



## The Urgent Need

Rising toxic polarization and political intolerance, combined with plummeting social trust, are tearing us apart. The daunting array of challenges we face as a society – from the pandemic to the climate crisis to economic and social justice – is more urgent than ever. Yet we struggle to come together in the face of divisive social media and conflict entrepreneurs. These times demand new ideas for listening and learning across divides, for conflict resolution, and for constructive action.

## Our Vision

The [Local Voices Network \(LVN\)](#) is a new kind of platform for constructive communication that brings people together in recorded small-group conversations around their lived experiences. Through a powerful combination of deep human listening and artificial intelligence, LVN enables partner organizations to make sense of the conversations they collect, amplify typically underheard voices, inform public understanding, drive better policy and decisions, and enable unforeseen connections across the ideological spectrum.

LVN's unique human-machine system is the product of an effort led by the media technology non-profit [Cortico](#) in cooperation with [MIT's Center for Constructive Communication](#).

## Conversation Platform

The core technology behind LVN is a speech processing platform that enables partners to bring communities together for listening, understanding, and sharing. The platform supports audio capture and uploading, management of conversation archives, semantic content analysis and visualization, and online/social posting of audio highlights. It works for conversations held over Zoom or in-person. We have developed a custom audio hardware device for high-quality audio capture/playback seamlessly integrated into the speech platform.

## Community-Powered Understanding

Community-based organizations, municipalities, and non-profits upload recordings of small-group conversations onto the software platform. Recordings are transcribed, automatically indexed by topic, and converted into interactive visual conversation records that are accessible online. Users can explore conversations in detail, select and share highlights, and identify key themes within and across conversations. Audio sharing of conversation highlights from one conversation into another enables partners to cross-pollinate diverse viewpoints and experiences. The combination of authentic conversation and analytics technology reveals richly nuanced insights that surveys and focus groups cannot match.

## Impact

Communities have used LVN to surface underheard citizen voices and perspectives into the [selection of Madison, WI's police chief](#) and the [election of Boston's mayor](#). News media organizations have used LVN to [understand citizen agendas](#) and [include underheard voices directly in their reporting](#). Global non-profits are using LVN to listen to their stakeholders for strategic policy setting. Local non-profits have used LVN to [surface experiences of communities in the margins](#) and [amplify their voices through powerful narratives and artist collaborations](#).





### **Building Scale**

We plan to enable faster and wider adoption through a combination of product design iteration, easier self-service, greater automation of speech analytics, and acceleration of our partner strategy. In addition, in 2022 we will pilot a mobile-first social conversational network designed for youth – code named Blink – aimed at dramatically scaling our platform.

### **Advanced Research**

Our MIT-based research team is pioneering machine learning powered methods for analytic sense-making, privacy-preserving data architectures, and co-designing civic networks with community partners. Validated new tools and methods will be continuously incorporated into the LVN platform.

### **A Unique Team**

Cortico and the MIT Center for Constructive Communication (based at the MIT Media Lab) have brought together a team with extensive experience in tech entrepreneurship, product design, data engineering, AI and HCI research, civic design, communications, journalism, and public policy.

