Linda R. Tropp, PhD
Trisha A. Dehrone, MS

Cultivating Contact

A Guide to Building Bridges and Meaningful Connections Between Groups

Center for Inclusion and Belonging
a project of the AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

WELCOMING AMERICA
BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

University of Massachusetts Amherst

AUTHORS' NOTE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Linda R. Tropp is a professor of social psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She studies how members of different social groups experience contact with each other, and how group differences in status affect cross-group relations. For more than two decades, she has sought to promote the dual goals of fostering positive relations between groups while achieving ever-greater social equality and justice. Tropp has worked with national organizations to promote racial integration and equity, and with nongovernmental organizations to evaluate programs that bridge group differences in divided societies around the world. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and has received distinguished research and teaching awards from several other professional societies. Dr. Tropp is coauthor of *When Groups Meet: The Dynamics of Intergroup Contact* (2011) and editor of books including the *Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict* (2012) and *Making Research Matter* (2018).

Trisha A. Dehrone is a National Science Foundation graduate research fellow at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She received her M.S. in social psychology in 2022, and she is currently a doctoral student in the Psychology of Peace and Violence Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research examines how people's social identities impact their experiences while interacting with members of other groups, and how to improve these exchanges while advancing social justice and equity. Trisha has consulted with several organizations on reducing divisions and improving relations across group divides, and she has evaluated interventions to bridge group differences in divided societies in different parts of the world, including in the U.S., Rwanda, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Correspondence concerning this report should be addressed to:

Dr. Linda R. Tropp
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences
Tobin Hall, 135 Hicks Way
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Amherst, MA 01003, USA
e-mail: tropp@umass.edu

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Summary

The United States is in the process of reckoning with many forms of social division, but it is also facing a moment of immense possibility. With deepening divides occurring and being fomented across racial, religious, socioeconomic, partisan, and geographic lines, trust in others has declined and members of distinct groups are more isolated from each other than ever. Many forces seek to exploit these vulnerabilities and stoke fear and anxiety about group differences. Yet our nation's history shows us that, even in the midst of these challenges, Americans from all walks of life have found ways to come together across lines of difference to solve critical community problems.

How we choose to respond to group differences is ultimately up to us. We can take steps either to build walls or build bridges in the face of these differences. When we feel insecure, unsafe, or threatened, our initial instinct is to build walls, in an effort to protect ourselves and our groups. This instinctual response can help us to feel more secure and protected in the short term; but one long-term consequence is that we may grow more distrustful and fearful of people who are not like "us" and whom we don't personally know.[1] Worse still, challenging social and economic conditions can exacerbate these tendencies, such that we start to develop competitive narratives that pit "us" against "them" and further deepen existing divisions between groups.[2,3]

Instead, when we build bridges, we take steps to engage with people across lines of difference. Engaging with one another in meaningful and authentic ways often requires us to step outside of our comfort zone, as we begin to share our life stories and experiences openly while attending deeply and respectfully to those shared by others. From interacting with others with this spirit of openness and attentiveness, we invite others into our worlds, just as they invite us into theirs. By doing so, we not only develop greater mutual understanding, but we are also likely to become more invested in each other's lives and to care more about each other's groups—and this emotional investment and caring is what compels us to work toward improving our communities and social institutions to ensure that everyone feels like they belong.[4,5]

In this guide, we describe how to set the stage for people from different backgrounds to engage with each other in ways that foster trust and belonging, while also drawing on their similarities and differences to solve community problems. We review a number of strategies that encourage people from different groups to work together as equals, so that they can share ideas and perspectives, and co-create new initiatives in collaboration and across group divides. We also provide materials that can help organizations begin to envision how they might assess the effectiveness of their contact programs.

Why Is Contact Between Groups Important?

***Intergroup contact* refers to situations where people from different social groups—such as people from different racial, ethnic, religious, or national groups—interact with each other. A large body of research confirms that having people from different social groups meaningfully engage with each other can help to reduce prejudice and increase social cohesion.**[6]

Contact between groups has been shown to reduce prejudice by reducing feelings of anxiety and increasing empathy for members of other groups.[7] With greater contact, we become less apprehensive about engaging across lines of difference, and we develop a greater capacity to relate to and empathize with those who are different from us.[8,9] However, **this process takes time;** it requires opportunities for people from different groups to engage with each other repeatedly over many interactions. Once people from different groups begin to open up and trust each other, they become more able to not only see the ways in which they are similar, but also to understand and gain a deeper respect for the ways in which their perspectives and experiences differ, too.

