635 - 1700	RAG	RAG	RAG

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

We will be using this powerful meeting methodology that encourages participation, engagement, and creativity. It is a way to facilitate focusing on solving complex problems and fostering innovation.

The theory behind Open Space Technology is based on the principle that the most effective way to achieve results is to allow participants to self-organize and work on the issues that are most important to them.

The success of Open Space Technology is rooted in its simplicity and flexibility, a powerful tool for fostering collaboration, creativity, and innovation.

We are choosing a virtual platform that will provide the best opportunity to engage in the group relations experience, by providing freedom for engagement, connection, and learning.



→ **CLICK HERE TO REGISTER** ←

FEE STRUCTURE

We hope to host a conference that does not limit attendance based on financial concerns. Due to this we have set up a tiered registration fee system to meet the needs of all potential members. If you are in a space to pay it forward, please consider the registration plus scholarship option to benefit a student or special request. All additional money will go to the WBC for future scholarships to conferences. If you do not see a fee that applies to you and need further assistance, please reach out to the administrative team via the conference email address: wbc.spring.grc@gmail.com

EARLY BIRD DEADLINE: MAY 25

Students

- Student Early Bird Group (+1 or more)- \$150
- Student Early Bird Individual- \$200
- Student Registration- \$ 250

WBC Members

- Member Early Bird- \$350
- Member Registration- \$375
- Member Registration Plus Scholarship- \$425

AKRI Members & CRI Co-Creators

- Member Early Bird- \$375
- Member Registration- \$425
- Member Registration Plus Scholarship- \$475

General

- General Early Bird Group (+1 or more)- \$390
- General Early Bird Individual- \$425
- General Registration- \$475
- General Registration Plus Scholarship- \$550