

Part 1: We Can Build Bridges

Synchronous Curriculum

Note: An [asynchronous version](#) of this course is also available.

Curriculum Description: The United States has long been defined by the great diversity of its people. Whether that diversity enriches or divides the nation, however, is not a given. Where there is deep difference, there is a need for bridgebuilders: citizens with the mindset and skills to transform diversity into pluralism. In this curriculum, learners will learn about the goals of bridgebuilding, see an example of bridgebuilding in action, and consider where they might take steps to build bridges in their own lives.

Intended Audience and Use: This curriculum is designed for anyone working with a group of people who are interested in pursuing bridgebuilding in their own lives. Learners are welcome from a wide variety of sectors and experiences who are curious about what bridgebuilding is, if it's even possible, and how to more effectively engage across difference to build the common good. This curriculum includes support for both in-person and virtual learning.

Time: 90 mins

Format: Synchronous; In-person or virtual

Required Materials:

- [We Can Build Bridges Slides](#)
- [Everyday Opportunities to Try Bridgebuilding Handout](#)
- For in person settings: One, 16-piece puzzle per every 4–6 participants. Each group's puzzle should be visually distinct from the others.

Tip: you can create your own puzzles by finding images, such as on [Wikimedia Commons](#) and printing them out (preferably on cardstock). Once printed, cut each image into sixteenths—squares are great. Be sure that each image is quite different such as [this flower](#), [this butterfly](#), [this pizza](#), and [this dog](#). You can also design your own puzzles by searching for "blank puzzles" online.

Facilitator Prework/Preparation:

- Complete the 60-minute asynchronous version of this course [online](#) to further gain familiarity with the concepts and content.
- For in-person settings: Prepare the puzzles so that each group has one piece from each of the other groups and are thus also missing some of their own pieces. The swapped pieces should clearly belong to a different puzzle based on color or another easily identifiable feature.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Define the components of bridgebuilding
- Describe the key difference between pluralism and diversity

- Offer an example of bridgebuilding
- Offer a reason why bridge building can be an effective tool to address challenges
- Identify one place in their life, even if small, where bridgebuilding could be helpful

Agenda

Introductions (5 mins)

Start by welcoming everyone to the space, introducing yourself as facilitator, and sharing the agenda on **slide #2**.

Puzzle Time (15 mins)

OPTION ONE: For In-Person Settings

Split participants into groups of 3–6 people. Explain that each group will attempt to solve a puzzle together as fast as they can. These are the only instructions. If participants ask questions about the instructions, just repeat these. The only object is to solve the puzzle as fast as they can. Once participants are in their small groups ask them to quickly share only their names with one another and then begin.

Facilitator Note: In preparing materials, the facilitator should swap puzzle pieces so that each group has one piece from a handful of the other groups, and are thus also missing some of their own pieces. The swapped pieces should pretty clearly belong to a different puzzle based on color or another easily identifiable feature.

As groups go, they will hopefully realize that something is amiss and they need to visit with other groups to swap pieces. This is an intended part of the activity.

After the puzzles are all completed, **ask each group to discuss** the following for a few minutes (**slide #3**):

- What were your initial reactions to the pieces that seemed “wrong” or did not fit?
- What helped you complete the puzzle?

Facilitator Note: in the next section participants will be asked to reflect on how the puzzle activity required some of the components of bridgebuilding (respect, mutually inspiring relationships, and cooperation). In the meantime, the hope is for participants to notice the ways they needed to respectfully engage with other groups to be successful and that pieces that may have seemed out of place did in fact still serve a purpose. To transition, call the group back together, congratulate everyone on participating, and share that the group will now take a few minutes to explore how this activity relates to the theme of today’s session: bridgebuilding.

OPTION TWO: For Online Settings

Ask participants to think of a random object, place, or thing. After a moment, on the count of 3 have them enter what they thought of in the chat.

Next, split participants into groups of 3–4 people and share the instructions on **slide #17**. Share that once they are put into breakout rooms they should quickly share their names and then begin to brainstorm categories for the seemingly unrelated items each member just put in the chat *plus* the four images pictured on **slide #18**. Invite participants to take a photo of the slide or write down the images so they can continue to think about them once in breakout rooms.

The group that is able to create the fewest categories (at its best, they think of one category that encompasses all items) will win. Categories can be creative and may range anywhere from “things that can be orange” to “things that make us smile.” There’s no wrong or right way to group items.