As you explore the types of programs your community or organization could implement to create opportunities for contact between groups, keep in mind that **you don't need to start from scratch**. We hope insights from this guide will help you to adapt existing programs, or to embark on new projects that enhance opportunities for people from different groups to engage meaningfully with each other. We provide guidance about how these activities might be structured so that people from different backgrounds are not only able to work together productively and cooperatively, but in ways that can also encourage greater support for bridge-building efforts across different groups within the larger community.

Please keep in mind that providing opportunities for contact between groups is only one piece of the puzzle—and there are many other pieces that should connect with contact programs to achieve our broader goal of building inclusive communities. Indeed, as we will describe later in this guide, contact programs are likely to be most effective when they are bolstered by other features of the local environment, such as norms that support cross-group relations and encouragement from community leaders and organizations, efforts to address long-standing structural inequalities, and equitable access to resources that allow people from all groups to actively participate in their communities.

Connected Communities: Welcoming communities build connections between newcomers and long-term residents by strengthening relationships, communicating shared values, and promoting a welcoming culture through institutional communications.

(Welcoming Standard for Communities, Welcoming America, 2021)

Setting the Stage for Contact

When people from different groups initially come together, they might feel cautious or uncomfortable about getting to know others who are unknown or unfamiliar to them.

This is completely normal, and it suggests the programs you are about to implement are going to have an important and deep impact on the people and communities with whom you are working. At the same time, this initial discomfort also suggests that it might take some time for trust to develop and for deep connections between people from different groups to grow. Social science research suggests that people need to experience repeated and sustained interactions with members of other groups for meaningful changes to emerge in their attitudes and behaviors toward those groups.[10,11]

Below are several tips you might use to build connections between groups and maximize the chance that your program will have a positive and lasting impact. We recognize that, depending on the local context and communities involved, it may not always be possible to implement all the tips outlined below in every program. Nonetheless, if you wish to achieve the greatest impact from contact-based programs, we recommend adhering to the following guidelines to the fullest extent possible.

Balance Participation of People from Different Groups

Balanced participation means intentionally working to recruit similar numbers of people from different groups to participate in your contact program. It is important to ensure that comparable numbers of people from different groups participate, so that members of each group will feel well-represented during the program and no one will feel like they don't belong.

Balanced participation can also mean ensuring that the needs, interests, priorities, and perspectives of each group are taken into account when contact programs are being designed and implemented. For people from different groups to feel included in the planning process, communities and organizations should foster initial opportunities for collaboration between people from different groups, who can co-create program activities and offer feedback at each stage of the process. If your organizing team only includes people from one group, make a point of bringing members of other groups into the planning process; in this way, you can move away from designing programs *for* other groups and instead move toward designing programs *with* other groups. Importantly, including perspectives from different groups during the planning process can help organizers choose activities that would be of interest to members of each group, to identify possible barriers to program participation, and to specify resources or outreach strategies that might facilitate participation among people from each group.

Achieving balanced participation across groups can depend on several factors such as the demographics that make up your local community, the history of relations between groups in your local community,

and the accessibility and relevance of your organization's programs, among others. Reaching out to organizations and community partners with whom you already work can be a fruitful way to explore possibilities for co-sponsoring activities that would be of mutual benefit, and for recruiting program participants from different groups.

Make Sure People From Different Groups Engage As Equals

Sometimes, when we think about engaging with people from other groups, we envision ways in which we can provide resources or services to communities in need. Even if well-intentioned, this approach might inadvertently create an unequal and unbalanced relationship between groups, whereby the more that we offer what we have to give, the more others end up feeling put in the position of receiving others' charity.

For this reason, we want to make sure that we envision and structure contact programs in ways that allow people from all groups to contribute as equal partners. Thus, beyond balancing their representation throughout the planning process, people from different groups should be able to participate in mutual exchanges of ideas, skills, and knowledge during contact programs. By emphasizing the value of having groups engage with each other as equals, we can encourage all participants to recognize that they have something to gain and learn from interacting and collaborating with those who are different from them.

