

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW & ACTIVITIES

At home, at work, and in virtual meeting spaces, Alaskans have been tackling challenging conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine. It's easy for conversations like these to become heated quickly. The Forum's *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* effort asked, "How do we do better?" There were three primary components:

- **Workshops:** Three interactive workshops offered hands-on practice and concrete tools for navigating challenging conversations about vaccines with coworkers, family members, friends, and acquaintances.
- **Webinars:** Eight live webinars offered background on research and recommendations for navigating vaccine conversation. These webinars were recorded and posted to YouTube to reach a larger audience.
- **Depolarizing Conversations Guide:** The learning and insights from the workshops and webinars were compiled into a printed *IDepolarizing Conversations* guide to complement the virtual curriculum.

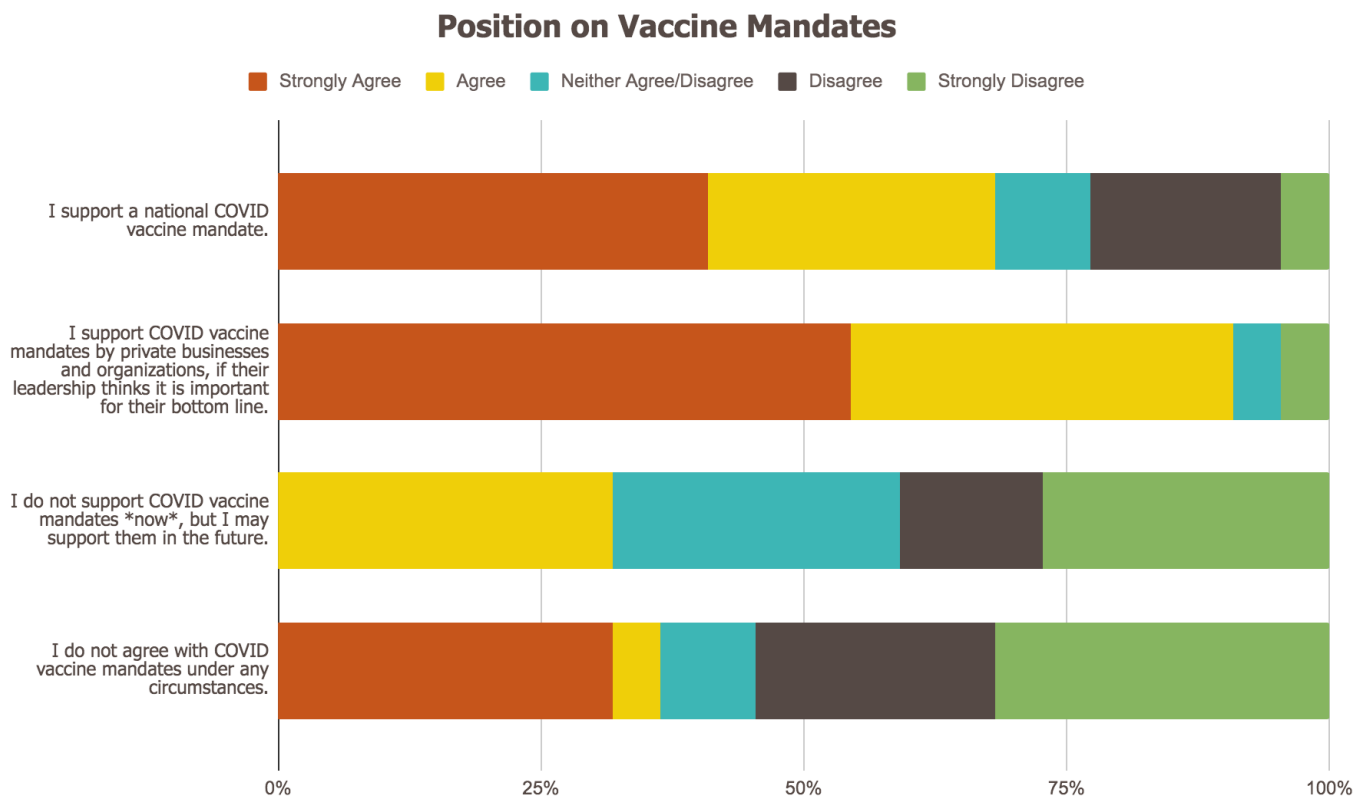
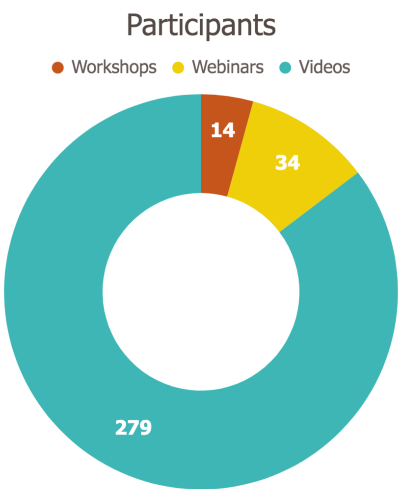
The Alaska Humanities Forum developed this series in partnership with the Alaska Children's Trust with funding from United Way and the Municipality of Anchorage's Health Department.

# PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Between January 1, 2022 and May 30, 2022, the Forum drew 327 participants and viewers to our *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* Workshop and Webinar series.

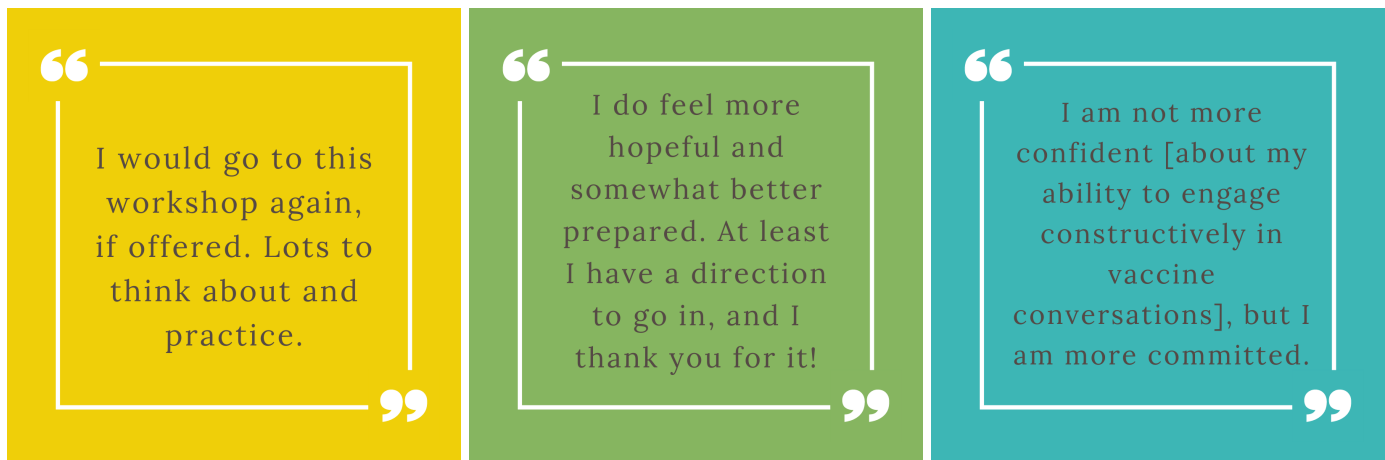
When we proposed this program, we were curious to know whether the programming attracted people with a wide range of positions about vaccines. As expected, our survey return-rate dropped as our connection with participants decreased, but we were surprised by how little engagement we were able to drum up from video viewers, even with incentives and significant follow up. 50% of webinar and workshop participants filled out surveys, but 0% of video viewers did. As a result, our data set is a small sample of the total.

100% of workshop and webinar participants surveyed had been vaccinated (or indicated they are likely to be vaccinated soon). Still, there was significant viewpoint diversity when it came to vaccine mandates, as demonstrated in the chart below:



Although this represents only a sample of the total program participants, it's fair to assume from this data that the overwhelming majority of participants were vaccinated. It's possible that people who were vaccine-hesitant or anti-vaccination felt more comfortable with the program options that required little-to-no interaction, such as the videos or conversation guide. It is also possible that the programming simply did not attract people who were vaccine-hesitant or anti-vaccination.

## PROGRAM IMPACT



The core goal of the *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* project is in the name: depolarization. We assessed this goal through three post-workshop/webinar survey questions:



Importantly, affirmative responses (strongly agree and agree) to the second two statements grew substantially between the pre-survey and post survey. Affirmative responses to "I believe that difficult conversations can have many goals, only one of which is persuasion" **increased from 80% to 95%**. Affirmative responses to "I feel confident in my ability to engage constructively in difficult conversations about vaccines" **grew from 0% to 59%**.

Furthermore, many of the people who indicated persistent low confidence after the webinar or workshop offered additional comments about that response in their follow up:

- "Your question about my confidence to engage didn't change because the wording of the question assumed I could improve quickly. Change is going to take time and practice. I do not feel confident and I may never feel confident, but I do feel more hopeful and somewhat better prepared. At least I have a direction to go in, and I thank you for it!"
- "I think that question about confidence needs tweaking. It's too much to expect confidence when we haven't tried this out in our lives. What I DID come out with was a general direction to try to move in. And that was VERY helpful!"

