

CIVIC SPIRIT

How Do Organizations Inspire and Equip Individuals and Communities to Listen and Understand Those With Whom They Differ or Disagree?

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Section I: Overview of the Problem

Throughout the last few years, we have seen increases in tension and political polarization in America like never before. Controversial supreme court decisions like *Roe v. Wade* shattered relationships between parties and left groups of people with very different emotions. The 2020 Presidential Election and the controversies associated have caused divides and stereotypes that have still not been resolved to this day. As more people have been getting involved in politics because of these large divisions, the lack of civic education has proven to cause big problems in society. Constant misinformation on social media and a lack of knowledge of these governmental institutions have led to many false and extreme opinions being spread, as well as more division. The lack of Civics in schools can be traced back to the Race to the Top Education Grants of 2009, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which do not include civics requirements when creating curriculums and benchmarks for public schools. These acts most likely did not include grants because of the constant polarization in this country. “We continue to fight over the accuracy, tone, and emphasis in the presentation of the American past, particularly in schools.”¹ Certain groups of people are against methods of teaching about certain figures and concepts, as well as lessons that disprove and deteriorate the validity of their political arguments and beliefs. Reconstruction was taught very differently depending on where you lived a century ago. In the South, it was taught as a bad period that tried to destroy the southern governments. But in the North, it was taught in a manner that explained the benefits the period caused for African Americans, and the abundance of rights they were given through the passing of the 14th and 15th amendments.

The structure of politics in the United States explains that politics are a very intense subject, because of polarization and the lack of empathy we give to others. “In times of polarization, our mind tricks us into thinking that politics is a purely zero-sum game. It’s *us* versus *them*. This adversarial mindset.”² As well as the adversarial mindset, the presence of very loud voices from extremes on both sides has limited bipartisan collaboration. Noah Silverman of Interfaith America believes that “Political polarization is a problem because of how the broader American discourse exists. There is a belief in ideological purity on the left and right, meaning that you have to have pure beliefs, and one large ideological difference destroys any effort of bipartisanship. This hurts democracy and bridge-building. This is due to the extremes getting a larger voice, and speaking much louder.”³ Most of this division and problem described is because of the stereotypes and the lack of unity existing in the United States. In our society, constant stereotypes and distorted views about the other side lead people to think

¹ [American Democracy Report, 2021](#)

² [Resolving Polarization Politically, 2021](#)

³ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

the other side is “bad,” and look to “destroy the country and its values.” The lack of educated conversation and relations between the two sides have caused the two sides and parties to move farther apart, which has created a stalemate of progress, where no bipartisan agreement could exist. According to Alex Edwards-Bourdrez from Braver Angels, the political division has been fueled by certain media practices. “The media plays to their base and they have to sell their stuff, which limits their ability to be open-minded.” He continued by saying that extreme views and stereotypes said on these platforms convince people of believing things that could be divisive. For example, the narrative that everyone on the left side of the aisle will take your gun is an extreme that has angered many conservative-leaning thinkers. Along with the media, Edwards-Bourdrez has noticed flaws in the primary system that have increased divisiveness between people. “The voters who show up for the primary are only about 15% of registered voters, which are shown to be extremes on both sides. The winner of that primary then becomes the nominee for the office. Once they are the nominee for the office, these extremes have to moderate so they get votes from the entire party. Once they are voted in and did not live up to promises to their extremist base in the previous primary, they would get voted out. We need a system that allows for the more moderate candidate to succeed.”⁴ These divides have become so bad that outreach has become such a significant problem for all of these organizations in the space of trying to prevent political polarization.

As well as political polarization, religious polarization is also a problem. In certain cultures, past tension with other cultures has led to resentment between the groups that even though disproven, still exists today. As seen throughout American history, the divide between Christians and Catholics dates back centuries, and long-held beliefs about Catholics by other groups of Christians still cause a large divide between the groups today. Another large example of a divide like this is between Catholicism and Judaism. “It was not until 1965, with the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, that the Catholic Church finally denounced antisemitism in all its forms and formally proclaimed that Jews should not be held accountable for the death of Jesus.”⁵ While the concept was disproven over 55 years ago, “it takes time for change to unfold and a lot of the messages haven’t fully trickled down to our communities”⁶. Polarization is not just a political problem, where there is lots of tension between political parties over certain issues, but it also involves religious cultures and resentment over past events that have still not been completely resolved.

