

# The Belonging Forum

## 2026 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program

### Partner Organization:

The Inside-Out Center (International Headquarters of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program and Alternative Dialogue & Exchange Initiatives)



### Project #1:

Inside-Out Think Tanks: Taking the Course Experience Further and Deeper (An In-Depth Study of Think Tanks throughout the Global Inside-Out Network from the Past and/or Present)

### Project #2:

What Transformation Looks Like – and Where It Can Take Us: Portraits of Inside-Out Alumni and How They Have Applied What They've Learned from the Inside-Out Experience



## 2026 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program: Project Proposal

**Partner Organization:** The Inside-Out Center (International Headquarters of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program and Alternative Dialogue & Exchange Initiatives)

Founded in 1997, The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is based on the idea that incarcerated individuals and college students might mutually benefit from studying social justice issues together as peers, through a dialogue of equals.

The core of Inside-Out is a semester-long academic course, through which 15-18 “outside” (campus-based) students and the same number of “inside” (incarcerated) students attend class together weekly inside prison. Participants read a variety of texts, write several papers, enter into dialogue in small and large groups, and work together on a final class project.

Over the years, participants have said that Inside-Out transformed the way they view themselves and the world – deepening the conversation and understanding about crime, freedom, inequality, and other related issues.

Inside-Out brings people together to share learning experiences in which we are reminded of our own humanity, as stereotypes dissolve, layer after layer. In this process, we recognize both differences and similarities in experiences, perspectives, and beliefs – and more fully appreciate our diversity.

By sustaining the practice of listening and seeing more deeply, Inside-Out creates a significant place for us to invite forth our own and others’ best selves, inspiring us to create more of these places in the world.

Learn more at: [www.insideoutcenter.org](http://www.insideoutcenter.org)

**Location of the Project:** This project will be accomplished completely remotely, in ongoing consultation with Lori Pompa, Inside-Out’s Founder and Executive Director and Joe Schwartz, one of The Inside-Out Center’s Team Members, who is also a former Belonging Forum Fellow. The Inside-Out



Center is located in Ardmore, PA, a few minutes outside of Philadelphia, and is now a free-standing 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

## PROJECT INFORMATION

### Section 1: Description of the Projects

#### Project #1: Inside-Out Think Tanks

Sometimes, at the end of a semester, Inside-Out classes have elected to keep meeting in the prison voluntarily to continue exploring issues in more depth on a regular basis (e.g., weekly, monthly). Over the 28 years of the program, these “think tanks,” as they came to be called, have proliferated throughout the Inside-Out global network. Some have ended their run due to the pandemic, though some continued during that period. Additionally, there are other think tanks that have begun more recently.

The work of this project will be to gather information about where both past and existing think tanks have taken their Inside-Out experience. Each group is unique and has been engaged in very diverse kinds of social justice initiatives. We want to delve into the development of each of these groups, including the mission, organization, and ongoing work of the group – and in what ways their work has taken Inside-Out further and deeper.

The fellow involved in this project will be provided contact information for the members of these groups, and develop a series of questions that can inform an interview with some of the think tank members via Zoom (when possible). Hopefully, the fellow will also be able to collect artifacts of the groups’ work, as well as craft a full description of each group’s membership, past work, and plans for the future. Finally, it would be of interest, once the information is gathered, to explore some of the intersections and common themes of the groups’ work.

#### Project #2: What Transformation Looks Like

Since its inception, Inside-Out has had more than 65,000 inside (incarcerated) and outside (campus-based) alumni who have taken classes in this model. The program has been around long enough to have



seen where some of these alumni have taken the experience in their lives. For some outside alumni, it has completely changed their career paths. For some inside alumni, who are still incarcerated, their sense of voice and leadership has developed more deeply, moving some to create new projects inside the prison.

For many former inside alumni, who are no longer incarcerated, the experience has inspired them to become involved in social justice efforts in their communities. Additionally, there are increasing numbers of formerly incarcerated Inside-Out alumni who have continued their education, specifically becoming involved in graduate studies on both the Masters and Doctoral levels, as well as law school.

The fellow involved in this project will be provided with names and contact information for both former inside and outside alumni in order to set up Zoom interviews with them. The fellow will develop questions for these interviews that will help to inform the interview process. After gathering the information, the fellow will examine the gathered data for both common themes, as well as a fuller understanding of the process of transformation experienced by the alumni – and how / why that transformation influenced their future trajectories.

## Section 2: Goals of the Projects

The goals of these two Inside-Out projects are quite similar, one to the other. In the Fall of 2027, we will be celebrating our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a gathering in the Philadelphia area of people from throughout our global network. The work of these two fellows will provide a crucial dimension to **expanding and deepening the picture of Inside-Out after 30 years.**

We want to more fully understand what moves a class to want to continue meeting after the semester is over, as well as what moves individual alumni to alter their life trajectories – and what keeps that **motivation** going in both situations (i.e., as groups and as individuals).

Sometimes, things can be more clearly understood after the fact. In light of that, we would be interested to see (and find out through inquiry) how the Inside-Out experience supports a sense of **belonging and social connection** in both groups and individuals.

