

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Civic Pluralism Curriculum Development Grants

Opportunity

Prejudice and polarization in American civic life continue to impact college classrooms and campuses. Some scholars even argue that we are now more divided as a nation than at any point in our history.¹ To reduce tensions on campus and better prepare students for leadership in an increasingly high-conflict world, it is essential to equip students with the skills for pluralism—defined as “the energetic engagement with diversity” through mutual respect, relationship-building, and cooperation across deep differences.² Interfaith America believes that integrating civic pluralism into universities, through curricula and educator modeling, is crucial for shifting both campus and national cultures toward cooperation rather than division.

Interfaith America has seen a growing interest from faculty who want to advance and educate about civic pluralism on their campuses. In response, Interfaith America is excited to offer \$4,000 grants for teams of two educators who are committed to collaborating across significant religious, political, social, and/or moral differences. These cross-difference teaching teams will receive grants to develop co-taught courses focused on the theory and application of civic pluralism across various disciplines. These grants will empower educator teams to model bridgebuilding in the classroom, equipping students to lead our diverse nation by cultivating respect across a myriad of differences, fostering meaningful relationships amid divergent perspectives, and enabling cooperation on concrete projects that unite disparate groups around shared positive goals.

Grant Overview

We invite teams of two educators to apply for a \$4,000 grant to design and implement a course on the theory and application of pluralism to be taught between January 2025 and May 2026. Each cross-difference teaching team will be made up of two educators who share at least one deep difference related to the course content. The funds will be split between the educators (\$2000/each) and are intended as support for their time and energy in curriculum development.

¹ See, e.g., Peter T. Coleman, *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 21-24.

² Diana L. Eck, “Defining Pluralism,” in *Pluralism in Practice: Case Studies of Leadership in a Religiously Diverse America*, by Elinor J. Pierce (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2023), vii.

Below are specific examples, requirements, and deliverables for the 2025–2026 grants.

- Examples of proposed pluralism courses include but are not limited to:
 - A course, co-taught by professors from differing political perspectives/parties, that explores the history of political discourse, polarization, and pluralism in America and the impact of positive cross-party engagement, with special attention to contemporary case studies.
 - A course, co-taught by professors with differing perspectives on the Israel-Hamas War, that explores how the history of civic pluralism in the United States informs relationship-building efforts today across deeply divided communities.
 - A course, co-taught by professors with differing perspectives on the use of gene-editing technologies like CRISPR, that explores the complexities of different approaches to engaging diverse perspectives on medical ethics for concrete civic projects based on shared values.
 - A course, co-taught by professors from different religious identities, that explores the history of religious diversity in America supplemented by case studies of interfaith cooperation driving and impeding civic pluralism.
- We will also consider substantive course revisions, such as the inclusion of a new substantive module or unit within a pre-existing course, provided the criteria below are still met.

Grant Requirements

Eligibility

- This funding is reserved for educators at 2- and 4-year colleges and universities in the United States. Educators include faculty (tenured, contingent, adjunct, contract, and part-time) and staff or administrators that teach courses for academic credit.
- We will be prioritizing applications that demonstrate the following:
 - A strong collaboration between educators with a commitment to a respect/relate/cooperate model of pluralism as outlined below.
 - Engagement with the American intellectual tradition of pluralism (see suggested readings [here](#))
 - Promise of sustainable curricular interventions
 - Curriculum that impacts a high percentage of students
 - Teaching of skills for civic pluralism (such as active listening, storytelling and other bridgebuilding skills found in [Skills for Bridging the Gap](#))
 - Preparation of students to engage diversity in deep, nuanced, and generative ways
- Courses must be taught between January 2025 and May 2026. For courses taught in Summer 2025, Fall 2025, and Spring 2026, course design (course syllabus, activities, etc.) must be completed no later than Spring 2025.