What program facilitators might say:

"Everyone here has something important to contribute... and we're going to be drawing on the diverse skill sets, strengths, and abilities of all the people who are here today..."

We can reinforce the equalizing nature of contact programs further by acknowledging and addressing ways in which broader societal inequalities might shape people's participation in contact programs. Unequal access to good transportation or other resources, language differences, and patterns of segregation that push groups into different neighborhoods can make it more challenging for members of certain groups to meet each other and may introduce some miscommunication and tension if and when these groups come together. Rather than ignoring these differences, try to envision how you can address them directly as you consider what it will take for people from different groups to participate in your program.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What if the participating groups live in different neighborhoods?

Offer transportation options or stipends, or arrange carpools, so that all participants can take part in your organization's programs. Alternatively, rotate meeting locations between different neighborhoods in which participating groups reside.

What if the participating groups differ in their access to economic resources?

Provide all necessary supplies and materials for the tasks at hand, so that all participants will be able to participate fully in program activities, without needing additional resources to participate.

What if the participating groups have different status positions in the larger society?

Ensure that representatives from each participating group share leadership roles during each day's activities, such as welcoming participants, providing instructions for different activities, and/or handing out relevant materials. Ask facilitators to monitor participation from each group during the program, to ensure that both sides have comparable opportunities to speak and contribute ideas to program activities.

What if there is initial distance or hesitance between participating groups?

Consider handing out tickets (representing different numbers, or colors) when participants enter the room for each program activity; then, ask participants to sit at the table with the corresponding number or color, to make sure that people from different groups disperse throughout the space in which activities will occur. Provide a clear structure for participating in program activities, to reduce feelings of uncertainty and give all participants a good sense of what to expect as they engage with one another.

What if the participating groups speak different languages?

Focus on activities that can be completed with limited knowledge of another language—such as gardening or painting. Provide interpreters and bilingual materials, as needed, and include exercises that help people from the different groups learn key words and phrases in each other's languages, and especially vocabulary relevant to the projects they will be working on together—for example: for a painting project you might teach "paint brush" = "cepillo de pintura." Develop **visual dictionaries** with verbal translations in each language to help people from different groups express any needs they may have as they work together.

From the Ukrainian–English version of **What Do You Need? Visual Mini-Dictionary For Refugees**, *a 2022 project by first-year School of Form students at SWPS University (Warsaw, Poland)*

Keep in mind that effective recruitment strategies may differ across groups, and that different recruitment strategies may be needed to reach groups beyond those that are well-represented within your own community or organization. Given that, special attention may be necessary to ensure that:

- Recruitment and outreach materials are available in **each group's first language**.
- Recruitment and outreach materials are provided in **accessible, user-friendly** ways; online formats such as sending email invitations and creating Facebook events may work for some, but not for all.
- Proposed **schedules** for program activities do not overlap with different groups' practices and priorities (for example: religious holidays, school breaks).
- Proposed locations for contact programs are **accessible through many modes of transportation** (via public buses, walking, biking, and driving).

Engage People in Projects That Require Multiple Meetings

Develop a schedule of activities (including dates, times, and locations) that allow the same people from different groups, as members of mixed teams, to meet regularly on an ongoing basis, in order to allow time for their relationships to grow. Whenever possible, avoid "one and done" projects, where people from different groups only have one opportunity to begin to get to know each other. Instead, consider the first meeting as a time for people from different groups to get to know each other, and to acknowledge and address the awkwardness they are probably feeling.

You might also start with an icebreaker or warm-up activity that can help to reduce initial feelings of discomfort and get people from different groups talking and engaging with one another. Depending on how many people are participating in your program, you might consider having people talk in pairs or break into small groups of four to six people with balanced representations of people from different social groups.

