

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Honors Theses

Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale  
Honors College)

---

Spring 5-4-2022

## How Integrated Marketing Communications Can Be Used to Better Engage Generation Z In Bridge Building

Gracie Bynum

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon\\_thesis](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis)



Part of the [Marketing Commons](#), and the [Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bynum, Gracie, "How Integrated Marketing Communications Can Be Used to Better Engage Generation Z In Bridge Building" (2022). *Honors Theses*. 2591.

[https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon\\_thesis/2591](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/hon_thesis/2591)

This Undergraduate Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College (Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College) at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

HOW INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CAN BE USED TO BETTER  
ENGAGE GENERATION Z IN BRIDGE BUILDING

By

Grace Bynum

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS

May 2021

Approved by

Reader: Graham Bodie

Reader: Professor Brad Conaway

Reader: Professor Zenebe Beyene

© 2020

Grace Bynum

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Graham Bodie, whom I have had the privilege of working with over the last year and a half. I could not have done this without him. He has acted as a mentor, teacher, advisor and role model during my time here at Ole Miss. In November of 2020, he encouraged me to apply for an internship position at Listen First Project where he serves as Chief Listening Officer and shortly after he provided me with the opportunity to serve as an Undergraduate Research Assistant for the School of Journalism and New Media. He has also been my primary thesis advisor and a huge supporter of my work here at Ole Miss. He saw potential in me that I didn't and a space to learn and grow where I have gained confidence in myself to do things I never would have attempted. His constant guidance and encouragement have been invaluable. There were many times when I thought of giving up, but he pushed me to persevere and patiently guided me through this process. As I leave Ole Miss, I reflect on my experiences and the words of Bryant H. McGill when he said, "One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say." Dr. Bodie has taught me to listen to others and I thank him for listening to me.

I would also like to thank my parents, Jeff and Melinda Bynum, and my little sister, Charlotte, for always encouraging me to be the best version of myself. Thank you for the opportunity to attend The University of Mississippi as an out of state student, I would not trade my experience for the world. This would not have been possible without your unwavering support, love, and guidance. I am so grateful to have the best role models and support system in my life.

Additionally, I would like to thank the entire Listen First Team for their continued help throughout my project. My internship experience is the inspiration behind my thesis, and it has been such an honor to work with you all on such meaningful and important projects. Whenever I needed help with finding the answer to a question, my teammates stepped up to the challenge.

I am extremely grateful for those that participated in my interviews. I am thankful to have been able to speak with you, and learn about your experiences in the bridge building space. I am excited to share my work with you.

Finally, I would like to thank the Sally Barksdale Honors College for giving me the chance to fully immerse myself in a subject that I am so passionate about, and providing me with the best mentors and professors to come to for guidance. I would also like to thank Professor Conaway and Professor Beyene for taking the time to read my thesis. Your feedback helped me to produce a better product.

GRACE BYNUM: HOW INTEGRATED MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS CAN BE  
USED TO BETTER ENGAGE GENERATION Z IN BRIDGE BUILDING

(Under the direction of Dr. Graham Bodie)

ABSTRACT

The use of Integrated Marketing Communications holds strong promise for engaging Generation Z in the work of bridge building. The work of bridging is dedicated to healing America by decreasing political polarization and bridging divides between people who think differently. The bridging space has grown drastically in the last few years because of a variety of factors including, but not limited to: increasing polarized political elections, rising racial tensions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that Generation Z, the most educated and diverse generation, is engaged in this space in order to create a less divided America. I conducted research for this project by gathering secondary data and conducting primary research through a series of one-on-one interviews with leaders of bridge building organizations to gain insight on this field. Gen Z resides on the Internet and various social media platforms, so it is vital that marketers are able to meet this generation there through the use of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy that forms relationships and builds trust. It is vital that bridging organizations engage with Gen Z by using cause marketing and collective impact campaigns to engage with this demographic. In order for bridge building organizations to be successful, Gen Z must be involved in this work; meaning, marketers need to provide this generation with the chance to be heard.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	7-13
Chapter 2: Generation Z Building Bridges and Engaging Across Difference	14-34
Chapter 3: Methods	35-41
Chapter 2: Results	42-68
Chapter 5: Conclusion	69-75
Bibliography	76-83
Appendix A	84
Appendix B	85-86
Appendix C	87-122
Appendix D	123-125