In American schools, teachers are having a tough time allowing individuals with cultural differences to feel comfortable in a classroom. Different cultural practices, language barriers, and trying to incorporate an individual into American culture could lead to problems. First, the way cultural differences are discussed in classrooms should be changed. “Cultural differences are seen primarily as barriers to effective communication and interrelations.”⁷ In schools, stereotypes are focused on more, instead of learning about cultures and trying to find similarities. “The classroom climate may make her feel excluded or uneasy; she may feel uncomfortable expressing herself in English”⁸ Also, being forced to thrive in a new classroom

⁴ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

⁵ [Teaching antisemitism in Catholic Schools, 2020](#)

⁶ [Teaching antisemitism in Catholic Schools, 2020](#)

⁷ [Teachers as intercultural bridge-builders: Rethinking the metaphor of bridge-building](#)

⁸ [Teachers as intercultural bridge-builders: Rethinking the metaphor of bridge-building](#)

environment, very different compared to classrooms in other countries, is a hard task. For example, in some countries, children who speak out publicly are frowned upon, and the child may not have the same expertise as other students who understand the school environment and what is already expected of them.

When trying to build connections between organizations, and people who differ, one large hurdle these organizations experience is the difficulty with outreach, and getting the people who are causing the division to come to these events. Of the five organizations in the report, all of them provide amazing programs that if enough participants are recruited, it would lead to a massive change in this country. But as Jeremy Garson from Bridge Alliance mentioned, "To work in this movement, means realizing how monumental and almost impossible the task is and fighting for it anyway. I have no idea if my work the last five years has made a dime's worth of impact in the country, but I am going to keep doing it." Not only reaching a large number of people, but reaching the people and organizations that will make the difference is a challenge for these organizations, and they all have unique responses to overcoming the issue and trying to spread their messages.

In this report, five leading nonprofit organizations that specialize in bridge-building: Braver Angels, Bridge Alliance, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM), and Interfaith America, were interviewed about how their organization helps to bring cultures together, and resolve the conflict between religious groups, political parties, and the American people overall. Interviews were conducted with Jeremy Garson, Chief of Staff at Bridge Alliance, Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, NY Coordinator of Braver Angels, Dylan Morpurgo, Associate Director of Youth Leadership at ADL, Arthur M. Maserjian, Director of Strategic Content and International Affairs at CAM, and Noah Silverman, Senior Director of Learning at Interfaith America. This report brings the insights from all of these organizations together to inspire and inform others about the best way to resolve the large social tension that is occurring in the United States at this time in our history.

Section II: Solutions

II.i: Outreach

To build connections and bridge-build, organizations need to have specific strategies of outreach. Outreach is not only about reaching a target population to have them attend events, but it is also about connecting with other organizations that have connections to specific issues or have large differences from the beliefs and objectives of your organization. In the case of most organizations, by connecting with other organizations, reaching certain populations of people tend to be easier. Bridge Alliance has many member organizations, where each one has close connections with different groups and contacts. This makes it easier for Jewish groups, for example, to reach certain church congregations, as some Christian-based organizations in the Bridge Alliance have close relationships with priests, who can communicate the message to their congregants. Similar to how the Bridge Alliance functions, the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) uses these alliances to connect to small groups in communities around the United States. CAM is part of a task force with other leading Jewish nonprofits. "This task force sends groups to different regions of the US, like CAM working with the governor of Nebraska to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. They used this opportunity to reach synagogues and

Jewish groups in Nebraska more directly to engage with them on the level of a partnership,” said Arthur M. Maserjian of CAM.

Dylan Morpurgo of the ADL has noticed that expanding the objectives of an organization to reach more cultures has helped with outreach and turnout. The ADL has teams that focus on antisemitism outside the US, and can more closely connect with Jews around the world. The ADL also builds relationships with organizations by helping them with their initiatives. Over time, they have gotten more involved with fighting white supremacy, which has helped them partner with other organizations like the NAACP so they can also help the ADL fight antisemitism. The ADL also has regional offices, which are essential to reaching local communities with their programming. By having local offices, the ADL can get involved with local religious events, like an Iftar ceremony at a mosque. Attending these events locally helps these organizations and allies show up if the ADL regional office needs assistance for specific programming or outreach. Along with using alliances and large groups of organizations, reaching people directly can also take a different approach. Braver Angels use local newspapers to publish articles and encourage individuals to join their programs. Edwards-Bourdrez has written numerous letters to local Long Island Newspapers and has been able to get them published to spread the word of Braver Angels.