What program facilitators might say:

"Being here together might feel a bit awkward or uncomfortable at first… so, we're going to start our time together by giving ourselves a chance to really get to know each other, and to appreciate what we can learn from one another…"

Some fun interactive activities for pairs or small groups include:

- ☐ **Hidden Talents:** Ask people to come up with two or three things they know how to do that other people often don't know how to do. Encourage the rest of the group to ask follow up questions to learn more about the hidden talents others disclose. *(5-10 minutes)*

- ☐ **No Place Like Home:** Ask each person to describe a dish or kitchen smell that reminds them of home. Encourage people who are listening to ask follow-up questions, such as who comes to mind when they think of the dish, what their relationship to that person is or was, or where and when was the first time they remember having the dish. *(5-10 minutes)*

- ☐ **Identifying Commonalities and Differences:** Task people in the small group with identifying at least five things that they all have in common (for example: places they have visited, movies they love, items of clothing they own). Then have each person identify at least two things they do not have in common with anyone else in their small group. If time allows, invite people in the small group share with the larger group what they learned. *(10-15 minutes)*

- ☐ **Defining Moments**: Ask each person to take 10 minutes to think about one or two of the most defining moments in their life and write a few words about each moment on a separate piece of paper. When everyone is finished, have each person take turns describing their defining moments and allow the rest of the group to respond and ask questions to learn more. *(10-15 minutes)*

- ☐ **Other Possibilities:** Other approaches include having people in pairs or in small groups ask each other questions that encourage them to share stories, thoughts, or other personal information about themselves. Possible sources for additional questions include those presented as part of the More Than One Story card game, or those included as part of Set I from the "36 Questions for Increasing Closeness," originally developed by Dr. Arthur Aron and available on the Greater Good website. *(10-15 minutes)*

Through **icebreakers**, we may begin to reduce people's feelings of discomfort about engaging across group lines. However, more meetings between people from different groups may be necessary to cultivate deeper and lasting feelings of liking and trust. Similar to how people see the greatest results from an exercise regimen when they work out repeatedly on a regular basis over several months, you are most likely to see the greatest benefits of contact programs when program participants have multiple meetings with the same people from other groups over a longer period of time. By setting the expectation that people from different groups will work together in mixed teams again and again, they should also be more motivated to remember details about each other (such as their names and personal stories),[12] and they will likely feel a bit more comfortable with each other, and closer to each other, each time they meet.[13] You might also encourage members of each team to start their meetings with a brief team-building ritual, as research indicates that this can foster a greater sense of meaning and greater commitment to the team's efforts.[14]

One Interaction

Plan one "community day" where participants work in mixed teams to paint a mural or remove graffiti in a local park.

More Interactions

Schedule "community days" several times over a period of three months, where participants agree to show up for all scheduled days. Have participants work in the same mixed teams each time (for mural painting, graffiti removal, garbage clean-up, and/or other activities).

Many More Interactions

Establish a community group of people who are willing to engage in "community days" every two weeks over a period of six months or longer, where they agree to show up on a regular basis. Have participants work in the same mixed teams (for mural painting, graffiti removal, garbage clean-up, and/or other activities), and set up social events and social media groups so that they can plan future community days together and keep in touch beyond seeing each other during scheduled activities.

Possible Changes Over Time

- ☐ Begin to Reduce Discomfort

- ☐ Reduce Discomfort
- ☐ Begin to Grow Liking
- ☐ Short-Term Change

- ☐ Reduce Discomfort
- ☐ Grow Liking
- ☐ Begin to Grow Trust
- ☐ Longer-Term Change

What program facilitators might say:

"Participating might mean not doing everything perfectly—and that's okay! It's more important that everyone participates, rather than sitting on the sidelines"

Foster Active Engagement and Cooperation Toward Shared Goals

Structure Program Activities So That They Are Active and Engaging!

After some icebreakers, structure contact programs to keep participants actively involved and working together toward shared goals. Instead of relying on activities that only involve more passive forms of engagement, encourage participants to stay actively involved in program activities. Be sure to give participants clear instructions about what you are asking them to do. Providing clear instructions and guidance at the start of each session can help participants feel more comfortable about getting involved, along with letting them know what will be expected of them as they engage with people from other groups over time.

