



CATALYST**NU**

2026 IMPACT REPORT

Northwestern | OFFICE OF COMMUNITY
ENRICHMENT

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CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

CatalystNU was, for a second year, a resounding success. Bringing together committed participants, a dedicated internal leadership team, and world-renowned experts, the program has increased learning, enhanced skill development, and created conditions for better relationships.

Following the success of the inaugural cohort of the CatalystNU program, a second opportunity was launched in the fall of 2025. This report includes information and data insights about the second cohort of the program which ran from January 2026 to June 2026.

The premise of *CatalystNU: Conversations that Transform* is that we can learn how to talk to one another more effectively, especially when we have deep disagreements, and that doing so will not only improve our working relationships and learning environments, but our overall well-being.

Having “conversations that transform” requires not only a willingness, but a set of skills that take practice and commitment.

Following the successful model of Cohort 1 the Northwestern leadership team engaged external experts in negotiation and conflict resolution—Naseem Khuri, Jayne Nucete, and Rob Wilkinson (full bios available upon request)—to design and facilitate a multi-session program aimed at learning and skill development related to dialogue, conflict, behavior patterns, deep listening, power differences, and more. Workshops included formal presentations, interactive exercises, small and large group discussion, and role-play.

CatalystNU is made possible due to the generous commitment of the Office of Community Enrichment, the Office of the Ombudsperson, the Center for Leadership, Human Resources, and the Office of the Provost. Special thanks to Leona Quist (operations), Anthony McCray (communications and design), and Hilary Zimmerman (assessment and evaluation) for their countless hours of work to make this program happen.



VISUAL IDENTITY

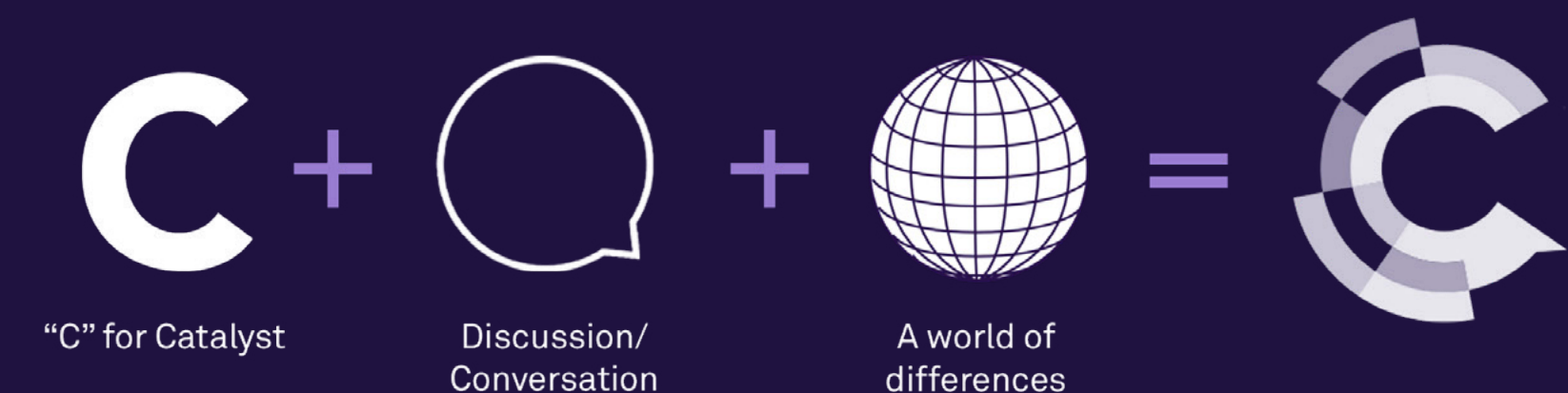


The CatalystNU visual identity was designed to reflect the program's focus on dialogue, transformation, and connection. The logo combines three key elements: (1) the letter C for Catalyst, (2) a speech bubble representing conversation and the program's tagline "Conversations that Transform," and (3) a globe symbolizing dialogue across differences and cultures.

The color palette pulls from Northwestern's brand identity, anchored by the Northwestern Purple and complemented by lighter and darker shades of purple, blue, and black to maintain a strong institutional connection while introducing a sense of depth and uniqueness.