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As a member of “Gen Z,” I feel a special responsibility to make our world stronger. As I arrived to start my college career at the University of Mississippi in 2018, I began to apply that mentality to campus. Since my time in Oxford, I have seen several markers of what I consider “progress” toward a stronger community. The University of Mississippi offers many outlets and programs for students and faculty to express their feelings so that every member of the community can feel heard. For example, the Division of Community Engagement (DCE) offers equitable opportunities for students and faculty through transformative experiences on the Ole Miss campus. Additionally, DCE is committed to educating the community on diversity, equity, and inclusion so that each student feels supported. Likewise, several faculty across campus create opportunities for “difficult conversations” such as the Just Conversations series run by the Department of Philosophy and Religion. It is important that every member of the University community has a safe space to speak their thoughts and be heard. I believe that if the University of Mississippi campus and Oxford community can work to become better, so too can our world.

In November of 2020, I reached out to my academic advisor, Professor Graham Bodie, to see if he knew of any open internship opportunities. I was hoping to further my studies in Integrated Marketing Communications and gain more real-world experience. In that conversation, he encouraged me to apply for a social media internship with Listen First Project, a 501(c)(3) that “leads a collaborative movement to heal America by building relationships and bridging divides.” As they continue on their website:

We transform division and contempt into connection and understanding. We enhance the impact, visibility, and voice of the interpersonal bridge-building field by aggregating, aligning, and amplifying the efforts of 400+ #ListenFirst Coalition partners into large scale, collective campaigns and strategies.

I applied for the internship later that week and was eager to get involved with an organization dedicated to doing so much good for our country. I was excited by the prospect of getting involved in non-profit work that was bigger than myself. A few weeks later, I was notified that I had received the internship and would start in January of 2020. I was told some of my responsibilities would include meeting weekly with the Listen First team, working on the day-to-day social media, contributing to different social media campaigns and events, and managing the weekly #ListenFirst Friday email marketing campaign. In many ways, this internship aligned with my Gen Z profile and desire to do good work in my community and beyond.

### **Listen First Project: A Brief Background**

Listen First Project was founded in 2013 on a bus ride from Uganda to Nairobi. After five years working in Republican politics, Pearce Godwin was returning to his native North Carolina to apply his knowledge of survey research and micro-targeting to the marketing context. In between, he applied for and accepted a position with Samaritan's Purse, spending six "eye opening months" among some of the most relationally rich humans he had ever met. As that life-changing experience came to an end, Pearce got reflective and penned *It's Time to Listen*, publishing those 551 words on his blog. What was originally intended to be not much more than



something for his parents and close friends ended up as an opinion piece in over a dozen newspapers across the United States.

Since 2013, LFP has added a pledge, signed by over 10,000 to date, and other resources such as conversation tips, summaries of research on toxic polarization, and information for businesses on how to create a Listen First culture. Most importantly, however, is the development and expansion of the #ListenFirst Coalition, now over 400 organizations dedicated to (a) inspiring hope and desire to transform division and contempt into connection and understanding; (b) equipping Americans with skills, opportunities, and courage to build bridges across divides; and (c) normalizing listening to understand, extending grace, and seeking common interests. As described more in Chapter 2, Listen First Project leads a collective impact network.

Of course, for me, the biggest change is that I now have the honor of working with this dedicated team of bridge builders everyday. Prior to starting my internship, I was not familiar with the bridge building space, but I was excited to become involved. I did some research over my 2019-2020 winter break to get ready for my internship. At first glance, I learned that the bridge building space works to bridge the many divides threatening our country. As survey after survey shows, most Americans agree that political polarization is a threat (“Political Polarization in the American Public,” 2014), and most also say it is important to reduce divisiveness in the US (“America’s Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness,” 2021). Toxic polarization, the way we demonize each other across differences, is pervasive, and Americans are often siloed in their echo chambers only listening to news and other sources that make this problem worse (Centola, 2020).