Give the groups around 5–7 minutes to work on categories. **IMPORTANT:** while participants are in their breakout rooms, take note of who is in each group. You will send participants back to breakouts with these same people later in the session.

Then, bring everyone together and ask the team that was able to create the fewest categories to share. As time allows, other groups can enter their categories into the chat to share their thinking.

After congratulating the winning team(s) **ask each group to discuss** the following for a few minutes (**slide #19**):

- What were your initial reactions to the items that seemed “wrong” or did not fit?
- What helped your group complete this task?

***Facilitator Note:** In the next section participants will be asked to reflect on how the activity required some of the components of bridgebuilding (respect, mutually inspiring relationships, and cooperation). In the meantime, the hope is for participants to notice the ways they needed to respectfully engage with others to be successful—perhaps people had different associations with certain items which inspired the group be more creative. To transition, congratulate everyone on participating and share that the group will now take a few minutes to explore how this activity relates to the theme of today’s session: bridgebuilding.*

Defining Bridgebuilding (5 mins)

Explain: In today’s session we’ll be exploring bridgebuilding: a powerful way to strengthen relationships, teams, and communities, and to address challenges—like solving a puzzle. Bridgebuilding helps us navigate differences in beliefs, experiences, and worldviews. These differences could be related to politics, age, race, religion, geography, or other dimensions of identity. Navigating differences might sometimes feel intimidating or even futile. Perhaps your initial reaction to your group’s obviously different puzzle pieces / items was confusion, annoyance, or disregard.

However, to solve the puzzles, we needed to notice differences and find ways to respectfully cooperate with others. We needed to step into the role of a *bridgebuilder*. Bridgebuilders aim to do a few particular things: **(slide #4)**:

- Bridgebuilders **respect** others' identities and perspectives, even when they don't agree. Bridgebuilders acknowledge that people have the right to form their own identity and opinions and that they have the right to express that identity and those opinions. Respect does not mean agreement. A bridgebuilder is tasked with respecting individual identities even when they ultimately cannot fully agree with them.
- Bridgebuilders also build mutually inspiring **relationships** across lines of difference. They actively seek out positive, constructive, warm, and caring engagement across lines of difference. This can be through civic action, friendly conversation, or shared activities. Such relationships do not require us to hide our differences or force agreement, but are instead forged with the recognition of both differences and commonalities.
- Finally, bridgebuilders **cooperate** with people different from themselves in common action around issues of shared social concern. They find ways to bring diverse individuals and communities together in commitment to the common good.

Of course, sometimes different communities have different notions of what constitutes the common good. When this happens, it's helpful to identify values that are both widely shared and deeply held. For example, values like serving others, caring for the environment, or offering hospitality are shared across numerous worldviews, political orientations, and traditions. While we don't all agree on the best way to conserve nature, for instance, identifying the overall value of caring for the environment can create common ground for dialogue and action. There are many things we disagree on, but there is a surprising amount that we hold in common.

In short: **bridgebuilders engage across difference in ways that respect others' identities, foster mutually inspiring relationships, and promote cooperation in service of the common good.** Respect. Relate. Cooperate.

It's worth noting that these three dimensions of bridgebuilding do not have to happen in one prescribed order. For example, it might be that families from different worldviews and experiences come together in cooperation to lower the speed limit and ensure their respective children have safer places to play. Through this work around a common concern, the families attend meetings together and begin building mutually inspiring relationships, which also result in greater respect for one another's identities.

As time allows, ask 1–2 participants to give an example of ways the opening activity required any of these components. Examples could include needing to respectfully interact with others (to exchange puzzle pieces [in-person settings] or understand an item better [online settings]), respecting that the different pieces / items still served a purpose or had a contribution to make, admiring one another's puzzles / categories as mutually inspiring, or cooperating in their own group or with other groups [in-person settings] to achieve a positive outcome.

Meet Some Bridgebuilders (25 mins)

A great way to understand bridgebuilding is to see it in action. Let's look at one example of what is possible. **Keep in mind: bridgebuilding takes lots of forms, from small actions to large initiatives. This is just one inspiring example.**

Play [this 9 minute Stand Together video](#) (slide #5) exploring a community safety initiative in Dallas, Texas. Ask participants to jot down 2–3 ideas, quotes, or moments that stand out to them.