Passive Engagement

- ☐ Attending concert shows
- ☐ Watching theater
- ☐ Going to art exhibits
- ☐ Visiting a fair
- ☐ Visiting a farm
- ☐ Watching a sports game
- ☐ Attending a dinner
- ☐ Going to a park

Active Engagement

- ☐ Making music together
- ☐ Putting on a play
- ☐ Creating an art installation
- ☐ Planning a fair or festival
- ☐ Building a community garden
- ☐ Organizing sports leagues
- ☐ Overseeing meal exchanges
- ☐ Arranging a park clean-up crew

Structure Activities to Ensure That People From Different Groups Actually Work Together

Once you choose activities that can bring groups together, you will need to think about how to structure activities during the program. At least at first, it is a common tendency for people to gravitate toward others from their own groups, with whom they are most familiar and feel most comfortable, and to separate themselves from other groups.[15] For this reason, it will be important to take intentional measures to

ensure that people from different groups actually engage with each other during program activities. By assigning tasks and creating teams that *require* people from different groups to work together, facilitators can minimize the tendency for group segregation to emerge. Research also shows that we are more likely to observe positive effects of contact the more that members of different groups work together, and truly rely on each other, to achieve shared goals.[16] A number of strategies may be used to encourage active engagement across group lines, including those outlined in the graphic below.

Creating **pairs** across groups

- Take **two decks of playing cards** into the room where activities will begin. Ask members of one group to pick a card from the first deck, and ask members of the other group to pick a card from the second deck. Tell participants to find the other person in the room with their matching card (for example, the "two of hearts" or "eight of clubs").
- Create matching slips of paper, each with the same adjective or emotion written on it (such as "curious" or "excited"). Tell participants to find the other person in the room with their matching word, and invite them to talk about what makes them feel the word they share—for example, what makes them feel "curious" or "excited" about participating in the program.

Creating **mixed teams** across groups

- Take a deck of playing cards into the room where activities will begin. Hand each participant a playing card as they arrive. Tell participants to sit at a table in the room where everyone has a card of the same suit or type. For instance, to create groups of four people, everyone with a "two" card would sit at the same table; to create larger groups, everyone with a "heart" card would sit at the same table.
- Label tables with the names of the 12 calendar months and have participants sit at the same table with others who share their birthday month.
- Give each participant a colored index card (or a plain index card with a colored sticker) when they arrive. Tell participants to sit at the table with others who share the same color.

Establish and Model Organizational Support for Contact

Beyond designing contact programs and activities to foster engagement, we can establish norms and practices that reinforce the value of bringing people from different groups together to engage with each other. As organizational leaders and program facilitators, we can communicate these messages through a variety of means, including through what we say and do, and how we structure the spaces in which groups come together. More specifically, we can:

Discuss Ground Rules, Communal Norms, and Expectations for Engagement

As programs begin, we can let people know what kind of conduct is expected as people of different groups interact with each other across group lines. For example, we might express that we expect this program to be a place where everyone cooperates and feels like they belong, where we respect others, where we can expect to learn some new things, and/or where we are committed to appreciating our differences. We can also invite participants to propose additional ground rules and expectations that will guide their work together. Regardless of what they might be, setting clear expectations and ground rules for how people from different groups should engage and interact with each other can help to reduce uncertainty, while guiding people toward more desired behaviors and away from less desired behaviors during the program.

Model Effective Cross-Group Contact

Furthermore, we can reinforce the expectations we set by modeling the kinds of cooperative, respectful behavior we seek from participants as they take part in program activities. Here, we can ensure that representatives from different groups share responsibilities for facilitating and leading program activities, to bolster norms of cooperation and mutual respect while engaging as equals. The more clearly participants see expectations for conduct modeled by organizational leaders and program facilitators, the more natural it will be for them to adopt similar norms and behaviors in kind.

"At the Y, we know that in our diverse and increasingly complex world, we are stronger when everyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to be included, feel safe and able to access support to reach their full potential. We all have the opportunity and obligation to build bridges between diverse communities, and to foster community cohesion to the benefit of all society. The efforts can run the gamut—from breaking bread at a social event to co-creating a community project; but with each interaction, we reinforce the importance of creating inclusive and shared space with others."

