



LEARNING THROUGH DISAGREEMENT AN OVERVIEW FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS

WHAT IS SWAY?

Sway is an educational chat platform that pairs event attendees who disagree into one-on-one, [text-based conversations](#) about discussion topics chosen by the event organizer. Attendees share their opinions on these topics, and Sway aims to match each attendee with a peer who holds a different perspective. Attendees then chat synchronously or asynchronously on their phones or laptops.

An AI facilitator called Guide joins every conversation: it can pose challenging questions, surface implicit assumptions, de-escalate tense moments, and provide relevant information—without ever taking sides. When an attendee writes something unconstructive, Sway suggests a better way to make the same point, providing real-time coaching in clear, respectful communication.

From the humanities to STEM, more than [11,000 students](#) at over 100 institutions have used Sway to practice constructive disagreement. No extra staff time, facilitator training, or coordination is required.

HOW DOES SWAY EXTEND AN EVENT?

Many events invite experts to model constructive disagreement for an audience: debates, panels, and moderated dialogues. Sway extends these events by giving audience members a structured way to practice what they have just watched. It's one thing to observe constructive disagreement; it's another to practice it yourself. Audiences often leave a strong event energized but with nowhere to take the conversation; Sway gives every attendee a next step.

How an Event Deployment Works

- Before the event, you choose the discussion topics.
- At the close of the event, attendees scan a QR code and register their opinions on those topics; this takes about a minute.
- Over the following days, Sway matches attendees who disagree and invites them into one-on-one conversations.
- Conversations remain open in the weeks that follow; attendees chat from their phones or laptops, on their own schedules.
- Setup is light: you provide the topics; the Sway team configures the event and provides a custom link and QR code to project on screen or print on table cards.
- Sway is grant-funded. Attendees can volunteer to participate in IRB-reviewed research on civil discourse.

What the Event Report Shows

- After the discussions conclude, you receive a de-identified event report: behavioral evidence of your event's impact, not just attendance and satisfaction numbers.
- Not just what your audience believed, but why: the arguments on each side, the common ground, and the persistent disagreements.
- Opinion distributions on every topic, with pre/post shifts for attendees who completed surveys.
- Where attendees reasoned well and where they struggled, including recurring misconceptions worth addressing.
- Ready-to-use follow-ups and topic suggestions for your next event.

[Browse real reports →](#)

Sway has been used at a range of public events including several **MIT Free Speech Alliance** debates, events at **UNC Chapel Hill's School of Civic Life and Leadership**, a **Committee for Academic Freedom** panel in the UK, and a variety of **Australian Dialogues**. These include MFSA's Great Climate Debate and its fall 2025 debate at MIT, and public dialogues in Brisbane and Melbourne on tariffs and trade, the energy transition, the China–Australia relationship, and Taiwan.

Does It Change Minds?

- Participants are nearly 5x more likely to moderate an extreme view than to harden a moderate one: 56% who entered a conversation at a polar extreme left holding a more moderate view.
- The effect holds on the hardest topics: 51.5% moderated even on polarizing issues such as abortion, immigration, and gender.
- The share holding extreme positions dropped by 23% after a single 30-minute conversation with a partner who disagreed.

From 10,000+ matched pre/post opinion pairs at 80+ institutions

[Learn more about improving speech cultures →](#)

Inclusion & Fairness

- Guide does not offer opinions—it pushes participants to reason more carefully, interrogate their assumptions, and engage seriously with the strongest version of the opposing view.
- In a survey of over 3,500 participants, 87% agreed Guide treated both sides with equal respect—and only 3% disagreed.
- In an empirical study, over 600 politically diverse Americans evaluated real Sway transcripts across multiple topics and perceived no directional bias—while correctly detecting bias when it was experimentally introduced.

[Learn more about bias evaluation →](#)



“Students know that Guide is AI and they find it not at all partisan, not at all biased. That was never an issue.”

— **Diana Mutz**, Samuel A. Stouffer Professor of Political Science & Communication, UPenn; member of the National Academy of Sciences and author of *Hearing the Other Side* ([more from instructors](#))

Conversations are encrypted; organizers cannot read identifiable transcripts or view individual attendees' opinions. Personal attacks and mere insults are blocked. Attendee data is never used to train commercial AI models. 92% of participants felt comfortable sharing honest opinions; 93% felt respected by their partner. [Read our privacy policy →](#)

Interested in using Sway at your next event? [Book a 20-minute demo](#) to learn more.

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