Through the combination of logo, colors, and style, the brand captures the transformative spirit of CatalystNU and positions it as a distinctive and recognizable initiative within the Northwestern community.

Each CatalystNU cohort is represented by a different brand color—black for the inaugural cohort and teal blue for this year. This intentional use of color gives each cohort a unique visual marker of their CatalystNU experience while connecting them to the larger program community.





APPLICANTS

There were 128 applicants to the CatalystNU program and 101 people were admitted to the program. Roughly 86% of applicants identified as staff. The next largest group consisted of faculty who made up roughly 9% of the applicant pool. Finally, there were approximately 4% of the applicants who identified as graduate students. There were no undergraduate student applicants to this program.

Overall, applicants came from 22 different academic or administrative units across Northwestern's three campuses. Applicants for the program represented all 12 of Northwestern's schools, and there were 10 different administrative units represented among the pool.

Additionally, more than half (58%) of applicants to the program noted that they decided to apply because of a recommendation or through word of mouth from colleagues at Northwestern.

Staff	86.7%
Faculty	9.4%
Graduate Students	3.9%

Evanston
Chicago
Qatar

Submissions were received from all three Northwestern campuses.

22
Schools
and Units

Applicants for the program represented all of the 12 schools and 10 different administrative units.

Northwestern Schools
Bienen School of Music
Feinberg School of Medicine
Kellogg School of Management
The Graduate School
McCormick School of Engineering
Medill School of Journalism
Northwestern University in Qatar
Pritzker School of Law
School of Communication
School of Education & Social Policy
School of Professional Studies
Weinberg College of Arts & Science

Administrative Units
Alumni Relations and Development
Athletics
Facilities
Human Resources
Information Technology (IT)
Libraries
Civil Rights & Title IX Compliance
Office for Research
Office of the Provost
Student Affairs

ASSESSMENT



The learning objectives and outcomes for the program were used as a framework for assessing the program. In addition to learning about overall satisfaction with their experiences, the CatalystNU leadership team also wanted to assess the learning and skills development of participants. To that end, the research questions guiding the overall assessment of the CatalystNU program were:

1. How are CatalystNU participants growing in their knowledge and application of dialogue skills?
2. How, if at all, are participants using their skills in their Northwestern environments?

The assessment plan for the program used a logic model to understand, organize, and structure the connections between resources, activities, and desired outcomes. Based on the logic model, we designed an assessment plan that included a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data and a plan for collecting data over the course of the program.

DESIGN

6

short surveys administered
after each full-day and half-day
workshop.

Thematic qualitative coding
resulted in

16

unique codes across each of
the 8 timepoints.

101

faculty and staff participated
in the program.



~35%

matched response rate based
on survey responses from
participants on both the pre-test
and post-test surveys.

353

survey responses from
participants across 8 different
timepoints.

Surveys included both
quantitative scale questions and
short answer questions which
were qualitatively coded.

MAJOR



FINDINGS

1

GROWTH

Overall, participants' confidence in their dialogue abilities increased over the course of the program. In the matched sample of participants' pretest and posttest survey responses, participants reported positive growth in their abilities in each of the dialogue skill areas.

2

PREPAREDNESS

Across each of the workshops, the vast majority of participants felt prepared to use the skills that they learned thus far in the program. At the conclusion of two full-day workshops and all three half-day workshops, all but one of those timepoints, over 85% of participants felt very well/quite prepared to use the skills they learned in the workshop.

