



The Change Collective is a national network for local changemakers who are passionate about solving issues in their communities and combating social isolation, political polarization, and civic disengagement. We train, connect, and elevate these rising leaders, equipping them with the tools to build a more robust and inclusive democracy from the ground up. Our vision is to reinvent civic life for a new generation – creating the mediating institutions that our communities need to build bridges and enact change. In this section, we'll outline Change Collective's unique approach, common misconceptions around pluralism, and provide an opportunity for self-reflection and assessment.

- **TRAIN:** Build the skills and tools necessary to drive change and have an impact in local communities.
- **CONNECT:** Connect a network of local civic leaders to learn from each other, from local leaders in other communities, from mentors, and from subject-matter experts.
- **ELEVATE:** Leverage a nationwide network to build a strong culture of civic leadership and participation. We do this by elevating and celebrating the work being done in communities, and helping advance the field of community work and leadership by analyzing, identifying, and sharing key trends and best practices identified by participants.

OUR 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- 1. EMBRACE DIFFERENCE AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH |** This work requires a sense of safety and belonging in order to be successful. We embrace diversity and difference as a tool for driving meaningful change. We do not have to think the same or be the same to drive toward the common goal of stronger communities.
- 2. CIVIC LEADERSHIP OVER “POLITICS” |** Our priority is creating strong civic infrastructure and building bridges to tackle local challenges. We're here for civic health and connectivity. Not partisanship.
- 3. TRUSTING COMMUNITY |** We focus on providing skills and facilitating experiences that empower participants and local partners to determine the change that is needed in their communities.

TAKING A LOCAL APPROACH:

We believe that the questions and problems in our communities are more tangible and clear on the local level. Discussions can be more constructive because the problem is concrete and the impact is visible. People with different experiences and perspectives make our solutions better and the work more sustainable.

PERSONAL REFLECTION IS ESSENTIAL:

Change Collective approaches pluralism through a lens of addressing internal work needed to navigate and imagine a future where we can increase belonging and grow the voices of people wanting to participate in democratic and change-making processes. Being siloed in an echo chamber has a cost to our communities and our ability to connect.

BELONGING IS VITAL FOR AMERICAN SOCIETY:

- **Social Cohesion:** Belonging leads to higher satisfaction in local communities and increases trust in neighbors, local government, and civic engagement. It reduces marginalization and concern over demographic change by opening us to diversity.
- **Democracy:** Belonging brings greater satisfaction with life and democracy in the U.S. and increased support for our democratic system of government.
- **Civic engagement and trust:** Belonging may help to facilitate social cohesion by improving individuals' ability to process information that may be at odds with their current worldview.

Source: The Belonging Barometer Report: The State of Belonging in America
By Over Zero & the Center for Inclusion and Belonging at the American Immigration Council

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE: THE CIVIC ACTION PROJECT PLAN

Each Change Collective participant creates a Civic Action Plan to deploy the skills and mindset needed to encourage belonging, bridge-building, and civic participation in their community. This plan is built around a clearly defined problem and/or priority geared at having a lasting impact by engaging key stakeholders, bringing the community together, and creating measurable change. Here's a snapshot of what our cohort members have been up to:



- **Jen Guzman (Chicago, IL)**
Jen is working to develop a program within PODER, a nonprofit organization on the South Side of Chicago focusing on integration for Latino immigrants, to provide resources and support to migrants. This support will come in the form of tuition-free English as a Second Language training, financial literacy, civic training, and workforce training.

- **Ben Schornack (Chicago, IL)**
Ben is expanding the work of a diverse coalition of 105 organizations, with more than 500 individuals, who believe in improving access to and participation in youth sports and play activities. He is recruiting additional organizations and partners and will launch four working groups to strategize and move forward on four core visions for the coalition. Ben has had a few major wins, such as unlocking \$10.5M in state funds.
- **Bandhan Kaur (Detroit, MI)**
According to the State of Computer Science Education in Michigan, only 6% of Advanced Placement Computer Science high graduates were Black and brown women. Bandhan is working to bring computer science classes to students in Highland Park, Detroit. Through a Change Collective partnership with the Rocket Community Fund, 16 laptops were donated for students who enroll in these classes. Bandhan has started two coding classes for all genders at Charlotte Mason Community School from grades 5-8 in app and game design.
- **Jonathan Pulley (Detroit, MI)**
To combat stagnant literacy rates among 18-24 year olds, Jonathan is working with K-12 partners, workforce development professionals, and upskilling partners, like nPower, community college networks, and Code 313, to provide community-wide spaces for 18-24 year olds to obtain GED Certifications, trained credentials, professional skills, and ongoing skills development. Jonathan will also engage the head of household as part of a "Whole Family Approach".
- **Charity Bruce (Jackson, MS)**
Charity is creating a pilot project for community members ages 16-30 to receive free expungement services and connect with local businesses committed to interviewing and hiring them once their record is clear. The project will expand opportunities for young adults with prior convictions and promote workforce development in Jackson. Charity had her first event in the spring and is building her list of participating businesses.
- **Harya Tarekegn (Jackson, MS)**
Harya is launching Rising Leaders Jackson, a leadership mentoring program that will pair young professionals with middle school students in South or West Jackson. Harya is working to connect with middle schools before the end of the school year that would host Rising Leaders one Saturday a month during the school year.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Self-reflection is required to build the muscles needed to build bridges. Reflect on yourself in the spaces below to ensure you are ready to start asking things of others.

When was the last time you changed your mind about something? What did that look like? Feel like? What was the timeline of that change?