We would hope to **share what is learned** with the wider Inside-Out network, in part to **inspire other alumni** with what we come to understand through the think tanks and the individuals whose lives have been changed.

Additionally, we always want to **understand** more deeply and fully how and **why this dynamic works as it does**.

### Section 3: Guiding Questions

The following questions would guide the work of each of the two fellows:

- How and why does the Inside-Out experience have the impact on individuals that would move them to get more deeply involved in social justice issues?
- A sense of belonging is central to the Inside-Out dialogical approach. How, then, is that replicated through the experience of the think tanks – as well as through the further involvement of individuals in social change and/or educational pursuits?
- How is the motivation for change (both individual and collective) sustained over time?

The intended audience for this work would predominantly be those already involved in – or interested in getting involved in – the Inside-Out Program. However, there could be a wider audience, including those interested in the power of dialogue, alternative teaching / learning modalities, as well as in how and why we move to make change in our lives, as individuals and as a society.

### Section 4: Research Methods & Dissemination Approach: The 3

#### Streams

Within the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program, we propose three research streams:

- **Creative**
- **Advocacy**
- **Academic**

The tracks are designed to articulate the possibilities of diverse scholarship on belonging. The program recognizes that creative methods, advocacy-focused research, and academic research are all scholarly. All three tracks have the potential to address similar topics. We encourage Fellows and Partners to explore different ways of asking questions and sharing knowledge that instills belonging for the researcher and participants.

For these projects, each fellow will do the following:

- Read **Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education** Edited by Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell.
- Read several articles written about Inside-Out written by those in the Inside-Out community.
- Zoom interviews and focus groups with individuals and with think tank members.
- Explore gathered data for themes, commonalities, differences, and insights about how the Inside-Out pedagogy leads to a sense of belonging and inspiration to engage in individual and social change.
- For Think Tank Fellow, specifically – Collect and analyze materials developed by the various think tanks.
- Both of these projects would constitute a cross between an academic study, a narrative description of the experiences of the people being interviewed, and recommendations to Inside-Out about how to more robustly bolster the development of think tanks and of opportunities for involvement in individual and social change endeavors.

## Section 5: Key Deliverables

- **Work plan:** A co-created, phased work plan outlining research activities, community engagement, and dissemination of milestones, with fairly specific dates for actions and outcomes.
- **1 blog post (500 – 1,000 word):** related to the project the Fellows are working on, posted to the Belonging Forum's website.
- **Final Output:** 15 – 30 page report, written in a somewhat narrative style, incorporating the themes discovered through the interviews

and focus groups; conclusions drawn from the data; and recommendations for the Inside-Out Program.

- **A PowerPoint presentation** that can be used for with groups in the Inside-Out network, especially during the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.
- **A Final Presentation:** A presentation to the Samuel Fellows cohort to share findings, community perspectives, and actionable recommendations.

## APPLICANT INFORMATION

### [About the Program/What the Program Offers](#)

The Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program empowers young people, recent graduates, and people with lived experience to engage in meaningful research and community action. At the Belonging Forum, our mission is to build connectedness within and between communities through partnerships, research, programming, learning initiatives, and advocacy. At the Belonging Forum, fostering belonging is central to our work. The Belonging Forum approaches the definition of belonging as connection to **the 4 Ps: people, place, power, and purpose**.

This is to say that belonging comes through our **relationships** with other people as well as through our **rootedness in nature**, our **ability to influence** social, political and economic decision-making, and our **capacity to find shared meaning and purpose** in our lives. The program offers a unique opportunity to apply the lens of belonging to issues that matter, to think intersectionally and holistically about the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – while working alongside experts and community leaders.

This is a paid opportunity from June 2026 – February 2027. Fellows will carry out the research part-time on a schedule agreed between the Fellow, the partner, and the Belonging Forum. The Fellow will receive a bursary to support their work.

#### **The Program offers:**

- A flexible, part-time research opportunity.

- A bursary to support your research calculated based on cost of living where the Fellow is based and number of hours committed.
- Work with national and international community partners.
- Capacity building, skills development, and mentorship.
- Network and team building opportunities.
- All works produced by the Fellows are published on the Belonging Forum website and promoted on our social media channels.

### Equity Statement

We encourage all equity-seeking groups such as immigrants, Black and Indigenous communities, people of color, women, young people, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and people with disabilities to apply. Please let us know if you need any accommodation throughout the application and interview process and we will be happy to support you.

Thank you for your interest in the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program. We thank all applicants for their interest, but only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

### Key Attributes and Skills in the Applicant

The skills required for each of these two projects are the following:

- Past and/or current experience with the Inside-Out Program.
- Capacity to develop ideas and questions, engage in research, and write clearly and concisely.
- Interviewing abilities, as well as communication and organizational skills.
- A sense of curiosity and interest in digging deeply into what people have to share and how their input connects with a sense of belonging.
- Those who have been formerly incarcerated are preferred for both of these projects, but others may be considered, as well.