Bridgebuilder Basics

Part 2: How To Build Bridges
Live Curriculum

Introduction

The following curriculum is the second part of Bridgebuilder Basics: a suite of resources to help people effectively cross lines of difference and take common action for the common good.

Please note: This curriculum is designed for use with learners who have already experienced "Part 1: We Can Build Bridges" (WCBB). WCBB is available asynchronously online through our partners at ReligionAndPublicLife.org, or can be delivered synchronously, either in person or virtually. While some review is built into this course, the following curriculum presumes that participants have experienced deeper learning on definitions and the vision of bridgebuilding which WCBB offers.

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 investigate powerful psychological and sociological dimensions of bridgebuilding and develop skills for effectively listening and sharing across difference. In addition to gaining facility with key concepts and practices, learners will reflect on opportunities to build bridges in their own lives and commit to next steps.

Intended Audience and Use: This curriculum is designed to be used after learners have already completed Part 1: We Can Build Bridges (either synchronously or asynchronously) which provides a foundation for understanding the goals of bridgebuilding. The following curriculum is for anyone working with a group of people who are interested in pursuing bridgebuilding in their own lives and learners are welcome from a wide variety of sectors and experiences.

Format: Synchronous; in-person or virtual

Facilitator Prework:

- Review the asynchronous course We Can Build Bridges
- Set up and familiarize yourself with live polling beforehand and upload the Polarization Poll Questions to whichever technology you prefer. Options could be Mentimeter or Slido, among others.
- Read through all of the blue "Facilitator Notes" sections of this curriculum to ensure your materials are in order.

Required Materials:

- How To Build Bridges Slides
- Journals or somewhere for participants to record their thoughts
- Pens / pencils
- Polarization Poll Questions

Handouts

- My Bridgebuilding Lens Handout
- High Vs. Good Conflict Handout
- My Pal AI Handout
- The Power of a Socially Diverse Network Handout

In-Person Settings Only

- Sticky notes
- Chart paper
- Art supplies such as construction paper, markers, colored pencils, magazines to collage from, etc.

Virtual Settings Only

- Miro, Google Slides, or another way to collaborate in real time on slides

Learning Outcomes

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

Vision

- Share how bridgebuilding connects to their worldview and/or traditions
- Articulate the value of healthy disagreement and curiosity in relationships
- Name one example of where bridgebuilding led to a positive outcome
- Identify and commit to a next step in bridgebuilding in their own life

Knowledge

- Describe the "Perception Gap" and give an example of where such a gap may exist in their life and impact their behavior
- Distinguish between "high conflict" and "good conflict"
- Describe how our brains tend to instinctively react when we perceive there to be meaningful differences in views during a conversation
- Explain the positive impact that an individual relationship can have on our perception of groups to which we do not belong

Skills

Listening

- Describe the value of listening as a core skill for bridgebuilding
- Name a few listening techniques for bridgebuilding
- Identify a couple of their current strengths and weaknesses as a listener as well as one thing they will do to continue refining their skills

Sharing

- Name a few reasons why stories are generally powerful but especially in bridgebuilding
- Share their values or perspective through a simple personal story in a way that is hospitable and empathetic to those who hold different views

Agenda At a Glance

Time: 7 hours (including three suggested breaks throughout, totaling 80 minutes of non-instructional time).

Use the hyperlinks below to jump to sections of the curriculum.

Introductions (20 minutes), page 5

Understanding Polarization's Impacts (50 mins), page 6

Break (10 mins)

Sharing Our Stories (90 mins total), page 10
- My Bridgebuilding Lens (30 mins)
- Why Share Stories (10 mins)
- Practice (50 mins)

Break (60 mins)

Helping Our Elephants (25 mins), page 15

Types of Conflict (25 mins), page 17

Listening Better (60 mins total), page 19
- Why Listen (15 mins)
- Practice (35 mins)
- Reflection (10 mins)

Break (10 mins)

Expanding Our Social Spheres (25 mins), page 23

Closing (45 mins), page 24

Optional Follow Up Ideas, page 28

Introductions (20 mins)

Welcome everyone to the space and introduce yourself as facilitator. Share that we're going to jump right in with a brief exercise. Show slide #2 and read the quote which begins with a blank. Ask participants to take a moment to silently fill in the blank for themselves based on their own feelings or experiences.

In-person: Display the quote in the front of the room and ask participants to place a sticky note next to the blank or write their word on chart paper or a white board nearby. Or, if participants share their words aloud, write responses on a white board or somewhere else easily visible for the group.

Virtual: Have participants enter a response into the chat. Or, create a shared slide all participants can add to using Miro, Google Slides, or other preferred technology. An example can be found on slide #66.

In small groups, ask all participants to share their name and any other short relevant information (location, role, title, pronouns, etc.). Then, ask them to discuss the following on slide #3:

- What stands out to you from the way others completed this quote? Why?
- What's a community that's important to you—where you feel love or identification?

Bring the groups back together and reveal the full quote on slide #4. **Share**:

> "However we completed this quote, we all have times in our lives where we live, work, or simply connect with people who believe and experience things very differently than we do. We do not simply live in a democracy, but a *diverse* democracy. This reality creates opportunities to build bridges—to find ways to respectfully work with people who are different from us in order to tackle challenges and create stronger communities. Today, we will explore some ideas and skills that can help us build bridges."

Use slide #5 to share the agenda.

