

An Inter-field Framework

Braiding approaches to unlock greater impact

The challenges facing Americans - from housing affordability to addiction - are not going away, even after decades of people doing their best to solve them. Many are so frustrated, they are willing to support undemocratic tactics to get our country to a better place, disregarding the concerns of the “other side.” In this context, it is imperative that Americans experience democracy delivering, by participating in processes that bring together different perspectives and meaningfully address a shared challenge.

To give Americans this crucial experience and grow their trust in democracy and each other, the expertise of **BRIDGING**, **ORGANIZING**, and **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY** are critical. Strategies that braid these three fields’ approaches are among the best investments of limited time and resources in this moment.



Bridging

Building authentic relationships, mutual trust, and understanding of each other’s perspectives, including between those who hold different identities or world views. Bridging exercises can also support the participants to uncover common ground and shared values.

Organizing

Growing the collective power of a community to address shared problems by taking strategic action to advance their interests. Organizing efforts aim to achieve results which improve the material reality of those participating and shift how power is arranged in a lasting way.

Participatory Democracy

Engaging the public in decision-making; creating new processes and structures so that everyday people can influence, and ideally make, decisions about issues that affect their communities. Participants have an opportunity to express their voice about topics that matter to them.

A project incorporates the key elements of these fields' wisdom, if it:

Key elements

Bridging

- ✓ Welcomes all participants, regardless of their identity or world view (no litmus tests).
- ✓ Continues to respect people's different perspectives during their participation, without asking or expecting them to change their views.
- ✓ Invites participants to engage with each others' views and choices with curiosity rather than judgement, supporting them to stay in relationship even while in conflict.
- ✓ Engages with complexity and expands beyond binary thinking.

Organizing

- ✓ Increases participants' sense of collective agency by supporting them to take action together on something that is important to them and to see results come from their participation.
- ✓ Strategically sequences collective action tactics to engage with informal and formal political and economic power-structures and build new ones to grow people's influence on systems that affect their lives.
- ✓ Cultivates leadership, supporting new participants to take on more responsibilities and become a driving force for current and future efforts.

Participatory Democracy

- ✓ Changes how policy/budget decisions are made in a way that gives everyday people - who represent the diversity of the community - more decision-making power.
- ✓ Increases participants' sense of agency by transforming their relationships to the institutions that affect their lives and to fellow community members.
- ✓ Gives participants the chance to experience new ways of making decisions together with those who are different from them, whether online or in person.

Why they matter

- To design effective solutions to the challenges we are facing, we need all perspectives at the table; excluding perspectives results in blind spots.
- Participants will only share their views honestly if they trust they will not be judged or excluded.
- If there is an intention to convert participants to a particular view, participants may become suspicious and shut down, further perpetuating division.
- Division and distrust are costly to thriving community and lessen capacity of the community to function.



- Incorporating a contextual power analysis is essential to organizing in a way that addresses the root causes of a problem and builds power and collective accountability.
- When an effort relies on many skilled leaders rather than one or two, it is more possible to scale to the massive levels of engagement required and sustain the work over a longer time period.



- For power to shift in a meaningful and lasting way, decision-making processes - including who makes decisions - must change.
- Ensuring that those impacted participate in the decision-making improves the quality of the outcomes and generates more buy-in for implementation.
- When participants see their input having an impact, they are more likely to participate in the future. Their sense of agency and trust (in institutions and each other) grows.