The strategies of outreach for certain organizations cannot be complete without a target audience. As said by Noah Silverman of Interfaith America, “Extreme voices have further divided the country to a point where the two parties cannot collaborate to create bipartisan legislation. The best solution would be to teach the moderate choir how to sing along. If the choir is louder, more people will listen to them than the extreme figures on both sides.”⁹ When the voices of those who are willing to collaborate and have beliefs that the other side could work with are amplified, the government could function in a way where it is not always divided, and somewhat united. Alex Edwards-Bourdrez of Braver Angels believes that the way to amplify the moderate voice is to advocate for certain changes in the political processes of the United States government. He believes that multi-member districts, where “You have to vote for multiple candidates, which will even out the more extreme candidates and get moderates in. Now, these extremes have to moderate their policy.” Also, advocating for the adoption of Rank Choice Voting, where you rank candidates instead of voting for one, can alleviate the problem as well. If you do not get a majority, you stay in the running, which means people have more moderate options to choose from, and the extremes would not be able to get all the moderate votes on their side. Focusing on the moderate voice with outreach, along with finding ways the moderate voice can stay permanent without it being crushed, is essential to bridge-building and stopping political polarization.

II.ii: Religious Polarization

Religious Polarization and religious conflict have been traced back to the beliefs themselves. The biblical conflict between groups, like the alleged killing of Jesus by Jewish people, while proven false, is still causing tension between groups that have still not been resolved. When it comes down to solving religious polarization, organizations are focusing on ensuring that the beliefs these people hold do not hurt another ethnic group. The first step most

⁹ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

organizations do, as done by Braver Angels, is to analyze religious beliefs. “What about someone's religious beliefs informs and allows them to support a certain issue?”¹⁰ is a question asked in most Braver Angels programs. Braver Angels figures this out through self-understanding workshops such as Depolarizing Within, which allows people to recognize their prejudices, and recognize the blockages within their beliefs. Similarly, the ADL has a large education department that specializes in anti-bias training. One of the largest anti-bias programming by the ADL is the Echoes of Reflection Program, which focuses on Holocaust education. By extending these programs to other religious groups, the ADL has noticed Muslims and Jews become more empathetic to each other. Similar to this, Arthur Maserjian of CAM has noticed that most of the religious conflict between Muslims and Jews has been a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By finding common ground between religious groups, beliefs, and origins, Maserjian believes that antisemitism and islamophobia can be combatted together. By explaining the common roots between Muslims and Jews before the conflict, and the similar religious beliefs of the two groups, they could be brought closer together despite the current conflict in the Middle East.

As an interfaith organization, Interfaith America primarily focuses on the religious aspects of bridge-building, and its importance. Noah Silverman of Interfaith America stressed the importance of religion to bridge-building. “Religious communities bring unique assets to bridge building since they have wisdom traditions on how to get along across boundaries. A simple recognition of the fact that humanity is created in the eyes of God. The fact that we understand we have distinct humanities and integrities means we are different and we need to understand differences.”¹¹ He believes that many religions have principles that justify bridge-building, and teaching people this belief will help to accelerate that process. Especially with a large population of Americans prioritizing their religious beliefs over their political ones, or having religious beliefs justify their political orientation, teaching these religious principles to the population is of utmost importance. Silverman says that if more bridge-building is done in the religious space, it can create huge impacts that may not be seen in any other space of bridge-building. Silverman said that “Rates of antisemitism go up with the rates of Islamophobia, anti-Christian, anti-Mormon bias as well. If we fight religious bigotry in general, everyone wins. We can benefit both ourselves and the broader community by doing this.”¹² Also, students of different backgrounds can feel more included and comfortable in school. The problem relating to certain groups of students having a harder time blending in with school norms could be eliminated. “If we teach teachers about other cultures, like Muslim students being late because of Ramadan morning prayers, we can make teachers aware of the student population and their needs to make them more comfortable in school,”¹³ Silverman said. Society can become a more integrated, unified, and collaborative place for religions around the world to work together if we become more inclusive and recognize the religious differences of others.