Facilitator Note: You will need to upload the **Polarization Poll Questions** *ahead of time to whichever platform you use to conduct polls and insert language on slide #6 that guides participants on accessing the technology (e.g. a QR code).*

Then, use slide #6 to get participants set up with live polling for the next section of this curriculum. If there is an access code they will need, be sure to add it prominently to the slide. Participants should be able to access the poll from a phone, tablet, or computer.

Understanding Polarization's Impacts (50 mins)

Share: *"In this next portion we're going to explore an example of what we mean by divisions and the context that informs our bridgebuilding."*

Work through **slides #7–23**. The following are talking points for each slide. You'll likely spend around 1–2 minute per slide, with an additional minute any time you launch a poll question.

- Slide #7: We'll begin with a definition of a word we may have heard before: polarization. To effectively build bridges it is helpful to understand the context in which we're operating. At its most basic, polarization is about two groups being divided and occupying opposite extremes. In this session, when we say "groups" or "identities," we're referencing things like religion, politics, race, generation, and geography, to name a few. All of us are complex beings and belong to multiple groups or hold many different identities.

- Slide #8: To better understand why and how groups become divided let's take a step back and consider why humans form groups in the first place. We are fundamentally social creatures and groups can provide many things.

  Launch Poll Question #1 and ask participants to share a few reasons why humans gravitate towards groups.

  [After responses have populated, click to advance the slide animation]: as you all have demonstrated, there are many reasons we gravitate towards groups. Some general reasons are for security or protection, forming an identity, sharing resources, or finding meaning. Our brains tend to be very attuned to feelings of belonging or not because subconsciously or consciously we know that forming meaningful groups can make our lives better or even help us survive. Groups are not inherently bad, however challenges certainly arise when groups are polarized.

- Slide #9: Let's explore a particular type of group polarization in the U.S.: political identity. As these headlines suggest, increasingly Americans are identifying with political parties in meaningful ways that inform and shape their perspectives, experiences, and relationships. As social scientists would say, political party identification is becoming more salient for Americans. How we vote seems to have particular prominence outside of just election season.

- Slide #10: So, a question for those of us interested in building bridges is just how often are Americans exposed to members of the other party? According to a 2018 analysis of 180 million registered voters, what percentage of Americans live in areas segregated by political party?

  Launch Poll Question #2.

  [After responses have populated, click to advance the slide animation]: 98–99%. To dig

in a bit more, the study found that Democrats and Republicans are quite unlikely to be exposed to each other in their residential areas. For every 100 people the average Democrat is exposed to, only about 30 of them are likely to be Republican. That number is 36 for Republicans. It's also worth noting that this study measures exposure—being exposed does not even necessarily mean we are even interacting.

- Slide #11: Across different geographies and even down to the neighborhood level, we are separating from each other along political lines. As the researchers share in the end, "a majority of Democrats and Republicans live with isolation levels well above the threshold [.6 or 60%] commonly used to describe high isolation in the context of race in municipal areas." Would anyone like to read this quote?

  > *"This social splitting is not the result of an urban/rural divide, where cities attract more Democrats, and Republicans typically favor the country life…Whether in small to mid-size cities, the suburbs or ex-urbs in between, the data showed that Republicans stick close to other Republicans, and Democrats stick close to other Democrats."*

- Slide #12: Let's take a moment to reflect on your experience. Out of every 100 people you're exposed to where you live, how many do you think are members of a different political group than you? Of course, this is just your estimation and that's okay.

  Launch Poll Question #3.

  [After responses have populated]: For those of you who are interested, there is data available online to explore just how closely you live to folks who voted differently or the same as you (such as this map from 2016, of these updated maps from 2020 based on this article). Regardless, the context in which the majority of Americans are living when it comes to political identity is segregated and polarized.

- Slide #13: What's important for us to know as we continue developing our bridgebuilding skills today is that our brains behave differently in polarized settings. Even when the world is not clearly segregated, our brains search for signs or "shortcuts" to determine who is in our group or not. These "shortcuts" our brains use might be language, symbols, appearance, or other signs. Remember: group membership can be a matter of safety, resources, or meaning, so these shortcuts can be our brains' attempt to protect us.

  However, in a polarized setting our brains' "shortcuts" take it one step further: not only do they create an "us" and a "them," but our brains assign value to each. We assume our group has good intentions and the other side is bad, hostile, or the enemy.

- Slide #14: Take this finding from a 2022 study for example. According to researchers what percentage of Americans would attribute positive qualities to voters of the other party?

  Launch Poll Questions #4.

[After responses have populated, click to advance the slide animation]: 5.6%. Would anyone like to read this quote?

[click to advance the slide animation]

> *"While previously polarization was primarily seen only in issue-based terms, a new type of division has emerged in the mass public in recent years: Ordinary Americans increasingly dislike and distrust those from the other party. Democrats and Republicans both say that the other party's members are hypocritical, selfish, and closed-minded, and they are unwilling to socialize across party lines."*

In short, polarization of our political identities is leading us to dislike and distrust those who are not in our group.

- Slide #15: Give participants about 3 minutes to silently journal on the following questions:
  - What's standing out to you about any of the data we've discussed? Why?
  - When have you noticed your own feelings of "dislike" or "distrust" for people with different political views? How have you navigated those feelings?

- Slide #16: Thanks for taking the time to reflect on places where your brain might be operating in a polarized context. These are some of the very places that might be ripe for bridgebuilding.

  By now, we've gone through a lot of data that can essentially be summarized as this: most of us live in politically insulated communities with low exposure to those of differing political views. This has created a polarized environment of extremes, or created the perception that there is not a continuum of political affiliation. Under these conditions, our brains see the "other" not merely as a different political group, but as hostile or "bad."

