

## Engaging Worldview Diversity

Welcome! Hopefully you're excited to facilitate a BRIDGE Workshop with your colleagues—and you should be! It's a terrific way to create an open space for discussing religious and worldview identity. The workshops intend to de-bunk the myth that you have to be an expert in comparative religions to enter into conversations on religious, spiritual, and secular worldview. It's an experience aimed at building relationships between individuals and developing appreciation for worldview as an element of identity.

The bottom line is, we all have religious or non-religious identities. These identities affect our decisions, inform our perspective on issues that matter in the world, and influence our orientation toward others. We all have opinions about religion, worldview, and everything in between, and it is important to provide examples for students on how to engage our deeply held convictions in productive ways.

This series of modules allows facilitators to tailor the content to their audience and time frame. Modules explore the importance of proactively engaging worldview identity, personal worldview identity reflection, biases and perceptions towards other identities, and relationship-building around shared values. More modules will be added to the library over time, so be sure to check back for updates.

This document provides guidance to help you be as intentional as possible about how you set up, frame, and facilitate the experience(s) for your colleagues or student para-professional staff. In addition to selecting the specific modules you will use, there are five major things for you to consider: yourself, your campus, your audience, your set up, and your responses. Each section of this guide focuses on a different consideration. We encourage you to reflect critically on the different pieces so you can step into the facilitator role with confidence. And don't worry- things that may seem unclear in the guide will become clear once you read through the curriculum.

You may already have extensive experience with these kinds of workshops, or you might be starting out. Either way, you are taking an important step to communicate that worldview engagement is important. We hope that the experience challenges and energizes you as a professional and hopefully helps to build comfort with worldview engagement on your campus.

## FIRST CONSIDERATION: YOURSELF

### Understand your intentions

Facilitating activities and discussion around worldview identity and difference requires energy, optimism, and confidence in spaces of tension. If you have a clear understanding of why the material matters to you personally and professionally, it's much easier to communicate authentically.

#### Consider the following questions:

- ▶ Why do I believe that worldview engagement matters?
- ▶ What is my personal goal(s) for facilitating this workshop?
- ▶ What experiences have I had that point to the need for worldview engagement?
- ▶ How comfortable am I in talking about my own worldview?

### Know your limitations

Chances are, you don't know everything about every worldview or know every response to every question or critique. Let's be clear: that type of knowledge is not required to facilitate a BRIDGE Workshop. Often the most enriching opportunity created in these experiences is grappling with issues lacking clear resolutions. As you will explore in the introductory module, worldview engagement is a process focused on building relationships so that disagreement doesn't unravel into conflict, tension, or violence.

#### Consider the following questions:

- ▶ What areas (e.g. knowledge of various religious practices, understanding histories of cooperation and conflict between traditions) do I feel least equipped to speak about?
- ▶ Who do I know who does have expertise in these different areas? Can I call upon them as a resource?
- ▶ Are there resources I can seek to build up my base knowledge? (Tip: We provide a list of these at the end of this Facilitator's Guide).

### Be consistent

In our experience facilitating worldview engagement workshops over the years, nothing trips up a group more than arguing over semantics. People will disagree with the terms "worldview," "interfaith," even "religion" and want to debate them. It's easy to deconstruct words in order to avoid actually engaging the topic at hand, so it's best to circumvent that early by acknowledging the power (and limitations) of the words we choose to use. It's important to define how you are using the terms "worldview" and "interfaith" immediately, and communicate that their purpose is consistency. Most importantly, *use them consistently*. The glossary of terms provides their definitions.

## SECOND CONSIDERATION: YOUR CAMPUS

### Campus type

The BRIDGE Workshop modules are written to be appropriate for both private and public institutions. They focus on individual experience and interpersonal engagement. Nevertheless, the ways that you frame the experience(s) will depend on your campus type. The more clearly you make connections between the mission, history, and values of your institution, the more clearly you can make the case for engaging worldview.

### **Consider the following questions:**

- ▶ How can you tell the story of your campus's history, and tie its values to the need to engage worldview? If your campus values citizenship, service, and intercultural competency, these are all values with clear ties to the need for worldview engagement.
- ▶ How does a religiously diverse campus engage worldview? What about a more religiously homogeneous campus?

## **Campus history**

It's important to know where your workshop fits into the overall story of your campus. It may be the first or just the latest opportunity for worldview engagement. Institutions of higher learning often have some history of engaging topics of diversity, and understanding that history can 1) communicate to your audience that it is acceptable to engage worldview in higher education and/or 2) indicate the importance of advocating for this engagement if it isn't as prevalent.

### **Consider the following questions:**

- ▶ What is the current story on your campus about worldview engagement?
- ▶ Have there been any recent events that point to the need for worldview engagement?
- ▶ What do you know about campus climate regarding religious and non-religious identity on campus?
- ▶ How do these realities of your campus context impact conversations about religious and non-religious identity?