¹⁰ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

¹¹ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

¹² Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

¹³ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

II.iii: Political Polarization

Resolving division in the political system starts from the top with elected officials. Currently, the division is at an all-time high because of the lack of bipartisan legislation, and the extreme ideological divisions between the two parties. Organizations have been trying to work with elected officials to get certain legislation passed to encourage bridge-building and ensure unity between the two sides. Braver Angels has been using its Braver Politics initiative to try and engage politicians in this process. Braver Politics uses programs similar to Depolarizing Within to offer self-awareness and personal workshops for politicians.¹⁴ Along with this work, Interfaith America has worked with Congress directly to pass a bipartisan deal to train people in bridge-building, and create curriculums to teach these values of bridge-building.¹⁵

Similar to anti-bias training, and teaching about other religious communities, understanding the context of political issues and the history of the issue in the United States is important for formulating more reasonable opinions. Edwards-Bourdrez stresses this importance. “When resolving political polarization, we need to ensure that people are knowledgeable about our governmental systems and how they work to have discussions. Like understanding how the supreme court works when discussing the Roe vs. Wade decision. What is in the constitution that allows certain rights, what is the history of this issue?”¹⁶ Braver Angels hosts moderated debates that are properly structured to prevent the debate from getting into a screaming fight. Before the actual debate starts, a speaker comes in to talk about the context of the issue, the reality of what is going on, as well as certain laws associated. These ideas cannot be argued because they are facts, so they provide a reasonable structure to formulate opinions, without them getting out of hand. Edwards-Bourdrez calls it “bringing people within the same framework of reality,”¹⁷ so when people debate, they can use facts and historical evidence to back-up opinions.

Noah Silverman from Interfaith America believes that political polarization could become less of a problem if we discussed politics differently. He says that “You need a common identity as Americans and citizens of this country. We know we do not believe the same politically and religiously. If we argue for a better future, we start a conversation by understanding the big similarity between us. We both want what is best for this country, and we should have a conversation with each other about what we want best for this country. Maybe we will find some similarities and make both of our ideas better by talking to you.”¹⁸ Instead of arguing about issues that will get you nowhere, if you find commonalities with a certain goal in mind, which is to do what is best for the United States, discussions could be more comprehensive and beneficial. History is also an essential part of resolving political polarization, as it teaches us previous methods and strategies that have worked in the past. The biggest example of resolving political polarization was in the 1960s when people collaborated between ideological differences to support the Civil Rights Movement. If organizations examine what strategies worked in that

¹⁴ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

¹⁵ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

¹⁶ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

¹⁷ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

¹⁸ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

period, they could take strategies that are still realistic currently and experiment with them to try and make an impact.

II.iv: How Should Organizations in the Bridge-Building Space Operate?

A large aspect of bridge-building is ensuring that all ideologies are represented, but at the same time, certain extreme ideologies ruin bridge-building, so how do organizations operate to ensure the best environment for bridge-building? As said by Jeremy Garson of Bridge Alliance, “Extremist groups who are not interested in the full diversity of America do not get a seat, but anyone who believes in promoting a government that reflects the views of all Americans, and is genuinely interested in helping America being its best self, we want them at the table.”¹⁹ Bridge-building cannot happen when groups with extreme ideologies that hurt certain groups of people are let in and given an influence over the process. Similar to the sentiment of Garson, Dylan Morpurgo of the ADL believes that eliminating some diversity is an unfortunate sacrifice that organizations sometimes have to do to accelerate bridge-building. “We eliminate certain groups that cause large disagreements like Israel politics as partners, which hurts bridge-building, but puts certain groups in the Muslim community that want to bridge build forward.”²⁰ Because these disagreements over certain issues prevent bridge-building from occurring with the entire Muslim community, bringing the Muslim groups who are willing to bridge-build and connect are more favorable to the ADL. But while these voices are not involved in bridge-building, Bridge Alliance does not favor any ideology, orientation, or ideal position of American society. Garson stresses the importance of the neutrality of their organization. “We are stubbornly neutral. How I think the country should run is irrelevant. What is relevant is making sure Americans understand all of their options, and how the system works to the best of its ability. We have member organizations whose solutions I disagree with. It does not matter. Lots of organizations are trying to network like this, but bridge alliance represents all parts of the self-governance movement, as well as promoting all perspectives on equal footing. We do not endorse any solutions instead of trying to empower the American people, helping people vote, and having a healthy American system.”²¹ Bridge Alliance is not bringing people together to promote their ideas, but instead to have these groups decide what is best for the American people. “If the American people decide that certain voting laws ensure the election system is secure, so be it.”²², said Garson. If this is the consensus that the people come to which will help to unite people, parties, and crush barriers, then it works for Bridge Alliance and the goals of their organization.