  Still, one thing Americans do seem to agree on is this: we're divided. In fact, one 2022 study found that 80% of Americans felt the United States was more divided than unified.

  [click to advance the slide animation]: But are we as divided as we think we are? Let's explore.

- Slide #17: Play the 4-minute video, "America's Divided Mind."

- Slide #18: As the video explained, the proportion of people who share similar views on even the most debated issues is higher than most of us assume. Of course, Americans hold an array of values and *do* disagree in meaningful ways on many issues. However, we tend to significantly overestimate just how far apart we are.

- Slide #19: Give participants 3–5 minutes to silently journal on the following questions. Consider your own worldview or beliefs:
    - What's one misperception (perception gap) others may have of you and your views?
    - Where might you have a perception gap of the "other side" or their views?

- Slide #20: Reveal the discussion questions on the slide. Invite pairs or trios to discuss the following for 5 minutes.
    - Share one thing you journaled about.
    - How has a perception gap impacted your behavior? How might it?

  As time allows, ask a few participants to share their responses to the second question with the group.

- Slide #21: Due to the polarized contexts we operate in, our brains have a particularly distorted view of the other side. We often think the distance between us and them is simply too far to bridge. This distortion leads us to believe that even *attempting* to build relationships or engage our differences is futile or would require giving up too much.

  But the power of acknowledging perception gaps is that it means we are often closer than we think and perhaps the space between us or the middle ground is not as large as we thought. We do NOT need to give up our own beliefs, nor should we. However, we can realize a greater possibility of cooperating with people different from us in mutually respectful ways.

- Slide #22: There's one more statistic that can be helpful to remember: 87% of Americans are tired of political division. Across different worldviews, beliefs, and experiences, there are many other people who are fed up with division. It takes all of us trying in small and big ways to bridge our divisions and live into the potential of this country's diversity. Overcoming division is possible, and to frame the rest of our time together let's watch this video which offers five practices that can help us all come together, even when we disagree.

  Ply the 9-minute video "Overcome *Division*"

- Slide #23: Irshad Manji shares five things we can all practice to overcome our divisions. The rest of our time together today will be focused on strengthening these skills and ideas, though not in the order Manji has presented them. We'll begin by practicing a core skill to finding common ground with others: sharing our stories.

10 Minute Break

Sharing Our Stories (100 mins)

My Bridgebuilding Lens (30 mins)

Share:

> *"We're now going to take a bit of time to reflect on our own traditions and worldview. This is because our traditions shape our worldview and how we show up in the world—including our motivation to engage with people who are different from ourselves. We can think of our worldview as a lens through which we process information and make decisions consciously or subconsciously.*
>
> *It's important to note that in this context the term "tradition" is broad. We all belong to multiple traditions. These could be religious or nonreligious—like Christianity, Islam, Secular Humanism, etc.—or they could be other cultural patterns with which you identify: your family, where you come from, etc."*

Facilitator Note: Be prepared to share an example of some of your own "traditions." You might be someone who identifies with a Mexican American tradition, Catholicism, being from Chicago, and the traditions of your own family. Also, participants will in a moment need access to different colors of writing utensils—markers, pens, colored pencils, etc. will suffice.

Next, give participants **5 minutes** to work on the **My Bridgebuilding Lens handout**. Reiterate that there is no single correct way to complete the handout or reflect on the influences that inform our worldview. The goal is simply to reflect.

Share: *"Each of us has a unique lens through which we view ourselves and others. This is especially true while bridgebuilding. It's important to be able to name that lens and then share with others about the traditions that influence our lens. So, we will now reflect on the different ways our traditions inform our understanding of bridgebuilding, and perhaps even motivate us to embrace differences."*

Show slide #26 to quickly review the goals of bridgebuilding. If needed, there are expanded talking points in the speaker points, but, 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.

Ensure that participants have access to three different colored pens or markers. Then, use slide #27 to instruct participants to review what they have written so far. They should spend around **5–10 minutes** reflecting on how their traditions influence the ways they think and feel about bridgebuilding. They should add this to their handout by drawing connecting lines from each tradition to what it has taught them. They are also welcome to continue reflection onto the back of their handout if they need more space. Guiding questions are below and on the slide.

What have your traditions taught you about:

- In color 1 (e.g. blue): diversity or differences—their value, how to positively engage them
  e.g. I love that my Mexican-American family comes from different backgrounds; our parties have delicious food that blends both cultures

- In color 2 (e.g. red): respect—what it looks like, feels like, why it matters
  e.g. my Catholicism teaches me to "do unto others as you would have done unto you"

- In color 3 (e.g. green): cooperation or service—what it looks like, how to do it, why it matters
  e.g. both of my parents worked in caregiving professions and taught me that contributing my time and talent to others was important

After everyone has added their reflections, place participants in pairs and ask them to discuss the following on slide #28 for 5–10 minutes:

- How many traditions did you brainstorm? How does it feel to look at your lenses?
- Which of your traditions most heavily influences your views or desire to build bridges? In what ways?
- Which component of bridgebuilding feels the most challenging to you? Why?