Lynda Gonzales-Chavez
Senior Vice President,
Chief Global DEI Officer
YMCA of the USA

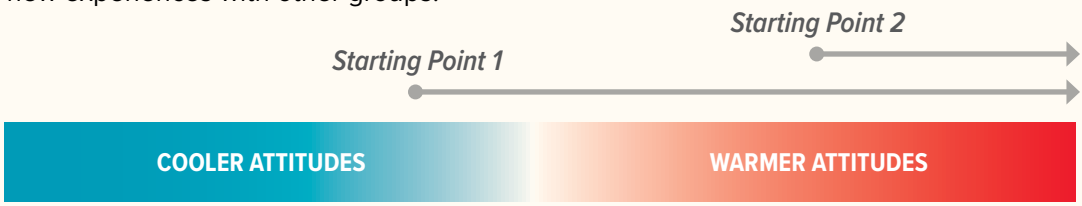
Promote Inclusive Norms

Other cues in the local environment can also transmit important messages about what is valued, who is welcome, and how groups should relate to each other.[17, 18] These messages can be conveyed in a variety of ways, ranging from what people say and how they interact with each other, to posters on the wall in the room where they interact. Intentional campaigns such as Belonging Begins with Us, Love Has No Labels, and Hate Has No Home Here communicate that all groups are welcome, and that everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive environment in which all can participate as equals.

Look Beyond "Preaching to the Choir"

Initially, we might think it would be best to bring together people from different groups who already like each other, in order to have a successful program. But **research suggests that contact often has the most transformative change for people who have had limited prior interactions with other groups and less positive attitudes toward other groups starting out.**

The logic here is that people who already have positive attitudes toward other groups have less room to change through participating in your programs. To illustrate, you can imagine people's attitudes ranging from very negative to very positive—like temperatures on a thermometer ranging from very cold to very warm. People who hold cooler attitudes toward other groups initially (starting point 1) can potentially benefit more from contact programs than those starting with warmer attitudes toward those groups (starting point 2), because they have more room to change their attitudes to become more positive through new experiences with other groups.



A Case Study: Sustainable Farming That Bridges Divides

Increasingly, local communities across North America are building connections and bridging divides through community gardens and sustainable farming practices.

A notable example: The Indigenous-led Bad River Food Sovereignty Program partnered with non-Indigenous sustainable farmers to expand existing community gardens to provide food and sustainable farming practices to community members across the Ashland area and Bad River Reservation in northern Wisconsin.

In addition to working together to teach others how to grow and prepare food using sustainable practices, the Food Sovereignty Program had the goal of distributing low-cost and free produce to Head Start and local farmers' markets. Through partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers, the program not only taught other community members how to make healthy meals, but allowed members of both communities to exchange cultural practices important to them and to learn new strategies to achieve their common goals of sustainability and demonstrating respect for the land.

What factors might have made this contact so successful?

- ☐ **Limited Prior Interaction:** Indigenous and non-indigenous farmers did not have many opportunities to engage with each other before the start of the programs, despite living in close physical proximity.
- ☐ **Multiple Contact Meetings:** Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers have been working together on this project for several years.
- ☐ **Active Engagement toward Shared Goals:** Members of both communities actively work together to cultivate the land and provide food and sustainable farming practices to the local community.
- ☐ **Balanced Representations of Groups Engaging as Equals:** Members of both groups are represented in leadership positions; the program also intentionally organizes cultural exchanges to demonstrate the value of what each group can contribute, and to allow members of the different groups to share and learn from each other.

"Food has been a way of celebrating, of meeting your neighbors and conversing with your community. That is a part of what we are trying to do here, to connect community around food."

What Do We Hope to Change Through Contact Programs?

When designing and implementing contact programs, it is important to keep in mind the goals we have and what we are most hoping to change in how groups see and relate to each other.

Decades of research show that many different aspects of people's social attitudes and behavior might be transformed through contact programs. Assessing outcomes of contact programs through evaluation studies can help organizations to learn what does (or does not) change as a result of contact with other groups, as well as to identify areas for improvement in programming contact-based activities. Your evaluation of a contact program may only assess changes that occur among individual program participants; but over time, it is possible that you may begin to observe broader changes in how groups relate to each other within your community.[19]

Summarized below are some of the more common changes we might expect to observe as people participate in contact programs with members of different groups, along with sample survey items to give organizations a sense of how these concepts can be measured. In what follows, the term "GROUP" is used to refer to people from another group with whom program participants have come into contact. All items presented below have also been included in a "starter survey" in the Appendix, so that organizations can begin to envision how they might use these items to survey program participants. Organizations interested in conducting more thorough and formal evaluation studies of contact programs are encouraged to reach out directly to the authors to learn more.