Who was involved in that change? What did it take for you to be persuadable?

What keeps you from talking to people who disagree with you?

SHIFTING CONCEPTIONS OF PLURALISM

Pluralism in practice involves shifting our understanding of people who disagree with us. We are better when we imagine and innovate from multiple perspectives as we build a different reality for our communities. We need to adapt our measure of success to accommodate different viewpoints.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Pluralism is about persuading others to agree with you.

We're too entrenched as a country for pluralism to work.

Pluralism makes finding a way forward more challenging.

People who are resistant to our ideas are evil, bad people who want the world to be worse.

IN REALITY

→ Pluralism calls us to do reflective work, have the willingness to change our minds, and show grace towards others.

→ Humans are wired for connection. In this era of profound polarization, research shows that we are hungry for opportunities to be together and talk.

→ Pluralism allows us to shift our mindsets from zero-sum thinking and embrace the vulnerability of not knowing everything.

→ People are resistant because they are afraid of the real or perceived loss of something - whether that may be time, money, respect, resources, or even moral high ground.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Use this self-assessment to evaluate the internal qualities required for practicing pluralism. For each quality, rate yourself from 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

After you've completed the self-assessment, add up your score and go to the reflection questions to dig into your results. Be honest about your strengths and areas for growth!

SCORE

EMPATHY		
Cognitive Empathy The ability to understand someone else's perspective and what they might be thinking and feeling.	I use my own knowledge and experiences to understand how others might be thinking and feeling in a given situation.	
	I am confident in my awareness and understanding of emotions.	
Affective Empathy You experience the emotions that you see others experiencing.	I feel what I perceive others in my group are feeling.	
	I feel what I see others who are different than me are feeling.	
Empathetic Action The actions you make are driven by empathy.	I am likely to take action to help others when I sense emotional distress.	
	I make decisions based on how my actions will emotionally affect others.	

COLLABORATIVE WORK		
Communication The ability to effectively share your vision and opinions productively.	I feel confident expressing my feelings and opinions about projects clearly and succinctly.	
	I take care to express my opinions and vision without harming others.	
Effective Listening Listening for understanding, bridge building, and collaboration.	When I listen to others, I listen to understand the other person's perspective, not to respond.	
	When I listen to others I can identify the underlying values they're expressing.	
	When I listen to others, I am listening for avenues to build connections.	
	When I listen to others, I am careful to control my reactions (facial expressions, interrupting with statements or questions, etc.)	

<p>Compromise The ability to settle differences through adjustment by finding the middle position or blending components.</p>	<p>When there is disagreement in the room, I identify non-negotiables for each side before developing a new proposal.</p> <p>When there is disagreement in the room, I listen to understand each perspective.</p> <p>I see disagreement as an opportunity for creativity.</p>
<p>Conflict Resolution The ability to manage conflict, both interpersonally and in groups.</p>	<p>I approach conflict with empathy first.</p> <p>I feel confident in my ability to navigate conflict.</p> <p>I am willing to apologize.</p> <p>When others mess up, I give them grace.</p>

EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENCE	
<p>Social Circle Diversity Your likelihood to experience differences in your own social circles.</p>	<p>I interact with people who hold different beliefs than my own in my family.</p> <p>I interact with people who hold different beliefs than my own at work.</p> <p>I interact with people who hold different beliefs than my own in my larger community.</p>
<p>Self Assurance The ability to experience difference without affecting your own opinions and self-esteem.</p>	<p>I am comfortable with others disagreeing with me.</p> <p>I am comfortable disagreeing with others.</p> <p>I am comfortable around others who hold different beliefs than my own.</p> <p>I am confident about the value my perspective, beliefs, and opinions bring to conversations I am a part of.</p>

PERSUADABILITY

Growth Mindset Having a mindset that is focused on your own personal development, curiosity, and the belief that there is more to learn.	When people disagree with me, I am curious and not defensive. I seek out perspectives that are different than my own. I reflect on what could change my mind about an issue.
Willingness to be wrong Being willing to be wrong allows you to focus on learning, perspective-getting, and growing as an individual and collaborative partner.	When I'm exposed to new perspectives or information, I am willing to change my mind. I am open to hearing dissenting perspectives and opinions. I take the time to reflect on my opinions and beliefs. I enter conversations with the mindset of hearing differing opinions.



NEXT STEPS!

34–67 points Spend some time practicing your bridge-building skills. Reflect on where you could have incorporated these qualities into your changework.

68–101 points You can engage in bridge building activities with some success, but there are likely areas you can continue strengthening your skills. Pick two qualities you want to practice over the next two weeks.

102–135 points You're a strong bridge builder. With a growth mindset, ask yourself: Where can I grow?

136–170 points You're a bridge-building machine! The next piece of the puzzle is coaching others to do this work powerfully.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Looking at your scores overall, what stands out to you?

Which grouping of qualities are your strongest? Why do you think that is?

In which grouping of qualities do you need the most growth? Why do you think that is?

Resources consulted for this material:

- Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides by Geoffrey L. Cohen
- The Belonging Barometer Report: The State of Belonging in America By Over Zero & the Center for Inclusion and Belonging at the American Immigration Council
- Good Arguments: How Debate Teaches Us to Listen and Be Heard by Bo Seo
- Otto Scharmer's levels of mindful listening and Theory U
- Our Common Purpose Report by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences
- Prisms of the People by Elizabeth McKenna, Michelle Oyakawa, & Hahrie Han
- Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work by Ruchika Tulshyan
- Why Won't You Apologize?: Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts by Harriet Lerner