Thank participants for discussing their lenses with one another. Next, **share**:

> *"Research has shown that when we reflect on the complexity of our own identities and traditions—including the ones that might be in tension with one another—the more open we are to acknowledging the nuance and complexity within groups to which we do not belong. In many cases, we're more able to find common ground, Let's see an example in this video."*

Play the 3-minute video "The Golden Rule" on slide #29. After the video plays, **share**:

> *"In the face of a polarized setting, Amina experienced a "that's not O.K." moment. Her traditions and values led her to common ground with someone different than her. She even had a conversation with him afterwards. In the face of the many challenges to bridgebuilding, a big part of finding common ground is identifying our own worldview or lens and sharing it with others. We'll now turn our attention to practicing doing just that."*

Why Share Stories (10 mins)

Show slide #30 and **say**: *"Before we dig into telling our own stories, let's take a minute to zoom out and think about the role and importance of stories. Take a moment to silently recall stories that have stuck with you—ones you feel like you may never forget. They can be fictional or real and might be from movies or TV, from books, from family, etc."*

Ask for a few volunteers to share the name of stories aloud (or type into the chat for virtual settings). Participants should not retell the stories but simply name them.

Next, **ask**: *"What is it about these stories that makes them unforgettable or easy to remember? What makes a story powerful?"* Some examples might be: they make me feel something, they reveal a deeper meaning or connection, they are simple and heartfelt, they touch on universal experiences.

After collecting a few answers, show slide #31 and explain that there is a metaphor that can help us understand why stories are powerful particularly when we are building bridges. Play the 1-minute video "Elephant and Rider."

As needed on slide #32 you can reiterate that, in short, psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues that humans have two sides: an automatic or reactive side (metaphorically, the elephant pictured here), and an analytical or deliberate side (its rider in this picture). The rider can see a path ahead while the elephant powers the journey. While the rider holds the reins and may seem to be the "leader," it's actually the elephant (our reactive or instinctive thoughts) that is much larger, powerful, and will ultimately "win" any time there is disagreement between the two.

Ask: What might be some signs that our elephant has overpowered the rider—or that our automatic and reactive side is leading?

After collecting a few ideas, advance to slide #33 and read through some of the telltale signs that our elephant has taken over.

Using slide #34 **share**:

> *"The good news is that there are specific things we can do to soothe an elephant in order to eventually also bring the rider back into any situation. The first one we will practice is sharing stories.*
>
> *Stories can help us make meaning of the events around us and can reveal more than facts, figures, and arguments. They can move people and help us construct what we consider 'common sense.' Stories can open us up or close us off to new or different options, possibilities, or solutions.* **In short, stories are better at taming an elephant than logic-based arguments, facts we've learned, or statistics. When we share stories instead of "our case," we soothe the elephant and gain access to the rider."**

Show slide #35 to build on the insights participants may have shared in the opening about why stories are powerful, offer a few reasons why we might tell a story while bridgebuilding:

- Credentialing: Stories can help establish connection and relevance between the storyteller and the listener. They can demonstrate why we or the people we're in conversation with would even be interested in talking about a certain topic or building a relationship.

- Revealing The Why: If our view may be unpopular or simply different from what is expected, it can be helpful to explain more about how we came to believe or see things. Stories help people understand and empathize with one another's views.

- Deeper Exploration: Stories give us an opportunity to explore disagreements by revealing nuance. This can help all of us stay open and curious rather than widening our perception gaps.

- From Debate to Conversation: When we share our stories instead of arguments, a case, or data points, we avoid or shift the mode of the conversation away from something that feels like a debate. We can't argue with each other's stories. They're real parts of us that, when shared, can lead to humanizing moments and even finding common ground.

Practice (50 mins)

Share: *"We're now going to return to our lenses on bridgebuilding and use them as a jumping off point for story circles. In a moment I'll show you a variety of prompts. You'll pick two that you'd like to answer through a story you share aloud in a small group."*

Show slide #36 to share some guiding principles for today's storytelling practice:

- The goal in sharing stories is to reveal our values or perspectives in a way that is hospitable to people who may have different experiences.
- Strive to speak from the "I perspective"
- While we will have time to discuss any common ground we hear, there is no expectation to agree on something or arrive at any conclusions as a group
- Whenever possible, focus on telling us about your actual experience or feelings rather than facts or figures.

Then, show slide #37 and give participants 10–15 minutes to brainstorm and sketch out responses for two of the prompts. As needed, remind participants that this is not enough time to fully polish a story. Rather, this activity is all about practicing how to share about ourselves and our perspectives in ways that are conducive to bridgebuilding. Sharing our stories can take time and it's alright to try on new or different stories in this exercise.

Place participants in groups of three. Explain that each participant will get 5 minutes to share one story. If groups have extra time, participants can share the additional stories they prepared. The facilitator will tell people when to switch to the next speaker. In between stories, everyone should take a quick moment to thank the most recent storyteller. A full debrief conversation will happen after everyone has shared their two stories so everyone should refrain from follow up questions or reactions for now.

Finally, use slide #38 to **say**, *"by default, treat the stories you hear today as confidential. That means it's best to check in with the storyteller before continuing the conversation outside of this space or relaying personal details to others."*

Instruct the trios to begin and help them keep time by reminding them to switch as follows, every 6 minutes or so:

1. Person 1 shares one story (6 minutes)
2. Group thanks person 1, transition to next speaker (1 minute)
3. Person 2 shares one story (6 minutes)
4. Group thanks person 2, transition to next speaker (1 minute)
5. Person 3 shares one story (6 minutes)
6. Group thanks person 3, transition to debrief (1 minute)

If groups finish early or as time allows, consider inviting participants to share their second stories.

After each participant has shared once in their trios (about 20 minutes), give every group the following debrief questions on slide #39 to discuss for 15–20 minutes.

