

# **Bridging and Belonging to Strengthen Social Connections**

**MAY 2025**

## **The Issue**

Bridging across divides and creating a shared sense of belonging in communities is essential to sustain a broader socially connected community. Approaches that honor the diversity of members in the community require bringing people together across differences to avoid othering and siloing of subgroups. Creating a sense of belonging involves helping all community members feel safe and valued.

## **Webinar Highlights**

- The session provided an overview of the status of disconnection in our country and communities, evidence-based strategies, and community examples to foster bridging and belonging while honoring diversity. Calista Small, Research Manager with More in Common shared highlights from the report, *The Connection Opportunity: Insights for Bringing Americans Together Across Difference*. Kira Hamman, Senior Director of Programs with Urban Rural Action described how the Uniting for Action programs are bringing highly polarized and once divided communities together.
- The field of social psychology identifies types of connection. Bonding refers to connection within a group of people who share similarities such as education, profession, income, race, ethnicity, faith, and political positions. Bridging involves making connections across these types of differences and diversifying social relationships. Bridging connections are important to achieve a cohesive society.
- Research conducted by More in Common reveals that:
  - A majority (70%) of Americans agree that we have a shared responsibility to connect with one another across differences. And two-thirds (66%) of Americans across all demographic groups feel they can learn something valuable by connecting with others who are different from them.
  - Community norms is one of the strongest predictors of connecting across lines of difference. When people see others in their community engaging across differences, they are more likely to show interest in doing so themselves.

- Connection is cumulative. The most cited barrier to connection is lack of opportunities. And the more opportunities people have, the more interested they are in connecting across differences.
- Recommendations from The Connection Opportunity: Insights for Bringing Americans Together Across Difference report include:
  - Provide more opportunities in communities for connection across differences. This helps reduce a common barrier of intergroup anxiety by increasing exposure and experiences with people who are viewed as being different. Creating “connection cascades” also results in a reinforcing cycle in which positive intergroup experiences catalyze further interest in ongoing connections.
  - Increase the perception that connecting across differences is the community norm.
  - Foster feelings of belonging across the community.
  - Highlight what community members have in common such as shared goals, interests, and activities rather than focusing on potential sources of tension.
  - Frame connective responsibility as an essential element for a thriving society which has led to advancements in economics, democracy, and civil rights.
- Six guiding principles of Uniting for Action include: finding strength in difference, embracing curiosity, centering communities, expanding democratic participation, taking action, and having fun!
- The Uniting for Action process builds the capacity of community members to strengthen relationships, have constructive conversations, analyze and solve problems together, and design and implement community solutions collaboratively.

Access more information from the webinar: [recording](#) and [slides](#).

## Resources

### ARTICLES & REPORTS

- [The Connection Opportunity: Insights for Bringing Americans Together Across Difference](#), More in Common, March 2025
- [Action Over Dialogue: The Case for Prioritizing Local Civic Engagement](#), Trust for Civic Life, 2024

### BOOKS

- [Belonging: The Science of Creating Connection and Bridging Divides](#), Geoffrey L. Cohen, 2023
- [Belonging without Othering: How We Save Ourselves and the World](#), John A. Powell, 2024
- [Better Together: Restoring American Community](#), Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein with Don Cohen, 2003

## GUIDES & TOOLS

- [Bridgebuilder Basics](#), Interfaith America
- [Practical Pluralism: A Toolkit for Action](#), The Obama Foundation

## ORGANIZATIONS

- [More in Common](#) works to understand the forces driving people apart, find common ground and bring people together to tackle shared challenges.
- [New Pluralists](#) is a funder collaborative investing in people, organizations, and ideas to bring pluralism to life in communities across the U.S.
- The [Othering & Belonging Institute](#) at UC Berkeley advances approaches to transform structural marginalization and inequality.
- [Uniting for Action](#) brings Americans together across political, racial, generational, and geographic differences to solve problems together.

## PODCASTS

- [Who Belongs?](#), Othering & Belonging Institute

## COMMUNITY / PARTICIPANT EXAMPLES

Participants in the post-webinar discussion group shared ways they are working on bridging and belonging.

- [Community Plate](#) is a Maine-based organization fostering connection and creating community through shared meals and stories.
- [Dining with Purpose](#), a Houston Food Bank initiative, brings community members together through meals, conversation, and storytelling.
- The [Outrage Overload Podcast](#) features topics and guests for balanced discussions and practical strategies to reduce outrage, improve mental health, and foster civil discourse.
- [The World Exists Here](#) started in Sweden and connects school students with immigrant adults in the community for mutually beneficial learning.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