After playing the video,

Share: "You might not personally agree with Antong or Chief Garcia about what a safe community looks like or the best way to frame Dallas' challenges, and that's okay. At its best, living in a diverse democracy means we can disagree on some fundamental things—like the root cause of violence—while still working together on other fundamental things like community safety. **With this example, we're going to focus on the ways Antong and Chief Garcia built bridges rather than the issue they chose to address.**"

Ask participants to **find a partner (or, send participants to pair breakout rooms) and discuss** the prompts on **slide #6**. For online settings, either put the discussion questions in the chat or share the slide to breakout rooms.

- Share something that sticks out to you from this story.
- What shared concern did Antong and Chief Garcia identify? How did they cooperate to address it?
- How did Antong and Chief Garcia demonstrate respect for the other's identity and perspective?
- What evidence of a mutually inspiring relationship did you see?

Back together in the large group, as time allows, ask a few participants to share their responses or takeaways. Below are some examples of the different elements of bridgebuilding within the video.

- **Respect:** During their initial meeting with the police department, "real OGs" from the neighborhood came into the room with Antong who, according to Chief Garcia, "came into the room being Antong—not trying to impress me, or not trying to get me on his side. And quite frankly, I came in the same way." Both groups understood that they came from different experiences and felt quite differently about police yet were able to sit down at a table and have a conversation together.
- **Mutually inspiring relationships:** In Antong's words, the community initiatives are "slowly peeling back those walls" and allowing the community to see law enforcement as human beings. They are also allowing law enforcement to see the humanity of people in the community.
- **Cooperation:** Lawlessness was a shared issue of concern. Antong and Chief Garcia invited community members and police officers to monthly meetings to address concerns and share ideas over food.

Antong and Chief Garcia were able to work across deep lines of difference in service of the common good—the essence of bridgebuilding. It involved perseverance and even some vulnerability.

Show the quote on **slide #7 and play the audio**. Then ask a few participants to share what it means to them. If it has not come up yet, reinforce that bridgebuilding does NOT mean compromising our values or changing our deeply held beliefs. Antong was able to share about his community's negative interactions with and mistrust of the police department *while* bridgebuilding. Antong and Chief Garcia chose to authentically enter into conversation and used a shared concern, or common ground, as a jumping off point to better understand other perspectives and address a real issue in their community.

From Diversity to Pluralism (15 mins)

Facilitator Note: Ahead of this segment, you'll want to be prepared to send participants to breakout groups so that they're together with the same group with whom they completed the opening "categories" activity. Have those group lists handy and/or ask a colleague to set up the breakouts while you facilitate this segment.

Share that there is one more critical thing that we'll explore that makes bridgebuilding bridgebuilding. Ask participants to stand and distribute themselves evenly around the room, with space between participants as much as possible. For online settings, ask participants to switch to turn on their cameras, switch to gallery view, and look around the "room."

Once everyone is spread out or has looked around the online room, say: "There is diversity here. Across all of us, there are likely lots of different kinds of diversity."

Next, ask participants to move to stand together with their puzzle group from earlier. For online settings, simply ask students to continue with their cameras on, in gallery view, and look now at the people they worked with in the earlier "categories" exercise. Once each group is standing together (or looking at one another), **say**:

"When you worked together with this group, there was diversity as you worked together. You most likely didn't *talk* about the ways in which you were different, but the diversity was there."

Finally, for in-person settings, ask the groups (who are now standing together) to take **two minutes** to talk together (**slide #8**). Each group member should share very briefly: "What's one word to describe your ethical, religious, or philosophical tradition?" Emphasize that they should just share **one word** each, while acknowledging that this might feel hard, given the complexity of our worldviews. For the purposes of this exercise, we're simply sharing one tiny glimpse into our views.

For online settings, send participants into breakout groups with the same people with whom they completed the opening activity. Alternatively, if breakouts are not an option, you can ask the whole group to answer the question in the chat. If you send groups to breakouts, bring them back after just a few minutes.