Listen First Project encourages positive conversation across differences. Even if you disagree with someone or have differences in background or experience, it does not mean that the conversation needs to be a negative experience. More often than not, you probably aren't as different as you might seem, and the conversation can be enlightening (“America’s Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness,” 2021). Listen First Project, and their vast network of mission-similar organizations, offers tips and ways to improve communication skills. At Listen First Project, we believe that if you #ListenFirst you can turn any conversation into a learning experience.

I did not realize how big of a field the bridge building space was until I became an intern for Listen First Project. At Listen First Project, we work to amplify the efforts of over 400 + organizations through the #ListenFirst Coalition which brings together the voices of many different organizations and nonprofits into large scale campaigns, projects, strategies, and innovations. As a member of the social media team, I work on a daily basis to amplify the voices of our coalition members through the creation of different social media posts on different internet platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. I am also in charge of writing emails for our #ListenFirst Friday campaign which is sent to over 9,000 people a week. For this email marketing campaign, I work with different people each week who want to spread a message of the positive effects of listening, conversation, and opportunities to get involved in the bridge building space. Through my work, I have gotten the chance to speak with hundreds of bridge builders who come from all walks of life and different backgrounds and communities around the country who all share the same goal of making America a more inclusive and less polarized place.

After many months as an intern for Listen First Project, I now consider myself a bridge builder in my own community and work to spread the positive messages of this organization in my daily life. I have also had the honor of serving as a University of Mississippi Undergraduate Research Assistant under Professor Bodie since June 2021. I am very thankful for this opportunity because I get to spread our work throughout the University campus and Oxford community.

### **The Current Project**

When thinking about ideas for my thesis, I realized that I wanted to incorporate my work with Listen First Project, our #ListenFirst Coalition, and the bridge building space. I hope that through my thesis I will be able to come up with new ways to help grow the bridge building community.

One of the biggest challenges I have witnessed working in this field is how to engage Gen Z. Right now, and based on some data analysis conducted by Cambria Findley-Grubb who works for both Listen First Project and Civic Health Project, the biggest demographic interested in our work is white women in their 50s and 60s. As a member of Gen Z, I believe I can bring some personal insight to this problem. Gen Z is a very complex demographic for many reasons, but the reason that sticks out most to me is because we're the first generation to grow up completely surrounded by technology and social media. We have felt the pressures and both positive and negative effects of social media since we were born. How people communicate with one another has fundamentally changed over the last decade. I believe it is extremely easy (perhaps too easy) to hide behind a computer screen; and more often than not, you are more likely to say things over the internet that you would not say face-to-face. This is one of the biggest reasons for an increase in toxic polarization in our society (Friedman & Schleifer, 2021).

Gen Z is also an interesting demographic to understand or “study” because we have dealt with many dramatic issues through our life span, including, but not limited to, increasingly polarized elections, racial tensions, and the Coronavirus pandemic. I believe that through these hardships, the Gen Z demographic feels a sense of urgency to build a better future for all generations. By talking to my classmates, peers, and friends, it has come to my attention that many people in our age group want to, like me, get involved to help communities become stronger.

A survey conducted in 2020 by The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tisch College showed that Gen Z is more “bridging” in their attitudes and behaviors than other generations. According to this survey, 83% of respondents say that they have the power to change the country, showing that Gen Z is eager to be involved in movements that are bringing about positive change (“Poll: Young People Believe They Can Lead Change in Unprecedented Election Cycle,” 2020). After seeing so much decisiveness and polarization over the last few years, Gen Z has realized it is their responsibility to take action to build a stronger future. In particular, COVID-19 has had an overwhelming impact on the lives of GenZers, with 79% of respondents in the Tisch College survey reporting that the pandemic has made them realize the impact of politics.

As an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) student at The University of Mississippi and as an intern for Listen First Project, I have learned that social media can be used to increase awareness and incite positive change. I hope to gain insight from exploring some internet and social media analytics and conducting interviews with representatives of nonprofit organizations who work with the Gen Z demographic to learn about what has worked and what has not. Additionally, I will use the knowledge I have gained from my IMC classes to provide a theoretically informed set of recommendations that will encourage GenZers to get involved in

