

The 2026 Mary Parker Follett Conversation on Creative Democracy

Fall 2026

CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR TEAMS

Introduction

A century ago, Mary Parker Follett wrote and spoke with remarkable insight into human relations, organizational dynamics, and the reality and promise of democracy. Her ideas and advice were practical and pragmatic in that they were based on actual human experience in real situations, but they were also visionary and idealistic in challenging us to pursue the untapped potential for social creativity and democracy.

Since her time, Follett's insights and ideas have had impacts in many fields, including business management, leadership, political science, and conflict resolution. Her principles remain the same across all disciplines: difference and diversity as a source of strength; the continuous evolution of situations and thus the need for continuous and creative evolution of relationships, understanding, ideas and strategies; and democracy as a way of life, among others.

Many have suggested that Follett was ahead of her time. We maintain that Follett was right on time—both for her time and for ours. Today, the promise of democracy as a way of life and as a creative experience seem as elusive as ever, yet the world is ever more interdependent and more people than ever seem to be ready for a conception of democracy that is authentic and meaningful, from the most intimate spaces of our lives through the global.

You are cordially invited to propose team ideas for the 2026 Mary Parker Follett Conversation, which is planned for fall 2026. The overall guiding question for the event is:

How can we fulfill the promise of democracy as a creative experience, one that releases both personal and social potential, from the local to the global level?

We hope that this conference will bring together people from many disciplines whose approach to human relations, community building, public affairs and management are based on integrated diversity and creativity among people facing situations together. The team-based conversation format will provide an enriching, participatory experience that we expect will produce new insights, fresh initiatives, and impetus for action.

Team-Based Conversation Format

Unlike traditional conferences featuring panel discussions, workshops, or the presentation of papers, the Follett Conversation will use a team-based inquiry format that is intended to produce new insights and fresh initiatives for research and action. The format works as follows:

Before the Conversation event:

- Individuals or groups propose team inquiry themes. These proposals for teams will be publicized widely. Most teams will be proposed as being open to anyone to join, but you can propose a closed team.
- As participants commit to teams, the teams begin to self-organize as conference planning continues. Team members introduce each other via email and conference call, share readings chosen by the team organizer or team members, and exchange shorter *input papers* to prime their collaboration.

During the Conversation event, which is tentatively three days and three nights in length:

- Teams meet daily to collaborate on their inquiry.
- All Conversation attendees convene for breakfast, lunch, and dinner together.
- There would be an all-participants opening session, and the Conversation would conclude with a plenary session at which teams present their findings.
- Team presentations can take a variety of forms—verbal, visual, artistic, participatory, etc.

Following the Conversation event:

- Teams create reports that are assembled into a Proceedings that is published online.
- Individual attendees can also publish *output papers* or reflections via the Proceedings (this can be important for academic credit).
- Teams may continue into subsequent annual or biennial Conversations, or they may exist for just one cycle.

This approach is proposed because it is participatory, supports integrating diversity, fosters greater mutual learning and the emergence of new insights and ideas, and builds long-lasting collaborative networks. As Follett pointed out, the root of the word “conference” is “to confer,” and we believe that the team-based conversation format allows for the greatest amount of conferring.

Themes of Inquiry

The integrating themes of the Conversation are **democracy as a creative experience** and **democracy as a way of life**. Conversation teams can organize around any concern or issue of common interest, in any context, within these themes. Themes must, however, be non-partisan and non-commercial.

Within those themes, team inquiries could relate to, but are by no means limited to, the following:

- Local community contexts
- Interpersonal / family / small group contexts
- Industrial / business contexts
- Educational contexts

- Difference and Diversity
- Group process / models & methodologies
- Politics
- Leadership
- International relations / global issues
- Conflict resolution & transformation
- Law and ethics

Special Categories

- Team inquiries around Follett as a person, the context in which she lived and work, and her legacy. Any such inquiries should be intended to create fresh insight and perspective that helps advance the influence of Follett's ideas in the 21st century.
- Teams focused on the Foundation-proposed projects, including the documentary effort, the Follett References project, or others described on the Programs page (follettfdn.org/programs).

PROPOSAL CONTENT AND DEADLINE

Proposals for teams must include the following information:

- Tentative name of proposed team (reflecting the topic of inquiry)
- Brief (1-2 paragraph) description of the team inquiry being proposed
- Tentative guiding/triggering question for the team's inquiry
- Contact information for the individual(s) proposing the team
- Indication of whether the team is open to anyone to join or is being proposed as a closed group

You do not need to propose team members (other than yourself), only the inquiry theme for a potential team.

The deadline for team proposals is December 1, 2026. Proposals should be sent to conference@follettfdn.org or mshapiro@follettfdn.org.

SCHEDULE

2025

Oct 20	Call for Team Proposals
Dec 1	Team Proposals Due
	Teams Announced / Call for Participants

2026

Feb 15	Teams Finalized
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Mar 1	Initial deadline for attendance commitment
Oct or Nov	2026 Conversation
<i>2027</i>	
Feb	Team Reports & Individual Proceedings Submissions Due
Mar-Apr	Proceedings Published

Conference Venue

We are currently working to identify the venue for the 2026 Conversation, but the location will be in the greater Boston area.

For More Information

For further information about the Follett Conversation, please contact Matthew Shapiro, mshapiro@follettfdn.org or (208) 246-9925.