3

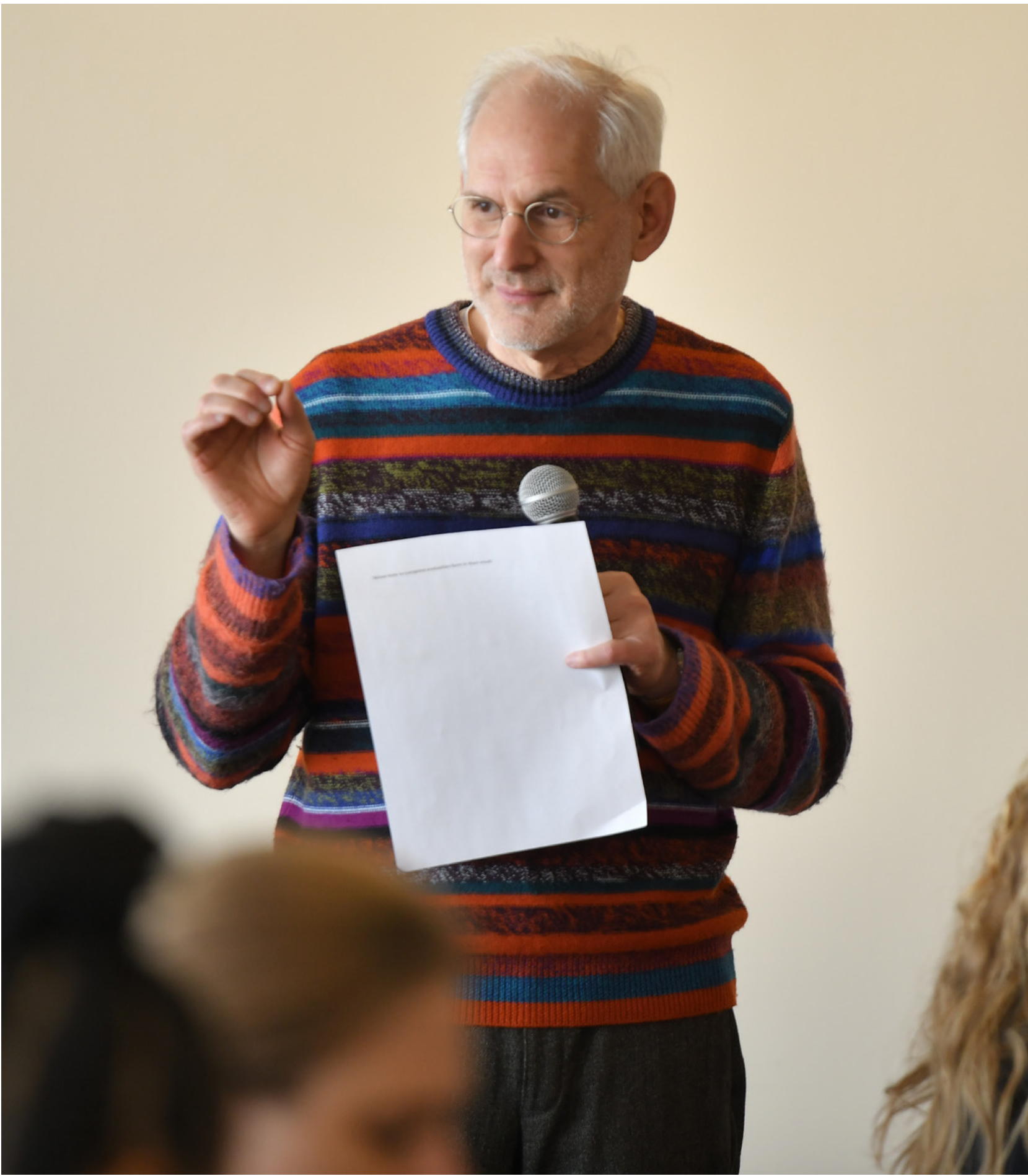
APPLICABILITY

CatalystNU participants were initially drawn to the program because of the applicability of the skills. By the end of the program, all (100%) of the participants were already applying their skills within and outside of their Northwestern contexts to some degree.

4

CONNECTION

At the conclusion of the program, all of the survey participants felt that the CatalystNU program did provide a space for them to connect and feel connected to others at Northwestern. On the posttest survey, all 100% of the respondents strongly agreed/agreed that the CatalystNU program helped them feel connected to others at Northwestern.





ALUMNI SESSIONS

One of the key benefits of CatalystNU was creating an enthusiastic community of learners from across all major schools and units at Northwestern. Through the program design, participants connect deeply with one another across silos. Evaluation data routinely highlights this community building as a core and lasting benefit to those who participate—they feel more connected to one another and to Northwestern.