## **THIRD CONSIDERATION: YOUR AUDIENCE**

### **Typical composition and size**

The staff and student para-professional staff who work with students outside of the classroom are the typical audience for this workshop. This includes student affairs professionals, religious life professionals, professors who serve as advisors, and students in para-professional roles (RAs, etc.). The point is to offer space for self-reflection and build awareness of the realities of a religiously diverse democracy like the United States. Since discussion of one's worldview is personal and folks can be hesitant to talk about it, we've found that these types of workshops work best with 20-30 people. If you want to train a larger group, consider offering multiple workshop opportunities or inviting a co-facilitator to join you.

### **Experience of the group**

It's important to consider experience you hope your audience will have as you plan your session. Consider about the best way to bring together the group and what implications that might have for the experience of participating. There's no one way to approach these experiences, which is precisely why BRIDGE is designed to be so flexible. Think about your end goals and what an ideal outcome is for you in planning these experiences. If your group is more advanced, think about how to call upon participant expertise in your workshop.

### **Consider the following questions:**

- ▶ Should you consider inviting groups by office, department, or division, or as individuals?
- ▶ Will this be a required or optional training, and how might that implicate participant experience?
- ▶ Are there places in the discussion portions of the modules to insert questions that call upon the experience of people in the room OR to allow for more in-depth discussion?
- ▶ Is there a particular skill you would like the group to develop in greater depth during your time together?
- ▶ What is the existing expertise you may have in the room? At what points in the workshop can that experience be beneficial to draw out for other participants? Feel free to adjust the curriculum to bring in their experience!

## Power dynamics

It's important to consider how the interplay between participants can affect their willingness to engage with the material. If your worldview is very different than your supervisor's, or if you've simply never discussed it before, then you may not feel like you can be open about it. As facilitator you can create a safer space within the workshop, but the folks may still be concerned with how knowledge of their worldview could affect their working relationships with people.

### Consider the following:

- ▶ Are there ways to direct activities so people at similar levels of the institution can interact?
- ▶ Is there enough trust among the group to openly discuss fears around "outing" one's worldview?
- ▶ Can you as facilitator respectfully name the risk involved and encourage understanding?
- ▶ Is there a potential participant from whom you can solicit input in advance to help you plan to make the space as safe as possible?
- ▶ Be sure to include confidentiality as a community agreement (the guidelines participants develop together to create an open and respectful space—this is the Introductory Framing module).

## FOURTH CONSIDERATION: YOUR SETUP

### Facilitators

Depending on your level of experience and confidence facilitating similar workshops, you have the option of a co-facilitator model. Co-facilitation between two people can help maintain energy in the room, provide a balance of perspectives (especially if facilitators are of different worldviews), and keep the audience engaged. It will be up to you on how to divide up the content to balance between the two of you.

### Consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do I have a colleague with experience facilitating staff workshops whom I can call upon to help?
- ▶ What identities do I bring into the facilitator role? Would I be a stronger facilitator if I have a counterpart who balanced my identities with their own?
- ▶ What will we need to do to feel prepared to work together in the workshop?
- ▶ What conversations should we consider having in advance about personal identity and the session itself?

### Space and timing

We recommend that you hold the workshop either in the morning or early afternoon, as fatigue can prevent quality engagement. Be sure to ask about your participants' accommodation needs before the workshop.

### Quick tips for setup:

- ▶ Arrange chairs in a circle or a series of small circles is best—it communicates that engagement and community building are a part of the experience. Avoid lecture-style seating and rows of chairs (unless they can be moved).
- ▶ You will need a projector and computer with internet for the videos in the modules.
- ▶ Provide scratch paper for participants and be sure to print off whatever handout the module calls for
- ▶ BRIDGE's overall design allows you to select which sessions you'd like to incorporate; therefore, the overall time you require will vary accordingly. Plan time appropriately dependent on the series of modules you have selected to implement.

## FIFTH CONSIDERATION: YOUR RESPONSES

As a facilitator, the way you handle challenging situations has significant implications for the overall experience of your participants. Considering how to moderate your responses can help ensure that the session is a productive learning space for all involved. This final section focuses on ways to respond to different challenging perspectives in the room. These perspectives are provided based on our real-life experiences of perspectives that often show up in conversations about worldview identity. The more you can think about responses in advance, the more comfortable you will feel facilitating.

▶ **There may be people in the room who think religion/worldview is irrelevant**

It's important to gently remind someone who raises this objection that you respect their perspective, but it is just one perspective. The majority of people in the U.S. and in the world are religious, and their beliefs inform many aspects of their lives. Talking about worldview in a way that is not combative is an essential element of building a peaceful world.