## PROGRAM IMPACT (Cont.)

Before the Forum even launched the workshops and webinars, the *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* project got attention from the state's *Plan Safer Events* team, which was funded by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and the COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center. The Forum was invited to present at their monthly **Plan Safer Events Learning Series**. The Forum used the opportunity to share information on navigating difficult conversations around holiday gatherings. The event was attended by roughly two dozen people.

Once launched, the *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* workshop and webinar series was featured on the **Alaska Primary Care Association Community Health Workers' Resource Spotlight** and **Alaska Public Media's *Line One: Your Health Connection*** with Prentiss Pemberton. The show was broadcast live on Wednesday, March 30, 2022, at 10 a.m. AKDT and then re-aired at 8 p.m. AKDT on the same day.



The broadcast introduced the Forum's depolarization work to a Fairbanks-based collaborative team focused on the region's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and on partnership among Public Health providers called the **CHIP/IPHP for Healthy Behaviors**. They invited us to present at their monthly meeting in April.

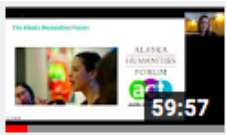
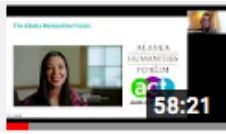
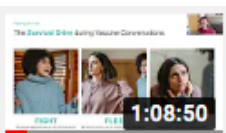



The series also got attention from the **Alaska Health Misinformation Response Project** at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The partnership with Yale School of Public Health offers Zoom-based trainings on identifying and responding to health misinformation in the community. The team organizing the effort has reached out to discuss how we might work together and align resources.

These responses and invitations represent a particularly high-level of attention to the project from community-based organizations compared to other, similar initiatives by the Alaska Humanities Forum.

## PROGRAM MEDIA & RESOURCES

Though the *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* was a short-term program, responsive to an immediate community need, the legacy of the program will endure through the media and resources developed, including eight recorded webinars as well as a 28-page printed *Depolarizing Conversations* guide.

Webinar Date	Video Image	Topic	Total Views Jan 1-May 30
1/13/2022		Understanding the Destructive Cycle of Conflict in Vaccine Conversations	106
1/27/2022		Why We Need to Redefine Our Goals for Vaccine Conversations	53
2/24/2022		Constructive Boundary-Setting for Vaccine Conversations	27
3/18/2022		Why We Need Wiser Questions for Vaccine Conversations	35
3/24/2022		Using Stories to Improve Vaccine Conversations	23
4/21/2022		Compassionate Listening for Vaccine Conversations	7
4/27/2022		Navigating Difficult Conversations about Childcare and Vaccines	9
4/29/2022		What We've Learned about Vaccine Conversations	19



## PROGRAM MEDIA & RESOURCES (Cont.)

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The printed *Depolarizing Conversations* guide compiles what we learned from this project about depolarizing contentious conversations of all sorts. In its pages are concrete tools for navigating this kind of challenging conversation with coworkers, family members, friends, and acquaintances, regardless of the topic. They are tools for strengthening communities, and families, in times of conflict and distrust.

This guide will ensure that the Forum can launch responsive programming quickly, whenever a community issue becomes toxically polarized. Ultimately, the health of our communities can only be as strong as our trust in one another. Tools like these help ensure that trust endures even in times of crisis.

## WHAT'S NEXT

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The Forum has been offering workshops that touch on depolarization for years, but this was the first time that we offered programming entirely focused on that goal. We learned a lot along the way that we intend to apply to future depolarization programming. Specifically:

→ *People are less likely to sign up for interactive programming about depolarization.*

For most of our programming, the highly-interactive format is a selling point. But for programming focused on depolarization, people were understandably nervous about talking openly about the topic with strangers. We originally planned to do a “train-the-trainer” program early in the series, but failed to attract any sign-ups, despite heavy direct recruitment work. In the future, we’ll want to front-load the launch of less-interactive resources and allow for extra time to cultivate interest in the more interactive options.

→ *Time is of the essence.*

Interest in the series waned over time, likely due to fatigue around the topic. When launching this project, we had to build all of the curriculum from scratch, which meant we could only move so quickly. The presentations we created for *Depolarizing Vaccine Conversations* can now be quickly adapted to new topics, and should allow us to take advantage of the early enthusiasm we saw for this kind of work.

→ *Evaluate commitment rather than confidence.*

When we were developing the survey tools for this project, we debated whether to ask about participants’ *increased confidence* in navigating challenging conversations or their *increased commitment* to navigating them. We chose “*confidence*” but the survey responses show clearly that people felt that was an unrealistic goal. In the future, we will use questions related to commitment.