☐ ***Attitudes.*** Intergroup attitudes involve our subjective feelings toward other groups that may show varying levels of liking and warmth. More positive attitudes toward other groups represent lower levels of prejudice, whereas more negative feelings toward other groups represent higher levels of prejudice. Greater contact between groups typically corresponds with reduced prejudice and more positive attitudes toward other groups.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

When you think about people in your community who are [GROUP], how much do you feel...

1. positively or negatively toward them?
2. friendly or hostile toward them?
3. close to or distant from them?

☐ ***Anxiety.*** Intergroup anxiety refers to the feelings of discomfort, lack of ease, and awkwardness one might feel about engaging with or anticipating interactions with members of other groups. Although greater intergroup anxiety tends to be associated with greater desire to avoid cross-group interactions, greater contact experience typically corresponds with less anxiety and discomfort about cross-group interactions.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

When you think about people in your community who are [GROUP], how much do you feel...

1. comfortable or uncomfortable around them?
2. relaxed or anxious?

☐ ***Trust.*** Trust is a social bond characterized by feelings of security and confidence in others' good intentions and goodwill. Trust may be particularly important in helping individuals take the risk of being vulnerable in the presence of other groups. The more contact people have with members of other groups, the more inclined they are to trust those groups.

SAMPLE QUESTION

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

1. Overall, I feel like I can trust people who are [GROUP].
2. In general, people who are [GROUP] can be trusted.

☐ ***Empathy.*** Empathy involves one's capacity for caring about the experiences of others, and it may also involve one's ability to understand and share the thoughts and feelings of another. Contact with other groups typically relates to greater empathy toward those groups, and greater empathy is also a crucial pathway underlying the link between contact and reduced prejudice.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

1. I care about people who are [GROUP].
2. I am motivated to understand the thoughts and feelings of people who are [GROUP].
3. I feel compassion when I think about the experiences of people who are [GROUP].

☐ ***Willingness for Future Contact.*** Intergroup contact has the potential to foster all the outcomes listed above—including improved intergroup attitudes, lower anxiety, and greater trust in and empathy toward other groups. Yet these outcomes can only be realized fully to the extent that members of different groups remain willing to engage in contact with each other. The more contact people have with members of other groups, the more they tend to be willing to engage and deepen connections with other groups.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

1. I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as neighbors.
2. I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as close friends.
3. I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] in my home.
4. I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as family members.

☐ ***Belonging.*** Belonging refers to feelings of acceptance, inclusion, and psychological safety within a given context. When we feel like we belong, we feel welcome, at home, and fully part of the "we" that makes up our community. Research shows that the more contact we have with other groups in diverse communities, the more likely we are to feel like we belong—a particularly strong effect for members of groups that have been excluded or underrepresented historically.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

1. I feel accepted by people who are [GROUP].
2. I feel welcomed by people who are [GROUP].
3. I feel like I belong in this community.
4. I feel at home in this community.

☐ ***Participation in Civic Life.*** Civic participation encompasses a wide range of activities related to active involvement in one's community, from volunteering, to participating in community activities, to being politically active. Some research indicates that the more people have contact with other groups in diverse communities, they not only feel more welcomed by other groups but they also may become more likely to participate in civic life.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

1. I am willing to attend community meetings.
2. I am willing to help organize events for my community.
3. I am willing to work with others in my community to solve a problem.
4. I am willing to contact a local public official about an issue I care about.

Conclusion

At a time when the United States faces many growing divides across lines of difference, finding ways to foster connections between groups has never been more important. Our ability to shape and navigate how we live together as a society fundamentally depends on how we engage with one another, and how we cultivate meaningful relationships across group boundaries.

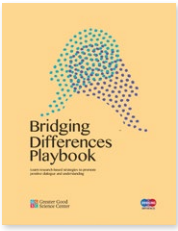
As this guide highlights, there are many ways in which we can build positive relations between people from different backgrounds, and community organizations play critical roles in making cross-group interaction and collaboration both impactful and sustainable over time.