▶ **There may be people in the room who have a hard time letting you lead**

The self-appointed honorary co-facilitator is a challenge for any facilitator, especially since these folks often mean well. People with lots of experience with worldview engagement should be encouraged to contribute their perspective while stepping fully into the role of learner. It requires vulnerability to do this, and people may want to stick with the 'teacher' role if that's where they're comfortable. Think about ways to encourage folks to focus on themselves during the workshop.

▶ **There may be people in the room who have had bad experiences**

The purpose of worldview engagement and interfaith cooperation is not to create apologists; throughout history, people have done terrible harm to other people in the name of religion/worldview and that shouldn't be swept under the rug. There may be participants who were rejected, marginalized, or victimized by members of certain traditions. They may share stories that reflect those experiences and have difficulty engaging with others because of them.

It's also important to maintain the balance between sharing and fully unpacking someone's experiences. Think about ways to gently move the workshop forward and make yourself available to chat with the person offline, or direct them to counseling services in your community. Be sure to thank them for their honesty and willingness to share with the group.

▶ **There may be people in the room with negative characterizations of certain worldviews**

This is often the most triggering element for facilitators and participants. In our experience, it usually comes in the form of generalized, flippant comments. For example, referring to leaving Christianity because "Christians are all a bunch of hypocrites" or referring to atheists as "angry militants who all think religious people are stupid." There are going to be people who identify with these worldviews in the room, so you need to address those comments to maintain the safety of the space. One approach is to focus in on the general terms like "all", "always" and "never" and affirm that they probably have difficult experiences with folks in their past, but those folks don't represent everyone of any tradition. When you point this out, the person may be embarrassed and feel defensive. You can let them know that the purpose of these spaces is to learn, and they've provided a valuable learning opportunity for everyone in the room.

▶ **There may be people in the room who want to aggressively debate**

Truth be told, this almost never happens. But, when people do have considerable disagreements they can't always keep it contained. These disagreements are usually fraught with other things—politics, for example—and the conversation spirals. On the rare occasion that folks get into it, you will need to flex your facilitator muscles and interrupt. Calling time-out can cool people down long enough for you to restate the purposes of the workshop. Remind people of community agreement(s) around dialogue over debate. You can also invite others into the conversation using prompts like "does anyone else agree?" or "how do other people see this?" This can help alleviate the pressure on you to navigate the difficulty solo.

### Consider the following questions:

- ▶ Have you encountered perspectives like this in your prior work? How have you handled it in the past?
- ▶ Will any one of these perspectives be particularly challenging for you to navigate? Why might that be? How can you work to be particularly prepared for this perspective should it arise?
- ▶ What are some alternate possibilities for how to react to each of these perspectives?
- ▶ You're not alone in the room as a facilitator. How might you rely on other participants to help navigate some of these challenging dynamics?

## CURRICULUM KEY: HOW TO READ THE MODULES

The BRIDGE Workshop modules read like scripts, but it's not script you have to memorize. We want you to feel like you can make the material your own; include personal stories, add information you know about worldview diversity on your campus, and have fun with it!

### It's important to remember two big things when you're leading a workshop:

- ▶ The purpose of worldview engagement is not to advocate for relativism (the belief that all belief systems are correct) or synchronism (the belief that all belief systems are the same).
- ▶ The goal of the experience is to communicate that we can talk about our very different worldviews in respectful ways, and work together around our shared values.

Always begin your workshop with the BRIDGE introductory module—it includes important space-setting activities. Allot thirty minutes for that at the beginning of your workshop.

## OPTIONAL RESOURCES

To feel as confident as possible facilitating the BRIDGE Workshop, we recommend you take some time to review the following information.

### Introduction

- ▶ **Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life**  
[www.pewforum.org/data/](http://www.pewforum.org/data/)
- ▶ **UCLA Higher Education Research Institute research on the Spiritual Lives of College Students**  
[http://spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/reports/Spiritual\\_Life\\_College\\_Students\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/reports/Spiritual_Life_College_Students_Full_Report.pdf)

### Personal Reflections

- ▶ **Intersectionality and why it's important**  
[www.care2.com/causes/what-is-intersectionality-and-why-is-it-important.html](http://www.care2.com/causes/what-is-intersectionality-and-why-is-it-important.html)
- ▶ **Self-Reflection and leadership**  
[www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/miller.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/miller.pdf?sfvrsn=0)

### Worldview Engagement Activities:

- ▶ **Shared Values Dialogue**  
[www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/BRIDGE%20Engagement%20Activity%20Option%20%20Shared%20Values%20Dialogue.pdf](http://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/BRIDGE%20Engagement%20Activity%20Option%20%20Shared%20Values%20Dialogue.pdf)

### Biases Activities:

- ▶ **Recognizing and understanding bias**  
[www.cptc.edu/stereotype/bias/lessonbuilder\\_files/Stereotypes\\_and\\_Bias\\_print.html](http://www.cptc.edu/stereotype/bias/lessonbuilder_files/Stereotypes_and_Bias_print.html)
- ▶ **Implicit bias**  
<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>