



BRIDGING **FOR** DEMOCRACY

BUILDING BRIDGES AND CLIMBING HILLS IN THE OC



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OCCCO, the Orange County Congregation Community Organization, has a vision for Orange County, California: to be a place where all people live with dignity and thrive. Their campaign, Anaheim is Our Home, is an invitation for the city of Anaheim to be a place of belonging for all its diverse communities. This fall, OCCCO put this invitation into action in an unusual way for community organizers, by leading a listening tour in the Anaheim Hills – a part of the city that is both physically and often culturally divided from the rest of Anaheim. This work, part of Bridging for Democracy (B4D), asks what it really takes to achieve that inclusive vision of belonging, and uses bridging to radically humanize people across lines of difference like race, geography, and ideology.

B4D is a partnership among social justice movement organizations to develop practices and narratives for rehumanizing and rebuilding our mutual commitments to one another across deep “us-them” divides in US society. This initiative was launched by the Othering and Belonging Institute and the Workers Center for Racial Justice and is co-led with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES), Make the Road Nevada, and Orange County Congregation Community Organization (OCCCO).

B4D is redefining how we defend democracy by building a new paradigm for civic engagement that integrates “long bridging.” The term *long bridging* refers to practices and narratives that bring people into relationships of recognition and respect across – and in the face of – wide, socially salient divides. Building long bridges is about overcoming reductive and dehumanizing tropes about “others,” thereby shrinking the “them” as a way to build broader civic “we” identities. These bigger “wes” are not predicated on agreement or sameness. Instead, they are about a “we” that can encompass two sides of a divide, recognize one another’s differences, but

also appreciate their shared humanity and stake in a shared future. This type of “we” is faltering in many parts of the United States today, but it is fundamental to— indeed, the very bedrock of— a sustainable, multi-racial democracy.

This memo describes and analyzes the long-bridging campaign carried out by OCCCCO in Anaheim, CA in October–November 2025. It serves as a follow-up to our report, [Bridging for Democracy: How a Smaller “Them” Gets Us to a Bigger “We,”](#) which covers the five-state pilot of B4D carried out in 2024.

OCCCCO is a faith-rooted, community-led organization developing everyday leaders to organize for systemic change in Orange County, CA. They work on issues from housing and education justice to immigrant rights and work alongside congregations, families, and youth to advance dignity, equity, and belonging for all.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

OCCCO JOINED the Bridging for Democracy (B4D) partnership in 2025, after working over several years with OBI on collaborative partnerships to strengthen organizing and narrative practices. The staff at OCCCO identified the community of Anaheim Hills as one with which they wanted to bridge by way of a door-to-door canvassing program. Anaheim Hills is the eastern part of the city of Anaheim, sitting at a higher altitude and physically separated from the rest of the city by major highways and the Santa Ana River. The Anaheim Hills area is significantly more affluent, whiter, and less densely populated than west Anaheim, where OCCCO's work typically focuses.

OCCCO primarily organizes with low income, immigrant and Latine workers and families in Anaheim and across Orange County. Anaheim Hills, by contrast, is perceived to be wealthy, as well as conservative. Residents were assumed to be less likely to support the types of social justice advocacy and core pillars of OCCCO's work, such as belonging for all immigrants and affordable housing for all. Bridging here would mean directly confronting assumptions, and likely misperceptions, about the residents of Anaheim Hills, as well as calling on residents to confront their perceptions about people from other areas of Anaheim outside their Anaheim Hills neighborhood. B4D recognizes that such mutual misperceptions are fundamental drivers of "us-versus-them" animus in the country today and get in the way of building a bigger we.

"In the beginning, I was surprised by the amount of people that wanted to share their thoughts with us, I was expecting less than what we actually got. Even though some of the responses were similar between some of them, there was a diversity of opinions in Anaheim Hills that I wasn't expecting."

OCCCO CANVASSER

OCCCCO's long-bridge canvassing effort in Anaheim Hills bridged across a geographic divide, as well as perceived socioeconomic and ideological divides. It aimed for mutual rehumanization through better understanding of communities in the Anaheim Hills, their values, and how residents there perceived the division between Anaheim Hills and west Anaheim. OCCCCO's vision is for Orange County to be a place where all people live with dignity and thrive. Bridging in the Anaheim Hills helps bring the county closer to that vision.

Canvassers asked three main questions of residents in the long bridging conversations:

1. What are some things about Anaheim Hills that define what it is, or make it meaningful to you?
2. If you think about how others see your community, what do you wish they understood better?
3. How do you see Anaheim Hills connected to other parts of Anaheim?