***Facilitator Note:** If the group is likely to be highly homogenous across ethical/religious/philosophical views, you may choose to ask a different question where there is likely at least some diversity, e.g., "Name the town where you grew up" or, "What is one word to describe your political identity?"*

After participants have shared their "one word" responses, bring everyone back together and **share:**

"What just happened is that we started to move from *diversity* toward *pluralism*. As your diversity is engaged—as it is brought into the conversation, as it is recognized or explored, as it is said out loud—that diversity begins to build toward something different than just diversity: it builds towards *pluralism*. **Bridgebuilding requires the intentional engagement of diversity.**"

Ask in-person participants to take their seats to explore further. Then, **share:**

"What do we mean by 'intentionally engaging diversity?' It means explicitly acknowledging and talking out loud about our differences. **The power of bridgebuilding is that it can harness diversity into pluralism. Pluralism is what's possible when we respect, relate, and cooperate. But *only if we engage our differences.***

Let's take a moment to better understand the difference between diversity and pluralism.

Bridgebuilding requires more than a diverse group of people working together. A diverse group of individuals can work side-by-side without ever engaging their diversity. They might not learn about each other's different identities (and thus never have the opportunity to respect them), they might not build relationships that are mutually inspiring, and they might not learn about the values and beliefs that motivate each of them."

Share (**slide #9**):

- Diversity is the fact of people with different identities sharing space with one another.
- Pluralism is the *engagement* of diversity towards a positive end.

Explain that this probably does not mean beginning with the biggest or most challenging differences. Instead, we can acknowledge our less contentious differences right away to engage and appreciate diverse worldviews. Then, over time, we build toward relationships that allow for conversation across dimensions of difference that are more difficult.

Here are a few examples you can share to illustrate the differences between diversity and pluralism:

- In the city of Chicago, there is a lot of diversity. It's just a fact that people who have lots of different identities live together in the city. That's diversity, even if those people never talk to one another or interact. *Pluralism* happens when those diverse people in Chicago

interact in ways that enable them to share their differences with one another.

- During the mid-20th century leaders from diverse religious backgrounds came together, drawing explicitly from their diverse religious, spiritual, and ethical resources, and fought together for civil rights. Those leaders transformed their diversity into pluralism.

In pairs (or pair breakouts), have participants discuss:

- Where in your life have you experienced diversity?
- Where have you experienced pluralism?

As time allows, once back together in the big group, ask for a participant or two to share their examples.

Finish by showing **slide #10** and sharing about the metaphor of a potluck compared to a melting pot. You may consider asking a participant to read the quote. As the text explains, a potluck embodies pluralism and positively engaging our diversity rather than finding ways to “melt” all of our differences into one, shared identity. Reiterate the main point: **bridgebuilding requires us to talk about our differences—to say them out loud and meaningfully acknowledge the places where our experiences and worldviews diverge or sit in tension with each other.** This is how we can create pluralism.

Why Pluralism? (20 mins)

Share: “Now that we’ve defined key terms, let’s explore one final, particularly powerful result of bridgebuilding and pluralism.”

Show **slide #11** and share that social scientists refer to the connections we make across differences as “bridged social capital.” While we’re focusing on bridged social capital, both forms of social capital explored in this video are valuable and allow society to function effectively.

Next, play the 4-minute video “[Exploring Social Capital](#)” on **slide #11**.

Next, using **slide #12** ask participants to hold up their fingers to answer how many out of every ten Americans they think “agree that we have a responsibility to connect across lines of difference.” After giving participants a moment to demonstrate their answers, reveal the answer: seven out of ten, or 72%.

In groups of 2–3 have participants discuss the questions on **slide #13**:

- Did you over or underestimate how much others want to connect across difference? How do you think your perception affects how you bridgebuild (or don’t)?
- What’s something you do (in your real life) that builds bonded social capital? What about bridged social capital?

After a few minutes, hand out the Everyday Opportunities to Try Bridgebuilding handout to offer participants some examples of places where they may be able to build bridges in their day-to-day lives. There’s no need for them to read the entire document, but if participants are

stuck on the next question, they may want to reference the information there. Finally, show **slide #14** and **ask participants to silently jot down** their responses to the following question.

- Where in your life do you see the potential for bridgebuilding, even in small ways.
Consider your family, your community, your friends, your team, etc.

After everyone has had a moment to write, invite participants to share their reflections with each other, or if time allows, with the whole group.

Closing (5 mins)

Thank participants for taking the time to reflect on bridgebuilding and where they might want to respect, relate, and cooperate across lines of difference. As time allows, you can ask participants to share a takeaway from the session with the group or a partner.

If desired, share the quote on **slide #15** and emphasize that bridgebuilding is an orientation towards what's possible when people come together to explicitly cross lines of difference. Bridgebuilding is both a choice in any given moment and a lifelong process of continued learning.