Political, media and technological forces have driven us into isolated, like-minded camps hostile toward outside views and ripe for the spread of misinformation, mischaracterization of others, hateful discourse, and even violence. The loudest, most extreme voices now dominate the public sphere, stifling communication that might bridge ever-widening and increasingly dangerous divides.

The MIT Center for Constructive Communication (CCC) (https://www.ccc.mit.edu) designs human-machine systems with the goal of improving communication across divides and increasing opportunity for underheard communities. CCC leverages data-driven analytics that work in combination with human input to better understand current social and mass media ecosystems, designing tools and communication networks capable of bridging social, cultural, and political divides.

Launched in January 2021 (https://news.mit.edu/2021/center-constructive-communication-0113) and based at the Media Lab, CCC commits to reach beyond academia and work closely with local organizations and trusted influencers in underserved, marginalized communities across the country. These collaborations are critical for launching pilot programs to evaluate which tools offer the greatest potential to create more trusted communication within and across communities nationwide.

Led by Professor Deb Roy, CCC brings together researchers in AI, computational social science, digital interactive design, and learning technologies with software engineers, journalists, artists, public health experts, and community organizers to explore and address the effects of deepening societal fragmentation in America. The Center’s affiliated faculty includes Professors Ceasar McDowell (MIT Dept. of Urban Studies and Planning), Katherine Cramer (University of Wisconsin - Madison; MIT Media Lab), David Rand (MIT Sloan School of Management; Dept. of Brain and Cognitive Sciences), Professor Andrea Louise Campbell (MIT Dept. of Political Science), and Steve Ansolabehere (Harvard University, Dept. of Government).

CCC is composed of graduate students pursuing master’s and doctoral degrees, research scientists, postdoctoral researchers, engineers, and program staff. While most graduate students are typically enrolled in the Program in Media Arts and Sciences (https://www.media.mit.edu/graduate-program/about-media-arts-sciences), students in any MIT department may request to conduct master’s and doctoral thesis research at CCC under the supervision of Professor Deb Roy or another CCC faculty member. If accepted, they may be eligible for support as research assistants. Every semester, CCC will host a few undergraduate students participating in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) (https://urop.mit.edu). Opportunities for undergraduate students will be posted through the MIT UROP office.