

FACT A meaningful cross-cultural experience at a formative age can profoundly shift the way the next generation deals with difference.

ABOUT THE CONNECT PROGRAM

Since 2003, Soliya — a New York based nonprofit organization and affiliate of Search for Common Ground — has integrated virtual exchange programming into curricula at over 100 universities in 28 countries across North America, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Every week over the course of a semester, students engage on-line in face-to-face small-group dialogue and collaborate with peers across the globe, under the guidance of Soliya-trained facilitators. The experience offers young people — often for the very first time — the opportunity to: voice their opinions on a global scale, critically explore pressing and potentially divisive issues, and be exposed to vastly different perspectives in a safe environment.



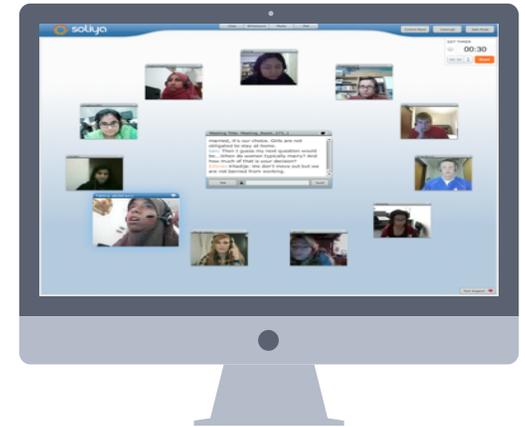
12+
Years of Experience

28
Countries

100
Institutional Partners

1,300+
Students & Young Professionals
Empowered Each Year

10,000+
Activated Alumni Around the World



OUR PLATFORM

Soliya's custom-built videoconferencing application and broader learning ecosystem enable safe and meaningful engagement — both live and asynchronously — between participants in widely divergent bandwidth environments.

TESTIMONIALS

"On my campus, we have a large number of 'first generation' students (first family member to go to college), who often come to college ill-equipped to recognize its potential to change their own lives, never mind the world. The prospect of studying abroad isn't even on their radar screens, even if they could afford it. The Soliya Connect Program opens their eyes to a bigger world and the transformative roles they might play in it."

Michael Kimball, Professor, University of Northern Colorado

"The Connect Program enabled my students to become independent thinkers and knowledge-seekers by encouraging active self-learning in an environment in which they pose questions and search for answers on their own."

Dr. Sahar Khamis, Professor, University of Maryland (formerly at Qatar University)

"I feel more confident now after saying what I wanted and having others listen to me. This was just a start and I'll make a change. Thank you for making me know that I can."

Fatima, Student, Menoufiya University (Egypt)

WHY SOLIYA?

Virtual exchange — defined as sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programs — is a rapidly growing field, with diverse program models proven to:



EXPAND access to high-quality, cost-effective cross-cultural education.

STRENGTHEN significantly people-to-people and interfaith relations.

DEVELOP young people's confidence and understanding of their identity, 21st century skills, and inclination and ability to engage constructively across differences.

PROFESSORS SAY...

- 97%** say the Connect Program helped them accomplish the goals for their course.
- 89%** say the Connect Program enhanced the quality of discussions in their class.
- 81%** say students gain confidence, communication skills and critical thinking skills.

STUDENTS SAY...

- 90%** are glad they participated and would recommend participation to their peers
- 82%** agree that the program helped them to clarify what they think and feel about issues that are important to them.

FACILITATORS SAY...

- 100%** of Soliya facilitators state that serving as a facilitator provided them with facilitation skills that they can use in other settings.
- 92%** of facilitators state that serving as a Soliya facilitator provided them with leadership skills that they can use in other settings.

IMPACT EVALUATION PARTNERSHIP

The Saxelab Cognitive Neuroscience Lab at MIT, through Soliya's Connect Program, is developing and piloting evidence-based methods for measuring the impact of virtual exchange programs on:

ATTITUDES OF CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING & EMPATHY

Over several semesters, the Saxelab has recorded changes in participants' *self-other overlap*. Increases in self-other overlap correlate to greater willingness to cooperate and less support for violence against the other.

21ST CENTURY SKILLS

The Saxelab is piloting a game-based test of *cross-cultural communication and collaboration skills* to explore whether virtual exchange can improve young adults' capacity to communicate and work collaboratively with diverse team-members. Positive results carry important implications for preparing students for a globalized workforce.

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The Saxelab findings from the spring 2013 Connect Program Semester, which coincided with the Boston Marathon bombings, were particularly telling. While American control group's attitudes towards Muslims as a whole and the religion of Islam in general worsened following the bombings, American Connect Program participants' attitudes either stayed the same or improved as they engaged in sustained dialogue with diverse Muslim peers. These findings indicate that by inoculating populations against the tendency to generalize the violent actions of a few against an entire identity group, **virtual exchanges provide a scaleable means to strengthen social cohesion across identity groups**. This is a critical need in increasingly diverse societies.