The Combat Antisemitism Movement has seen success with bridge-building and engaging more members of the community when they operate “like a two-way street by highlighting their work first then ours. CAM always asks “what can we do to support your work” instead of “what can you do for me.”²³ By doing this, CAM is more easily able to create connections with other groups because they are offering to help them first before worrying about

¹⁹ Jeremy Garson, Bridge Alliance; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

²⁰ Dylan Morpurgo, ADL; Interview conducted on July 11, 2022

²¹ Jeremy Garson, Bridge Alliance; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

²² Jeremy Garson, Bridge Alliance; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

²³ Arthur Maserjian, CAM; Interview conducted on July 12, 2022

getting assistance for their organization. If an organization can function in a way where they are empathetic and willing to care for the objectives of others as well, they could have the other organization give them the same treatment back to them.

II.vi: How to Bridge Build

Each of the five organizations has different strategies that enable them to do their work efficiently, and bring cultures together to form a more unified society. Out of all of the strategies presented, the one overwhelming commonality was the concept of bridge-building being very natural. Once organizations arranged perfect conditions for bridge-building, then it was a natural process.

The Braver Angels strategy focuses on holding elected officials accountable for political polarization, as well as looking beyond political orientation when meeting someone. We need to have this personal relationship with someone, so we can understand “How do they think, why do they believe a certain way, why do they oppose the ideas we favor, what views do they see that we do not.”, said Edwards-Bourdrez. By hosting one on one conversations, Braver Angels allows people of different political orientations to meet each other, learn about each other, and use evidence learned in previous events to shape opinions fairly. When people become more empathetic about their beliefs and get to know each other, bridge-building becomes organic. “Bridge-building is organic. Engage people in a way that is relevant to them, show them the importance of giving up your grip on what you think is right and absolute, as well as hold elected officials accountable for doing the same thing. The more people who recognize this approach, the more elected officials would likely understand this as well.” Edwards-Bourdrez also believes that bridge-building does not just mean bringing groups together, but it also means promoting the moderate ideology. When the moderate ideology is promoted, more people can be reached, more people’s needs will be fulfilled, and more people could be linked by a common identity and agreement. He believes that by promoting multi-member districts and rank choice voting, the bridge-building process could be easier because more people are connected by the moderate voice.²⁴

Bridge Alliance focuses on diversity as big step organizations must take to efficiently bridge build. “The bridgebuilding movement has had issues with diversity. There are a lot of organizations in the bridge-building movement that wants to support minority groups. It is much better to bring people in who are a part of these minority communities themselves. Bring in organizations that have certain political values instead of people who represent them”, said Garson. Garson believes that when you bring actual members of the communities in, they can speak for themselves, and provide real-life expertise on the issues they are facing. Also, it is more efficient for outreach. “We bring in priests of congregations and others who understand the needs of communities and are a part of communities. Organizations need to understand the needs and problems of communities.” These organizations with actual members of the community can likely reach the community and religious leaders more easily. Garson also stressed that bridge-building was natural. By having the Bridge Alliance include groups from many different communities, and explain to these groups the benefits of engaging with other organizations, the process is more efficient. “The best way to make collaboration happen is to

²⁴ Alex Edwards-Bourdrez, Braver Angels; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

bring very smart, well-intentioned people into the room together, and let them do their thing. We do not force anyone to work together, but we appeal to self-interest by saying collaborating benefits them and the organization. If something does not click, then do not do it.” The Alliance gives organizations easier opportunities to connect with others, while teaching organizations what they can do with these connections, and how it can accelerate their intentions. As shown with the “two-way street” concept from CAM, these types of connections can be formed easily with the assistance of the Bridge Alliance.²⁵