- How did it feel to share your stories? How did it feel to hear others' stories?
- What shared experiences or common themes stand out?
- What differences in traditions, experiences, or perspectives stand out to you?
- What have you learned from this exercise? Did anything surprise you?

Bring everyone back together and thank them for sharing their stories. As time allows, ask for a few volunteers to share some takeaways from this exercise. You can also ask participants to share aloud (or type into the chat for virtual settings) the name of someone with whom they think it would be beneficial to share stories with in this manner—i.e. to build bridges.

Before you send participants to their extended break, it can be helpful to once more remind everyone about the confidential nature of the stories that were shared and to check in with the storyteller rather than assuming it is alright to continue the conversation outside of this space.

60 Minute Break

Helping Our Elephants (25 mins)

Show slide #41 and **say**: *"Before the break, we practiced sharing our perspectives through stories—an important part of bridgebuilding that can help us find common ground. While listening to others' stories earlier may have been enjoyable or even easy, that's not always the case. Next, we'll practice some techniques to improve our listening—even when we disagree. The first, is teaching ourselves to take a deep breath."*

Advance to slide #42 and remind participants of the Rider and Elephant metaphor about our emotional, instinctive side (the elephant) and our reasoned, deliberate side (the rider).

Instruct participants to silently think about a time a conversation soured or went poorly. Perhaps they were demonstrating some of the signs that their elephant had taken over. Once they have the conversation in their mind, ask them to spend a minute jotting down what, during that conversation, their elephant was thinking about the other person or themselves.

Ask for a few volunteers to share aloud (or type into the chat for virtual settings) some of the reactions or thoughts they had. Examples might be "this is pointless—this person will never understand," or "they dislike people like me because they have never lived in this type of community."

Next, use slide #43 to share some of the common "traps" our elephants fall into when they have overpowered our rider.

- Jumping to conclusions: skipping ahead to a particular conclusion without enough evidence
- All-or-nothing thinking: thinking of things in terms of extremes, without being able to acknowledge nuance
- Labeling: assigning a judgmental label to something or someone, based on only one of its traits or limited evidence

Ask for a show of hands if the scenario anyone thought of involved one or more of these "traps."

Using slide #44, share that while our elephants have clearly gotten trapped in the past and likely will in the future, there are tools we can learn to more effectively communicate and to manage this elephant-rider dynamic. One technique is the "Detect, Pause, Correct" framework offered by The Constructive Dialogue institute.

1. **Detect** when your elephant might be leading. Pay attention to physical signs that you're starting to feel strong emotions.

2. **Pause** to take a deep breath (literally!). Identify your automatic thoughts to determine if there are any mental traps in your thinking. *[You may want to note aloud: Advice to take a deep breath is not touchy-feely mumbo-jumbo! Hard science tells us that deep breaths significantly shift our brain chemistry, increasing our ability to communicate*

effectively.]

3. **Correct** your elephant's missteps by reframing your thinking and leaning into inquiry. You can reframe your thinking by applying the Three E's: check for evidence (what did they actually say), eliminate exaggeration (close the perception gap), and consider alternative explanations (keep inquiring).

To quickly practice, ask everyone to apply the Three E's to the best of their ability in the example of a soured conversation. As slide #45 directs, everyone should spend a few minutes jotting down the following to the best of their memory:

- Check for Evidence: what did the other person actually say?
- Eliminate Exaggeration: what conclusions have you jumped to—are there places where you are or were thinking in extremes?
- Consider Alternate Explanations: brainstorm a few sincere questions you could ask to deepen the conversation rather than debate.

As time allows, ask a few participants to share about how applying the Three E's felt. Thank participants for taking some time to practice these tools.

Types of Conflict (25 mins)

Say: *"Recalling times when conversations went poorly might bring up a variety of feelings for all of us. To explore that further let's do a brief exercise."*

In-person: Ask participants to stand up and then **say**: "Let's imagine where I'm standing right now is the center of a disagreement or conflict. Move your body to the place in the room that you feel best represents your instinctive reaction to conflict."

Once participants are settled, ask for a few folks to share out where they are standing and why. They might reflect on whether they avoid, instigate, or observe conflict, as well as how the nature of the conflict likely affects their answer. After you've heard from a variety of places around the room, ask everyone to return to their seats.

Virtual: Using slide #68*, have participants enter a response into the chat or ask a few folks to share responses aloud to the following:*

- *What's the first word that comes to mind when you hear the word conflict?*
- *How comfortable are you with conflict? Consider your instinctive reaction.*

Note aloud that there is a large diversity of feelings any one of us may have about conflict, and that it may even depend on the particulars of the conflict.

Next, ask anyone to raise their hand who has ever been in conflict or a disagreement that negatively impacted the overall relationship.

Note aloud that most hands are likely raised.

Finally, ask anyone to raise their hand who has ever been in conflict or a disagreement that strengthened or improved a relationship.

Say: *"It would appear that disagreement brings up many types of feelings or associations for us. Conflict is not inherently good nor bad. Let's explore this idea more in this next video."*

Using slide #46 play the 3-minute video "Introduction to High Conflict with Amanda Ripley."