DIGITAL AD INTEGRATION

As part of OCCCCO's long bridge canvass, B4D conducted a new experiment integrating digital outreach. This entailed serving ads via Facebook and Instagram to community members in the neighborhoods to be canvassed, with the hope of priming residents and "warming up" the doors to facilitate better bridging conversations. We hypothesized that the Facebook and Instagram ads would help generate interest in the project, make people more comfortable and welcoming at their doors, and thereby encourage more and better conversations with canvassers.

Four separate ads were run to the same audience over a three week period. Two ads used graphics (see below), one of which had a photo of a canvasser, and two featured videos. One of OCCCCO's ads featured the mayor of Anaheim encouraging residents of "the Hills" to open their doors to canvassers and participate in the long bridging program. The hope was that this would boost the profile and credibility of the work. Additionally, we hoped that digital ads would increase canvasser safety by building awareness of the initiative and the focus on listening. Two of the four ads run during this project included members of the canvass team, helping make them recognizable.

Canvassers were in the field, knocking doors, for a total of 6 weeks, during two 3-week periods with a break in the middle during the week of the California statewide

election. Ads began running at the midpoint, after the third week of canvassing, setting up a before and after experimental model to analyze the impact of the digital ads on the long bridge canvassing effort.



RESULTS

The OCCCO canvass team knocked a total of 2,724 doors in Anaheim, and had 214 long-bridge conversations. Canvassers reported that the bridging effort went much better than they expected. Their conversations helped cut through stereotypes that Anaheim Hills residents are snobby or out of touch, and allowed for genuine sharing and connection.

Canvassers found Anaheim Hills to be more diverse than they expected, both in terms of identity and ideology. They also reported that residents hold a range of opinions on their connection to west Anaheim, or the existence of an inclusive Anaheim identity. While some residents said the hills felt different and separate from the flatlands of west Anaheim, many talked about their connection to other parts of Anaheim through relationships, experiences, and having lived in different parts of the city.

We collected a few different pieces of data across these canvasses, as we had done in the previous 2024 pilots:

1. Length of each conversation
2. Each resident's disposition/openness to engaging with canvassers (scale of

1-5), both at the beginning of the conversation and at the end.

- Each resident's stated willingness to speak with the canvasser again in the future.

For willingness to speak with OCCCO again, canvassers directly asked residents and recorded their responses. The question is meant to gauge whether, by the end of the conversation, the person being canvassed found interacting to be meaningful or enjoyable. Conversation length is used as a proxy measure of the depth or "grip" of the conversation. Finally, for residents' dispositions, canvassers made subjective assessments of openness at the beginning and at the end of the conversation using a five point scale where one is a reluctant, cold, or dismissive disposition and five indicates a very warm, excited, and forthcoming disposition. Canvassers were trained on how to use this scale.

Interest in Talking to Us Again



Across the Anaheim Hills long bridge canvass, the average of residents' dispositions at the beginning of conversations was 3.2, and at the end of conversations was 4.2. This indicates that, on average, community members opened up and were more willing to bridge as they began talking with canvassers. There was no instance in which a resident's disposition went down on the scale from the beginning to the end of a conversation. Out of the 214 total conversations, 83 residents' dispositions began as a "five." If we remove this group of people who were very warm and friendly from the start, we see an average increase of 1.6 among the remaining 131 residents with whom we had conversations.

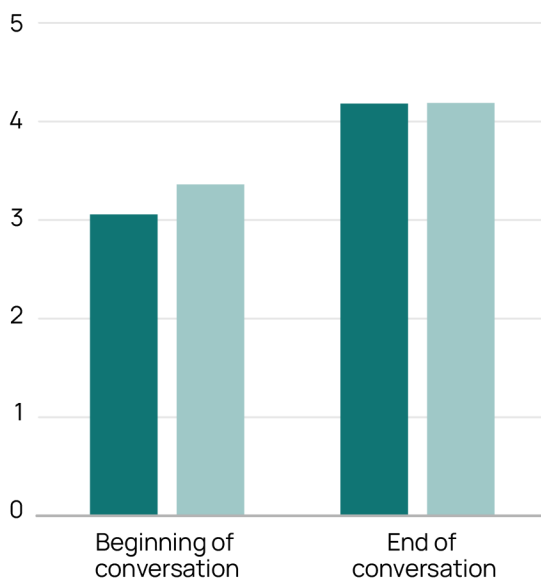
In measuring the impact of the digital ads, we were particularly interested in the beginning disposition metric. Specifically, we wondered whether, on average, those

who might have seen the ads would have a warmer “beginning disposition” than would those who were canvassed prior to the ad run. That is, would the ads have actually “warmed up” the doors as we hoped?