It was important to the leadership team to allow opportunities for CatalystNU alumni to stay connected and continue building upon the skills learned during their cohort. As a result, we developed two half-day sessions for alumni. The Fall session featured Sarah Klaper and Kamaria Porter on bullying in the workplace, and the Spring session featured Steve Franconeri and his game “Point Taken.” Approximately 40 people attended each session, demonstrating a lasting commitment to the work participants learned during their CatalystNU cohort, and a desire to engage meaningfully with one another.

PROGRAM IMPACT

WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO SAY

“I really enjoyed this program and feel like I’ve learned a lot about myself. I have a clear picture of what changes I’d like to make in my conversation skills “toolbox” and how to practice them. **I will highly recommend this program to my colleagues and NU community.**”

“I cannot say enough good things about this program. It was **inspiring, engaging, deeply valuable, well-organized and accessible.** Truly grateful for this opportunity - sincerest thanks to everyone involved!”

“I found CatalystNU to be one of the most impactful professional development experiences I’ve had **at Northwestern.** The program provided practical leadership/communication tools, encouraged meaningful self-reflection, and helped me build connections with colleagues across the university. Thank you for investing in this program and in the development of Northwestern’s leaders.”

“I truly believe CatalystNU is like a **master class in communication skills.** I was so thrilled to have been selected to join this second cohort and look forward to future opportunities to reconnect with other colleagues who have gone through the workshops.”

This was one of the first times I actually feel like a program like this has provided actionable takeaways. There are plenty of educational and professional development seminars I’ve been to that are inspiring in the moment but don’t give you much to continue using outside of the workshop. **The tools we learned in Catalyst have already been invaluable, and part of that, I think, is because all of it is so applicable to our entire lives, not just our professional lives.** Instead of starting with encouraging us to think big, Catalyst really emphasized starting small, starting in the places you can use it every day, even if that’s not at work.

“The facilitators were amazing – this was **one of the best trainings I have ever attended!** Thank you for this experience!”

IMPLICATIONS



By Dr. Hilary Zimmerman,
Assessment Consultant

From my perspective engaging with the program from an assessment lens, there are four things that I am taking away from the assessment of the second cohort of CatalystNU program.

First, participants experienced feeling consistently high levels of preparedness in using the skills they learned in the program. The model of using day-long workshop sessions to introduce concepts and using the half-day sessions to refresh and practice skills in a community of others who were learning alongside one another, provided the opportunity for participants to feel prepared. Beyond the structure of moving between day-long workshop and half-day workshops, the content was also scaffolded well and participants were given the opportunities to engage with, ask questions about, and have limited practice in the day-long sessions as well. These things taken together helped to support learning, confidence, and community building across the six-month period.

That being said, there were still a few, limited comments about the spacing or the amount of time between each of the sessions. There were three comments in the data about the gap between the workshops two and three being further apart. Those participants suggested perhaps a short video or a more in-depth review of what they had learned up to that point in the CatalystNU program. As I noted, there were very few comments about this, but perhaps this opens up a conversation in thinking about the “right” balance of time between sessions or ways to engage participants between sessions.

Second, the word is getting out about the CatalystNU program! Many participants decided to apply to the program because of a recommendation or hearing about it from another colleague. People are having positive experiences with the program, and they want to tell others. They are excited to engage as alumni with one another and the first cohort, and they want more people to have the opportunity to learn what they learned. More than one participant shared that this was among the top professional development experiences that they had taken part in. How can the leadership team harness that momentum and positivity? What does that mean for engaging after the official parts of the program have concluded? How do we keep people learning, engaged, and connected?

Third, I was happily surprised to see that statistically significant learning gains were made on each of the dialogue skills. The positive growth that this cohort reported in their confidence in dialogue skills was significant. Participants are leaving this program better able to self-regulate in a conversation, use active and deep listening skills, navigate power dynamics, bring a complaint to leadership and work to resolve it, navigate tricky classroom situations, discuss divisive issues, and advocate for change. There is no doubt in my mind that having a cohort of staff and faculty at Northwestern who can do those things will make Northwestern a better place.

Finally, this is the second cohort of the program. Both cohorts took part in the same assessment processes across their time in the program. It is important to think about what we can learn from the two cohorts, some things that may be themes across both and some that may be different between the two. And I will be doing just that—stay tuned for an addendum to the CatalystNU reports where I will pull together highlights across the two years of the program.



N Congratulations, Graduates!