Next, give everyone a copy of the **High Vs. Good Conflict handout**. Explain that you'd like them to read it over. Once participants are done reading, place people in pairs to discuss the following for around 10 minutes (slide #47):

- What's an example of good or healthy conflict you've personally experienced or seen? How did it support the health of the relationship?
- Where in your life do you see some aspects of higher conflict? *If it's helpful, consider places where a perception gap may exist.*

- List 2–3 people in your life you may want to bridge with and move towards healthy conflict. *No need to pick the hardest or highest conflicts in your life.*

Bring the group back together and **share**:

> *"Some of the places you may have identified as higher conflict in your life could be opportunities to practice sharing your perspective through stories, like we did earlier. They are also places where we can practice another important skill for bridgebuilders: listening. We'll now practice some techniques to ask sincere questions, listen better, and encourage others to tell us more."*

Listening Better (60 mins)

Why Listen (15 mins)

To begin, lead participants through the following brief activity (slide #49).

> In-person: Place participants in pairs. Invite everyone to pick up a nearby object. Their goal will be to sell this object to their partner, taking turns. Each partner will have 60 seconds. Give the signal for when partners should switch who is selling.
>
> Virtual: Ask for two volunteers who will model for everyone else. Each person should pick up a random object nearby. Their goal will be to sell this object to their partner in 60 seconds. Give the first volunteer a signal to start selling. After 60 seconds, switch and give the other volunteer a chance to sell for 60 seconds.

After both sales pitches, bring everyone together and **ask** for reflections aloud on the following:

- Was the "seller" doing more sharing or listening?
- Was that a convincing tactic?
- How did the seller connect to what the other person wanted or needed?

Once participants have shared some reflections, **say**: *"Often we think that connecting with others and getting them to understand is about how convincing we are. But most of the time, connection is about how well we listen. Let's take a few minutes to reflect on why you might want to become a better listener in the first place."*

Ask: "Why become a better listener?" If helpful, you can prompt participants to think about their families, work, neighborhoods, or other communities.

> In-person: Using chart paper or a white board, have participants write down their responses where everyone can see. They can underline or add a check mark next to others' responses that they find compelling.
>
> Virtual: Have participants enter a response into the chat. Or, create a shared slide all participants can add to using Miro, Google Slides, or other preferred technology.

After a few minutes, read aloud the responses. As needed, feel free to add any of your own including:

- Deep listening makes us more persuasive (Greater Good Science Center, 2020)
- Effective listeners generally project more positive impressions than ineffective listeners (e.g., Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006; Haas & Arnold, 1995) and are perceived to be more trustworthy (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997).
- Good listeners produce more rewarding interactions between patients and their physicians (Henry, Fuhrel- Forbis, Rogers, & Eggly, 2012), real estate clients and their agents (Amba-Rao, 1991), protégés and their mentors (Young & Cates, 2010), and more.

- A 30% reduction in office visits was found for chronically ill patients after they had been listened to for 15 to 30 minutes (Kaiser).

Finish by again reminding participants about Haidt's framework of the rider and the elephant. Share:

> *"Listening deeply to someone is an effective way to soothe their elephant. We can spend all day trying to convince their rider of our argument, but logical, fact-based approaches are fairly useless in reaching the elephant, who remains in charge if we don't listen. Listening deeply and sincerely is one very effective way to reach the elephant, who is then less likely to interfere with your attempts to reach the rider. So, let's explore some techniques we can deploy while listening."*

Practice (35 mins)

Using slide #50 **share**:

> *"We will be practicing four different listening techniques in pairs. While each technique will be practiced one at a time, in real conversations, we use all of the skills to different degrees. A useful metaphor can be thinking about each skill as a different muscle group we might exercise when we go to the gym. While the motion of a bicep curl may not be something we do on a regular basis just living our lives, we do use our biceps in conjunction with our other muscles to move through each day and its tasks. Try to think about the techniques this way—they may feel strange to practice in isolation, but they add up to a better chance that we can remain curious and grounded when bridgebuilding."*

Going skill by skill, lead practice as follows:

1. Explain the technique to the large group. You'll find talking points for each technique below. Then, click to advance the slide animation and reveal the prompt. Ask participants to practice the skill in pairs, using the prompt on each slide.
    - One partner will share for 2.5 to 3 minutes, while the other partner practices the named technique.
    - Then, without debriefing yet, direct partners to switch roles for another 2.5 to 3 minutes.
2. After each round, ask for a few volunteers to share their initial reactions about how it felt to practice that technique.

Talking points for each listening technique:

- Slide #51, Focused Silence: while many of us may be familiar with the advice of minimizing distractions like phones, deploying silence is a technique that can help ensure we're giving others the opportunity to share without interruption. Importantly,

silence is not the same as zoning out. Rather, it is a way to deeply focus on all that the speaker is sharing—even nonverbally. Try to focus on what the speaker is conveying. You can also pay attention to changes in the speaker's body such as blood rushing to their face, a crack in their voice, or when they cross their arms, for example.

Silence can also be an opportunity to take a deep breath—especially if we've just heard something challenging. Let yourself off the hook of thinking of the perfect response, and instead simply bear witness. Be fully present and silent. This includes avoiding overt nonverbal expressions.

- Slide #52, Footprint: Authors Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman have written about the ways that listening is not about being a sponge where we passively absorb information. Instead, we need to be active like a trampoline and give energy or amplification to what others share.

  So, one technique to do this is to stay within the speaker's footprint whenever you do respond. This means we only use the exact words or phrases the speaker has shared. If they said they were tired, we do not say "worn out." To them, there may be a meaningful difference between the two. Staying in the footprint makes it harder for the listener to grab the "steering wheel" and guide conversation where they want.

- Slide #53, Encouragers: It's important to show people we are interested in what they are saying and welcome further sharing. We can do this through verbal or nonverbal cues that encourage continued conversation such as nodding, saying "mhmm," or modestly changing our facial expression as appropriate.