Grant Requirements

- Use at least three resources from Interfaith America's [Learning and Action Bridge \(LAB\)](#). These can include case studies, [Bridgebuilder Basics](#) curriculum, [We Can Build Bridges](#) curriculum, [Skills for Bridging the Gap](#) curriculum, [Interfaith Leadership Video Series](#), [pluralism bibliography](#), or other resources available through the LAB.
- A letter of support from a relevant supervisor or senior administrator, acknowledging support for the development and implementation of this grant.
- Both teammates must attend a two-hour virtual workshop led by Interfaith America on civic pluralism in January 2025 (as part of the grant launch). Date and time TBA.
- At least one teammate must participate in a mid-Spring 2025 phone call with IA staff about the project progress. At least one representative required.
- At least one teammate must attend two cohort calls with other grantees, one in Spring 2025 and another in Winter 2026.
- Submit a final report that includes the curricular materials developed through the grant such as syllabi, case studies, modules, activities, etc.

Funding Information

- Grantee teaching teams will receive \$4,000 total, divided evenly between the two team members (\$2,000/each).
- This grant is designed to be paid out to individuals as compensation for the grantees' time and energy in curricular design.
- Grantees requesting payout to their institution are responsible for understanding and navigating their institutional or organizational grant processes.
- Those who receive funding may receive a 1099 tax form at the end of the year.

Restrictions

Grant funds may not be used for:

- Indirect or overhead costs (including fringe)
- Expenses associated with political campaign activities, including directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office; making contributions to political campaigns; or attempting to influence legislation (i.e., lobbying)
- Capital funds or expenses (e.g., endowments, capital campaigns, annual funds, tuition, or student fees)

Deliverables

- Grantees will be expected to submit a final report outlining learnings and impact, along with curricular materials developed over the grant period.

Proposal Review & Selection

- Through its grant programs, Interfaith America is committed to supporting initiatives that meaningfully engage people with a range of religious, philosophical, or ideological perspectives and diverse racial and ethnic identities. In alignment with this commitment, the selection committee will seek a balanced cohort of diverse grantees, including those with a variety of faith and worldview commitments from both public and private, as well as religious and non-religious, institutions.

Program Timeline

- **October 1, 2024:** Application period opens
- **November 29, 2024:** Application period closes
- **December 6, 2024:** Selection decisions communicated to applicants
- **January 1, 2025:** Grant implementation period begins
- **May 1, 2025:** Grantees provide a progress report on their projects and submit all curricular materials developed for implementation in Spring 2025, Summer 2025, Fall 2025 or Spring 2026.
- **May 31, 2026:** Grantees provide a final report; grant implementation period concludes

For further information, please contact Dr. Mike Whitenton, Director of Academic Initiatives, at mwhitenton@interfaithamerica.org.

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Additional Resources

- Resources accessible via Interfaith America's [Learning and Action Bridge](#)
- Interfaith America's [Pluralism Bibliography](#)

Interfaith America's Framework for Pluralism: **RESPECT. RELATE. COOPERATE.**

For more than two decades, [Interfaith America's work](#) to unlock the potential of American religious diversity has been grounded in a steady vision for pluralism. We support leaders and institutions to build communities and cultures defined by the following characteristics.

For a fuller look at this foundational framework, see Chapter 4 of *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, by Interfaith America Founder and President, Eboo Patel.

RESPECT: Respect for Diverse Identities

People respect each other's identities and perspectives, even when they don't agree. They acknowledge each other's right to form and express their own identity and opinions. They accommodate each other's identity-related needs whenever possible.

"To respect someone else's identity does not require you to agree with it or accept it."
(Patel, p. 93)

RELATE: Mutually Inspiring Relationships

People seek out positive, constructive, caring engagement across lines of difference, whether through civic action, friendly conversation, or shared activities. Such relationships do not require us to hide our differences or force fake agreement; rather, they are forged in the recognition of both differences and commonalities.

"These are not connections based on the fiction of total agreement across all dimensions of identity, but rather engagement in full awareness that there are areas of both commonality and divergence and a commitment to care for one another in recognition of both." (Patel, p. 94)

COOPERATE: Cooperation for the Common Good

People engage with different others in common action around issues of shared social concern. Despite differences – which are sometimes irreconcilable – they engage shared values to come together in a commitment to the common good.

"The common good are those principles and structures that a range of groups benefit from and people generally agree we have a collective interest to uphold." (Patel, p. 96)

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