



SYMPOSIUM 2026

Activate the Possible

July 8-11, 2026

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

“The possibilist mindset is a curious, creative, and collaborative way of engaging with our differences in these divided times” – William Ury

Possible: How We Survive (and Thrive) in an Age of Conflict

The **Global Improvisation Initiative (GII)** was launched almost a decade ago to ignite a worldwide exploration of the art and impact of improvisation—deeply and collectively. Rooted in a profound appreciation for the rich history and diversity of our field, the GII seeks to unlock the infinite possibilities that lie ahead.

The **GII Symposium 2026** will take place in **Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.**, and will be hosted by **Portland State University’s School of Music & Theater**. It will continue and deepen the explorations begun at the first three symposiums (2017 at both University of California at Irvine and Chapman University, Southern California; 2019 at Middlesex University, London; and online in 2021) with specific focus on the central theme “**Activate the Possible.**”

William Ury, cofounder of Harvard’s Program on Negotiation and coauthor of the seminal book *Getting to Yes*, asserts in his most recent work, *Possible* (2024), that “Possible is the new yes,” and:

“Possible means applying our full human potential to the conflicts surrounding us. It means creating little breakthroughs that can build into bigger breakthroughs over time. Possible means gradual transformation.”

Ury’s notion of “possible” as a mindset rooted in transformation, growth, and sustained effort resonates strongly with the foundational principles of theatrical improvisation. A good improviser is a possibilist: someone who finds and acts on opportunities for change in the here and now. Someone who sees obstacles and mistakes as offers and opportunities for creative, collaborative solutions. Someone who practices humble audacity, that is, awareness of self and self in relationship to others and an openness to new ideas balanced with courage to take focus and decisive action when called upon. And someone who believes transformation—of a scene, a relationship, an idea, a worldview—is essential for the imaginative journey.

Transformation in times of conflict requires more than resolution—it calls for the courage to build bridges across different experiences, identities, and worldviews. For Ury, this means creating genuine pathways to the other side—opening doors to new possibilities and making it possible for all voices to say “yes.” In this moment of global conflict and uncertainty, it feels especially fitting to hold our next gathering in **Portland, Oregon**—affectionately known as **Bridge City**.

As with past symposiums, we envision the **GII Symposium 2026** as a vibrant intellectual and artistic hub for sharing, generating, and documenting new knowledge about improvisational theatre practices across the performing arts and beyond. In keeping with the spirit of improvisation and the "possibilist" mindset, we also hope to spawn forward-looking ideas and actions, imagine alternative futures, build bridges—between disciplines, communities, cultures—and activate the possibilist mindset in our improvisation community.

Previous symposiums have brought together an international gathering of scholars, practitioners, educators, activists, and performers—all dedicated to advancing and evolving the art and practice of improvisation for future generations. We recognize, however, that many in our global community face legitimate concerns about traveling to the United States during this deeply challenging moment in history. In response, the **GII Symposium 2026** will include a robust program of online offerings to ensure meaningful participation for those who cannot—or choose not to—travel next summer.

2026 Location: Portland State University, in the heart of downtown **Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.**

2026 Tentative Schedule

- **Wednesday, July 8** (afternoon/evening): Welcome & Launch (event/performance)
- **Thursday, July 9** (all day): Curated presentations, workshops, panels, roundtables, and evening events and performances
- **Friday, July 10** (all day): Curated presentations, workshops, panels, roundtables, and evening events and performances
- **Saturday, July 11** (all day): Open Space to Activate the Possible
 - Participants and presenters will engage in an Open Space Technology forum, a participant-driven format designed to extend and deepen the conversations and processes that emerged over the previous days, including evening performances

Call for Proposals

The GII invites contributions from teachers, makers, performers, researchers, and students from any field to consider the symposium theme of “**Activate the Possible.**” We are interested in proposals across a range of formats, including performances, workshops, oral/paper presentations, panel discussions, making and craft-based sessions, roundtables. Other formats will also be considered.

We invite proposals that challenge prevalent perceptions of, and address emergent questions about, the field of theatrical improvisation and how this might extend beyond theatrical realms to social spaces. We encourage you to address your proposals under any of these categories:

- **Performance: activating new frameworks, rehearsal processes, audience engagement**
- **Interdisciplinary Practices**
- **Teaching, Pedagogy, and Education**
- **Genders and Identities**
- **Policy and Social Practices**
- **The Future and The Unknown**

Possible investigations/topics might address (but are not limited to):

- Improvisation as a method for navigating polarization and fostering community
- Tracing improvisation's history, present, and future possibilities
- Activating the possible through improvisation performance, training, and scholarship
- Applications of improvisation in creative pedagogy and academic settings
- Teaching values and ethics in the improvisation classroom
- Connecting theory to practice through improvisational approaches in the classroom
- Improvisation's potential to reimagine politics, policy, and the future of democracy
- Improvisation and access: advancing inclusivity in practice and pedagogy
- Challenging constructed identities in improvisation training and performance
- Improvisation's contributions to gender and queer studies—and ongoing challenges
- Improvisation in intergenerational contexts
- Improvisation within immigrant and refugee communities: practices and impacts
- Improvisation and dynamics of status, power, and rank
- Improvisation as a tool for (re)telling marginalized or untold histories
- Theatre companies founded on improvisational methods yet not classified as improvisational ensembles
- The place of improvisation in professional theatre and actor training programs
- Improvisation and interdisciplinarity: exploring its impact across visual art, music, dance, digital technologies, economics, environment, social media, and beyond
- Fostering improvisation's growth and idea exchange while honoring historical and theoretical foundations
- Exploring the connection between improvisation and philosophy
- Connections between improvisation and spirituality
- Approaches to teaching, performing, and writing improvisation that deepen collective understanding and honor its diversity and complexity

- 1st Round of Submissions Due: Monday, November 17, 2025
- **2nd Round of Submissions Due: Monday, March 2, 2026**
(Submission Form for 2nd Round will open on *February 2, 2026*)

For inquiries regarding the submission process, please contact the GII Steering Committee at:
GlobalImprovisationInitiative@gmail.com

For information about PSU's School of Music & Theater, visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/music-theater/>

For GII Symposium 2026 updates, visit:
www.globalimprovisation.com