  Still, encouragers can be deployed to subtly grab "steering wheel" in conversation. As speakers, we are habituated to follow where we receive approval. Oftentimes we may pick up on the listener's encouragers and use them as guideposts for what we can or cannot talk about with them.

  We need to practice giving encouragers, even if the speaker is saying something we do not agree with. Remember, in bridgebuilding, encouraging someone to continue sharing is not the same as agreeing with them.

- Slide #54, Open-Ended, Sincere Questions: This technique allows conversations to deepen, particularly when we're hearing something new or challenging. Open-ended questions should offer a sincere opportunity for someone to share more about how they view things and why. Some examples you can use in almost any situation are:
  - Can you tell me more about that?
  - What was that like for you?
  - What did you make of that?

Listening Reflection (10 mins)

Using slide #55 **share**:

> *"There are many techniques we can use to listen better. Whichever technique we use, it's important to be clear on our own motivation to listen as bridgebuilders. As Amanda Ripley found after studying groups moving away from high conflict, 'people didn't have to agree to make progress, but they had to feel heard.'"* (Ripley, Amanda. 2021. *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*)

Instruct participants to spend a few minutes silently journaling on the displayed questions:

- Which technique from this exercise would you like to practice more? Why?
- Where or with whom in your life might you be able to practice these techniques?

If time allows, ask for a few volunteers to share what they've written about with the whole group or with a partner.

10 Minute Break

Expanding our Social Spheres (25 mins)

Say: *"We've spent a lot of our time together discussing and practicing skills with others in this room. Now, we're going to think about the reasons and ways you can bring this knowledge and skills into your life outside of this session. So, let's dig in."*

Half of the participants will read the **My Pal Al handout** and the other half will read **The Power of a Socially Diverse Network handout**. After reading, assign participants into groups of four where two people have read the former handout and the other two have read the latter.

Give everyone 4–5 minutes to read their assigned excerpt.

Using slide #58 give groups around 10 minutes to discuss the following:

- Each pair should summarize the main points of the excerpts they read. Respectively, they should share with the other pair:
    - What do researchers mean by a "socially diverse network"?
    - What is the "My Friend Al principle"?
- Do you have a "Friend Al" experience (it does not need to focus on religious difference)? Describe your own experience and how it influences your perspective.
- How can you "broaden your social portfolio" or expand the types of social contacts with whom you engage? Try to be specific.

Bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to summarize the main point of each handout to ensure understanding. The main points are described below.

- **The Power of a Socially Diverse Network handout**: Research shows that when we have expanded types of social interactions beyond just our friends or family, we experience greater happiness and wellbeing. Examples might be neighbors, coworkers, the postal workers, someone at the gym, or even strangers. It's good for our health to try connecting with people we do not regularly talk to—even if it's a brief conversation.

- **My Pal Al handout**: People in the U.S. have frequent occasion to develop positive, meaningful relationships with people from other religious communities. A friendship with even one member of a suspect or marginalized religious group can improve somebody's attitude towards the whole group. Consider the example of Amina Joseph from The Golden Rule video. Putnam and Campbell's research also showed that a friendship with someone from one minority religious group changes people's attitudes towards other minority religious groups. For example, befriending a Buddhist causes improved views towards Mormons, Muslims and Hindus. We can apply this principle to identities beyond religion or faith.

Closing (45 mins)

Say: *"We have covered a lot in our time together! In the final part of this session, we will reflect on what we have learned and decide how to apply our knowledge and skills beyond this room."*

Facilitator Note: For this section, use your judgement to determine the best way to review concepts. If small group discussions are not feasible or your preference, you can also choose to present each concept with the talking points below, ask different volunteers to describe each term, or another format. The goal is simply to offer time to review big ideas from the session.

Show slide #60 which lists the key concepts and skills from the entire session. Place participants in small groups and give them 10–15 minutes to:

- Briefly summarize the different concepts.
- Discuss: share an example from today or your own life where bridgebuilding led to a positive outcome.

The following are brief summaries of each concept. When you bring the whole group back together ask if anyone has questions.

- **Perception Gaps**: the difference between what we imagine an "opposing" group believes and what they actually believe. Studies show we tend to significantly overestimate the distance between our own opinion or beliefs and those of others.

- **Goals of Bridgebuilding (4 components)**: Intentionally engaging differences, respect for other identities and perspectives, mutually inspiring relationships, cooperation for the common good.

- **The Rider and The Elephant**: The elephant represents our automatic thinking which is instinctive, emotional, and reactive. The rider represents our controlled thinking which is more deliberate, reasoned, and analytical. The rider's control can be easily overthrown by the much larger elephant. This has implications for how we have conversations across difference, understanding that we are unlikely to reach the rider without attending to our own and others' elephants first.

- **Pause, Detect, Correct (3E's)**: This framework builds from The Rider and The Elephant and offers some suggestions for how to stay grounded and curious in conversations, even when we disagree. The steps are:
    - **Detect** when your elephant might be leading. Pay attention to physical signs that you're starting to feel strong emotions.
    - **Pause** to take a deep breath (literally!). Identify your automatic thoughts to determine if there are any mental traps in your thinking.
    - **Correct** your elephant's missteps by reframing your thinking and leaning into inquiry. You can reframe your thinking by applying the **Three E's**: check for evidence (what did they actually say), eliminate exaggeration (close the

perception gap), and consider alternative explanations (keep inquiring).

- **High vs. Good (Healthy) Conflict**: Conflict is not inherently good nor bad. However, our brains behave differently in high conflict which is characterized by an "us vs. them" mentality and binary extremes. Good or healthy conflict can still be heated but is generative. People ask questions, feel understood, and can lead with curiosity to ultimately strengthen their relationship.

