

Bridging Movements

How conversation builds shared
visions of the world

Review the case study and reflect on the follow-up discussion questions

This case illustrates:

The tendency to break across issue organizing because of the underlying and false belief of scarce resources. It shows the power of strengthening an overarching movement by illustrating that issues are connected and that we are much stronger when we work together and that we can show up for each other's movement work, without it having a negative impact on our own.

Key topics considerations:

Strengthening movements, scarcity mindset, systemic issues, interconnectedness across issues, belonging circles and training.

Setting:

After Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, PICO California — the largest faith based organizing network in the state — began to see increased polarization, othering, and racial anxiety in California and across their network partners. In order to address the increasing divide, PICO California initiated Belong Circles in 2019. Through the facilitation of Belong Circles, PICO California aims to change the dominant narrative of division to one that fosters bridging among their partner organizations and Californians.



Members of La Asociación Latino-Musulmana de Norte América (part of the LA Voice network) participate in a Belong Circle to bridge folks in their community as well as members of the Indonesian Muslim community whom they invited.

BREAKING

The breaking is caused by increased polarization and racial anxiety between different community based civic leaders and organizers across the state of California. Leaders in the PICO network and beyond were subconsciously buying into “us-versus-them” framings, even among allies. There was contention about what issue needed to be addressed immediately and fear that their issues would not be addressed if they were not at the top of the agenda. There was also a scarcity mindset, i.e., if one group won, another group necessarily lost.

BRIDGING

Belong Circles are designed to create bridging opportunities across acknowledged identity lines such as language, religion, or race. Belong Circles are led by a facilitator and bring about ten people together in the same room to hold intentional conversations. The Belong Circles aim to help participants see that movement issues are connected through related systemic failures such as structural racism, and help people envision a greater ‘we’. The curriculum is free and open source in both English and Spanish. PICO also provides ongoing support in the form of facilitator training, and advice to ensure that people interested in implementing Belong Circles feel supported.

BELONGING

PICO California has trained over one thousand facilitators, and thousands more have participated in Belong Circles all over the state. Preliminary focus group data reveal that sharing experiences and reflecting on one’s positionality in relation to privilege can be powerful steps in the process of becoming more engaged in civic life and in the name of a larger “we” than previously imagined. Additionally, Belong circles have allowed people to begin to build bridges within their own groups, and then expand to other groups, gaining collective power and more unity.

Questions for Discussion:

We want you to keep your thoughts to the points or facts illustrated in this story. For the questions in your life or your examples, please speak from the “I” experience.

Question	Educational Goal
1. Where do you see breaking in the story?	Be able to identify a breaking dynamic.
2. How did the breaking dynamic manifest among organizers in California?	Be able to identify the negative impacts of breaking, what happens when we don't bridge.
3. What policies and practices are the reason for othering in this particular case?	Be able to identify policies and practices that create structural othering.
4. In this particular case, what opportunities were opened by bridging?	Be able to identify the impact that bridging can have.
5. What questions or critiques do you still have about breaking, bridging and belonging?	Be able to understand the frameworks enough to offer questions and critiques.
6. Where do you see or experience breaking in your own community, organization, school, or work setting? Can you describe the negative impact that these have?	Be able to apply the breaking framework in their own life experience.
7. Do you engage in bridging in your work? If so, how?	Be able to apply the bridging framework.
8. If you don't already bridge, how might you apply what you learned today?	
9. What world do you see when we instead decide to bridge?	Be able to understand that smaller 'we' leads to harm. Be able to imagine a world where we focus on the bigger 'we.'