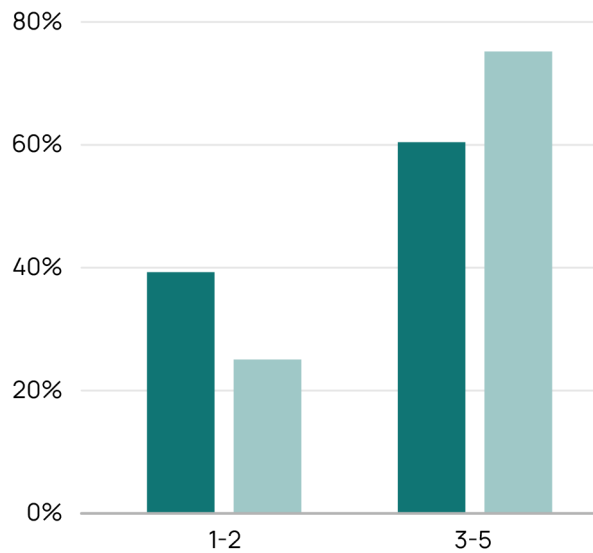
OCCCCO’s findings are encouraging. Our data shows that people whose doors were knocked after the digital ad run were more open and receptive at the start of conversations with canvassers. On average, the beginning disposition of residents was 0.3 points higher once the digital ads were running. Moreover, the share of residents whose dispositions began in the “cold” range was noticeably lower. Before the ad run began, 39 percent – around 8 out of every 20 people – opened their doors with a disposition score of “1” or “2.” Once the ads were running, just 25 percent – or 5 out of every 20 people – began with a “1” or “2” disposition.

We observed this “warmer” starting disposition despite canvassers moving further east, higher in the hills as the canvass progressed, therefore knocking doors of wealthier and more conservative leaning voters. We anticipated starting disposition may actually decrease in these communities, despite the ads. Indeed, some canvassers noted that bridging was more muted, with less support for a cohesive Anaheim identity in the east-most hills. Still, the stronger beginning dispositions that we recorded may indicate that digital ads had their intended effect.

Change in Disposition Before and After Digital Ads



Starting Disposition Before and After Digital Ads



● Before ● After

LEARNINGS FROM DIGITAL INTEGRATION

This long bridge canvass piloted running digital ads to support and strengthen our long bridging work. The process of running the ads also opened up a new bridging opportunity in working with the Anaheim mayor, who gave time to create a short video promoting OCCCO's long bridging work. Through our data and canvasser experiences, we also found the ads to be beneficial towards our goal of long bridging and strengthening democratic norms. The ads also served to amplify OCCCO's work and profile in the Anaheim Hills, hopefully supporting future bridging and work in the area.

The cost of working with consultants and running ads could be a hindrance to some partners who may wish to integrate digital ads into future long bridge canvassing. It is hard for most organizations to cultivate the in-house expertise needed to navigate the complexities and ever-changing regulations around running ads on Meta, especially those that are considered "political" ads. The alternative is specialized consultants and firms, and these are not cheap to contract. We worked with a firm that provided the expertise in managing Meta Ads platform's "backend," but this significantly increased the total cost of the long-bridging campaign.

The campaign could have benefited from more precise targeting tools as well. Ads were served based on a combination of voter list matches to Meta accounts, along with geofencing. Still, we would have wished to have better means of ensuring that the largest number possible of households that were in the canvassing universe received ads.

We plan to continue iterating on the model for integrating digital outreach into canvassing campaigns. Among other things, we will consider exploring new platforms or avenues to expand the use of digital tools to strengthen our on-the-ground long bridging work.



CONCLUSION

BRIDGING FOR DEMOCRACY is a long-term partnership that will continue long bridge canvassing and innovating other strategies through which movement organizations can transform our work to strengthen democratic norms and build the social fabric for a strong, multi-racial democracy. B4D continues to grow, experiment, and innovate with practices and strategies that allow us to bridge with communities across the country.

Our current landscape of increasing fragmentation, dehumanization, and an erosion of democratic norms and trust in democratic processes underscores the urgent need for long bridging. The current national context has not only deepened existing B4D partners' commitment to long bridging, it has also expanded interest in this work across the civic engagement field. We are continuing to expand B4D and share strategies and tools we've developed with our field, across the country. Through deep partnerships with community based organizations and new bridging projects, we continue to refine the tools we've built for this work: training curriculum, scripts, best practices, evaluation frameworks, data collection, and now digital integration.

“I realized we really don’t know people unless we really talk to them and know about their experiences. It is important to just listen to one another.”

OCCCO CANVASSER

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