- **Listening Techniques**: There are different strategies we can use to become better listeners. We can combine these techniques to help build relationships across differences.
    - **Focused Silence**—paying close attention to all that the speaker shares verbally or nonverbally, remembering to breathe, and being fully present.
    - **Footprint**—repeating back only the exact words the speaker shared.
    - **Encouragers**—verbal or nonverbal cues that let the speaker know we are interested and welcome their continued sharing,
    - **Open Ended Sincere Questions**—questions that require more than a yes or no and allow conversation to deepen such as "can you tell me more about that?"

- **"My Pal Al" Principle**: A friendship with even one member of a different group can improve our attitude towards the group as a whole. Research shows that this increased goodwill also extends to other, different groups beyond just the one to which our friend belongs. "The Golden Rule" video used earlier in this session was an example of this principle.

Facilitator Note: If you are leading the following activity virtually you will need to create a blank slide for each participant to fill out in a shared deck (Miro, Google Slides, etc.). There is an example on slide #69 you can use as a template.

Next, **share**:

> *"This is a lot of content we have explored! So, for the remainder of our time we are going to reflect on what resonates most with you personally. Take a moment to think about what feels most important to you from today [PAUSE].*
>
> *Perhaps there are images… quotes… concepts… lyrics… a conversation… a memory… a skill [PAUSE].*
>
> *After today, what will be a helpful reminder to center yourself when you try to build a bridge? [PAUSE].*
>
> *For the next 15 minutes we'll try to create a visual answer to this question."*

Show slide #61 and explain that we will now take time to create art or a visual reminder for ourselves. Emphasize that there is no wrong or right way to do this; participants can use words, images, doodles, or really any visual form they would like. For anyone who does not consider

themselves an "art" person reiterate that the goal is reflection and ultimately what we produce now is to support our future selves with remembering our learning and continued commitment to bridgebuilding.

In-person: *Make art materials available. If desired, play music and invite participants to begin.*

Virtual: *Give participants the link to a shared slide deck to which they can add content. Invite them to design a slide using images and or text. If they would like, they can also reach for any art supplies or materials they have readily at their disposal—it could be as simple as a piece of paper and a writing utensil. If they choose this option, they will need to take a photo of their art and then insert it into the slide deck. This could be accomplished by taking a photo on their smartphone and emailing it to themselves, for example.*

Offer a reminder when there are about 5 minutes remaining. For virtual settings remind anyone who opted to make physical art to begin the process of uploading and adding a photo of their art to a slide in the next few minutes.

Next, spend about 5 minutes in a gallery walk so everyone can see each other's art. For in-person setting ask participants to place their art around the walls, or on tables facing outwards. For virtual settings ask participants to scroll through their peers' slides.

Afterwards, have in-person participants collect their own art.

Now, show slide #62 and ask participants to silently journal for 5 minutes on the following:

- 3 takeaways from today
- 2 places or relationships where you can apply your takeaways
- 1 concrete next step to deepen bridgebuilding in your own life

Based on the size of the group and timing, the following final share can be answered as a whole group where each person answers aloud, or participants can discuss in pairs. (slide #63):

- A piece of gratitude form today
- Your next step

Suggest that everyone put their art somewhere they look or visit regularly to serve as a reminder of their commitment to bridgebuilding. Perhaps this visual reminder can live on their desk, the dashboard of their car, or next to a mirror where they get ready each day.

If desired, share one of the quotes on slide #64 or #65 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.

Session End

Optional Follow-Up Ideas

The following are resources to consider sharing with participants who would like to continue developing their bridgebuilding knowledge and skills.

- Take the Bridging Differences Quiz and reflect on your results.
- Work through the Toxicity Inventory Worksheet to reflect on higher conflict or polarized relationships in your life.
- Take the Perception Gap Quiz to learn more about the degree to which you might be misperceiving people who affiliate with a different political party than you.
- Reflect on the different people you know who are also interested in bridging divides.
- Check out the various discussion guides and other resources offered by Living Room Conversations.
- Learn more about StoryCorps' One Small Step imitative and ways to participate.
- Select a few sources of news that are different from what you normally follow. The next time news breaks, try visiting these sources first. Visit websites like All Sides, Ground News, and Flip Side to identify different news groups to try out.
- Check out the additional resources offered by Engaging Difference.
- Explore more content from Starts With Us like their Polarization Detox Challenge which offers ideas such as: *"If you feel comfortable doing so, travel to local mixed political places (this map or this one). Get off the couch, get in a car or on a bus or bike, and travel to a more purple community than your own for a short visit or holiday. Once there, head to a diner, library, café, ice cream shop, or shopping center and take in life there. Odds are it will be much like your own. No need to talk politics. Just spend time in the community. If you can't travel today, make a plan to do so. Put it in your calendar to ensure that you stick to the plan."*
- Read through the Bridging Differences Playbook which offers suggestions such as*: "Do you tend to have a low opinion of gun owners? Pay a visit to the local shooting range and sign up for lessons. If it's liberals you don't like, consider attending panel discussions hosted by liberal organizations. It's important to approach these events with questions and an open mind. Don't arrive hoping to make other people like you or looking for things to criticize. The next step, beyond that, is to bring others like you into your new experiences. In this way, you can reduce misperceptions and biases, and create warmer feelings between people."*
- Learn more about Confident Pluralism, a framework offered by John D. Inazu.