Our hope is that this guide will provide you, and your local communities and organizations, with helpful evidence-based recommendations on how to structure contact programs effectively, along with useful tips and best practices for implementing and facilitating these programs. Whether you are developing new contact-based programs or infusing existing programs with insights from contact theory and research, we humbly thank you for your efforts to strengthen our social fabric and build healthier, more resilient communities for generations to come.

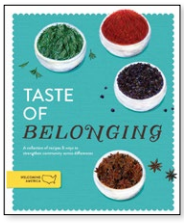
Additional Resources

International Organization for Migration
The Power of Contact: Designing, Facilitating and Evaluating Social Mixing Activities

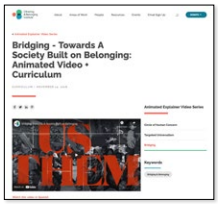
National Coalition on School Diversity
Re-Weaving the Social Fabric through Integrated Schools



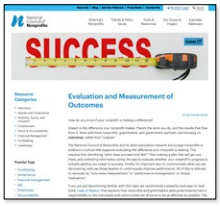
Greater Good Science Center
Bridging Differences Playbook



Welcoming America
Taste of Belonging Cookbook



Othering and Belonging Institute
Bridging Towards A Society Built on Belonging



National Council of Non-Profits
Evaluation and Measurement of Outcomes

Appendix: Starter Survey

The brief "starter" survey provided here is designed to help organizations begin to envision how survey items in the guide can be used to assess participants' attitudes and behavioral intentions, and how these attitudes and intentions may shift as a result of participating in contact programs. As a step toward this goal, organizers should ask participants to complete the same set of survey questions before the contact program begins, and at some point after the contact program ends. Organizations should also take efforts to ensure that they can match survey responses from the same participants across these two time points; this matching of participant responses is essential to assess if and how each participant may have been influenced by the program.

Please note that as a starter survey, this is not intended to be exhaustive of all types of questions that may be of interest to program organizers or relevant to participants' experiences in contact programs. For instance, organizers may also be interested in learning more about how participants felt about different program activities or the program as a whole, and they may also wish to gather demographic information to compare responses across participants from different groups. Organizations interested in conducting more thorough and formal evaluation studies of contact programs are encouraged to reach out directly to the authors to learn more. On the pages that follow, and as noted previously in the guide, the term "GROUP" will be used to refer to people from another group with whom participants have come into contact during the program.

Organizations interested in using this starter survey are encouraged to access the editable PDF version available on the same webpage as this guide. When using this editable PDF version, we recommend that organizations replace the term "GROUP" with the name of the group(s) with whom people in their programs come into contact. Instructions are included with the forms.

For each of the following questions, please choose the response that best represents how you feel.

When you think about people in your community who are [GROUP], how much do you feel...

Negatively or Positively Toward Them?	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive
Hostile or Friendly Toward Them?	Very Hostile	Hostile	Neutral	Friendly	Very Friendly
Distant From or Close to Them?	Very Distant	Distant	Neutral	Close	Very Close
Uncomfortable or Comfortable Around Them?	Very Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very Comfortable
Anxious or Relaxed Around Them?	Very Anxious	Anxious	Neutral	Relaxed	Very Relaxed
Insecure or Confident Around Them?	Very Insecure	Insecure	Neutral	Confident	Very Confident

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, by choosing the response that best represents how you feel.

Overall, I feel like I can trust people who are [GROUP].	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
In general, people who are [GROUP] can be trusted.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I care about people who are [GROUP].	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am motivated to understand the thoughts and feelings of people who are [GROUP].	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel compassion when I think about the experiences of people who are [GROUP].	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as neighbors.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as close friends.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] in my home.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be willing to have people who are [GROUP] as family members.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel accepted by people who are [GROUP] in this community.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel welcomed by people who are [GROUP] in this community.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel like I belong in this community.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel at home in this community.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to attend community meetings.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to help organize events for my community.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to work with others in my community to solve a problem.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to contact a local public official about an issue I care about.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

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WELCOMING AMERICA
BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Endnotes

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