Interfaith America does most of its programs in college by forming interfaith alliances between religious groups on college campuses. Noah Silverman believes that starting early is important in bridge-building. “If you build interfaith cooperation in colleges, you will build a generation with more cultural appreciation, better leaders that focus on interfaith.” The organization launched an initiative on college campuses a few years ago called Better Together, where student leaders are brought to an interfaith summit where they meet others, learn skills, and realize that they need to unite together to create real change. Silverman believes that this strategy of bridge-building by using interfaith councils is efficient because “Most people want to figure out how to get along with most people. Telling people they are wrong will not make them go away.” If people build connections early with interfaith leaders and have meaningful discussions on campuses, they can create a unified campus culture that can carry on to their life in the professional world.²⁶

The Anti-Defamation League uses its historical relationships to help bridge-build. The Government Relations and Advocacy Team (GRACE) at ADL helps to form partnerships with organizations in other communities like the NAACP and the National Urban League. By building these relationships early, the ADL has been able to more easily bridge-build. Morpurgo believes that “These historical relationships have helped transcend the politics that could get in the way of grassroots relationship building.” For example, the ADL was able to help the National Urban League and NAACP after the Buffalo shooting because of these relationships, and get them on board for ADL initiatives such as Fighting Hate for Profit, a movement to prevent hate from living online and on social media. Maintaining close relationships, building trust with organizations, and showing determination to help each other out in times of need makes bridge-building easier, and without the fear of political or religious divide.²⁷

The Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM) uses the common ground to bridge build. When interacting with those who differ from you, you mustn't allow one issue or one disagreement to ruin a conversation and relationship. Arthur Maserjian from CAM understands that “Sometimes it is hard for catholic groups to talk about the Holocaust. We find a topic that is common and important to both and build relationships from there.” Finding common ground also means catering to both sides. When talking to members of the National Hellenic Society about the Holocaust, CAM caters to the Greek perspective, specifically discussing Greek individuals who saved Jews during the Holocaust. Maserjian believes that it is important to “Engage with positive elements of their history to have them advocate for issues important to us.” For example, uniting Greek-Americans and Jewish-Americans over Israeli-Hellenist relations allows both groups to benefit from discussing a relevant issue for both sides, and connect because of

²⁵ Jeremy Garson, Bridge Alliance; Interview conducted on July 6, 2022

²⁶ Noah Silverman, Interfaith America; Interview conducted on July 13, 2022

²⁷ Dylan Morpurgo, ADL; Interview conducted on July 11, 2022

it. Along with finding common ground as a bridge-building strategy, the CAM Coalition has 580 organizations with different backgrounds. This coalition enables CAM to use their “two-way street” strategy to bring groups together, and promote the events of the member organizations.²⁸

Section III: Conclusion

Each organization interviewed presented a unique approach with proven success to combat the current issues in our society today surrounding polarization. Despite the diverse strategies, a few themes were present in each organization that is important to note. First is the idea that the organization must focus on helping the partner organization if they expect assistance and compromise. When they help out these organizations, it will make them more likely to help in return for their services, which in turn would overcome some ideological boundaries between the groups. Second, the naturalness of bridge-building is important to note. If people are forced into collaborating without a goal or incentive, the idea of bridge-building will be inefficient. Suppose organizations learn the importance of building relationships and choose to do it voluntarily. In that case, the collaboration will be more effective and productive, as well as desirable for both sides. Third, is the idea that perfection will never be accomplished. We as a society will always differ in some way, whether it be culturally, religiously, or politically, and we have to understand that there is not a situation where everyone will believe in the same thing. Once this is understood, organizations can use different strategies to focus on issues without focusing on discrepancies between ideologies. The one issue groups disagree with no relevance to the topic, like two religious groups disagreeing on their political affiliation, should not prevent conversation, or dictate how people judge another person. If organizations can collaborate without having these issues get in the way, bridge-building may not be complete but will be more than ever before.

While organizations recognize that bridge-building and resolving differences in every issue is an impossible task, meaningful steps in the right direction can connect communities that were previously on bad terms, or simply did not understand each other’s beliefs. With the help of new tactics for bridge-building and the presence of many great organizations that do this work constantly, we could work to stop division, and make our communities more diverse to further end the vast divide in our country today.

²⁸ Arthur Maserjian, CAM; Interview conducted on July 12, 2022