the bridge building field. I believe that the Gen Z demographic has the opportunity to bring about great change when it comes to positive listening and conversation and to ending the toxic polarization that is hurting our communities. I chose to focus my attention on the Gen Z demographic because it is vital to engage this demographic in order to have a successful marketing campaign. As a member of Gen Z, I have witnessed how many bridge building organizations are not engaging with us as much as they could be. By using IMC strategies, marketers will be able to build strong relationships with this demographic for years to come. It is also important to point out that as an intern for Listen First Project there could be a conflict of interest, but I do not believe this to be true. I have acted as an independent researcher throughout this process by avoiding biases in my work.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction on why I chose the topic of engaging Gen Z in bridge building for my thesis. Chapter 2 will give the reader an overview of the bridging field and include a market segmentation of the Gen Z demographic. In Chapter 3, I will outline the methods I used to conduct a series of one-on-one interviews with leaders of bridge building organizations. Then in Chapter 4, I will use thematic analysis to uncover similarities in my interviews to better understand what the bridging field can be doing to engage with the Gen Z demographic. Finally in Chapter 5, I will make recommendations for bridge building organizations so that they are able to use IMC strategy to engage with Gen Z.

## **Chapter 2: Generation Z Building Bridges and Engaging Across Difference**

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: First, it provides the reader with an overview of the field known as interpersonal bridge building and why it is a growing, essential component of efforts to reduce toxic polarization. In order to heal the distrust and contempt fellow Americans feel toward each other, Americans must learn to listen despite differences. Second, it provides an analysis of the demographic known as Generation Z. In particular, I explore the psychographic profile and other elements that make this demographic unique and important for the work of bridge building organizations. Before either of those goals is realized, I first provide a brief overview of Integrated Marketing Communications as a framework for better reaching potential bridgers, especially those born after approximately 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

### **A Brief Overview and Introduction to Integrated Marketing Communications**

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) emerged throughout the late twentieth century as a way of thinking about mass-media-based influence (Grove et al., 2002). Before the 1990s, the majority of marketing efforts were dedicated to advertising, with functions such as public relations and customer relationship management also prevalent but not fully integrated into a working whole (Brunello, 2013). Beginning in the 1980s, the marketing world experienced a series of drastic changes from a primary reliance on traditional advertising to a collective marketing mix that reaches consumers in various ways. At first, IMC was defined as the alignment of multiple channels of communication, including marketing, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations (Thorson & Moore, 1996). Today, IMC can be

thought of as a general framework that provides “an integrated process or system that focuses on customers and brings all the functional elements of the organization together to meet customer needs and solve customer problems” (Schultz et al., 2015, p. 7).

### **A Shift in Perspective**

The primary shift organizations and marketers made when transitioning from a traditional mass marketing or advertising perspective to an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) perspective was from a focus on the product (or, more precisely the 4Ps of marketing) to a focus on the prospect. As Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) put it, “the most precious thing [agencies] have to sell today is a fundamental understanding of the receiver and what motivates that receiver” (p. 14).

Understanding one’s primary consumers was aided by the proliferation of the internet and social media platforms (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010), along with the growing sophistication of customer data collection and analytics (Zahay et al., 2009). As people shifted their interactions with brands and the companies that own them from physical point-of-sale transactions to virtual spaces (spaces that might include a website, multiple social media accounts, and myriad other touch points across multiple devices), the need for an integrated approach became more and more pronounced. Indeed, IMC uses synergy to advance a marketing campaign and reach a wider range of consumers. The technological advancements have created a whole new set of challenges for marketers, and it is integral that markets create solutions that satisfy customer needs.

This idea of offering solutions to customer problems is but one of many examples of how IMC thinking changed the traditional marketing and advertising landscape. Prior to the introduction of IMC, marketing professionals were largely focused on creating campaigns to

inform potential consumers of a product's benefits or attributes. Although communicating about brands and their identity remains an important objective for IMC professionals, it is even more vital to create and maintain long lasting relationships between brands and consumers. A brand must be able to achieve stability over time while being adaptable to current consumer needs (da Silvera et al., 2013). Brand identity distinguishes the brand in the consumer's mind which, in turn, encourages customer loyalty. Indeed, from the IMC perspective, the notion of brand really only exists in the minds of consumers, causing some to claim that the brand owner is not the company but the customer (e.g., Moore, 2015).

Today's society is also dominated by growing global competition and high dynamism (Brunello, 2013). This means that an organization must be able to communicate about its brands to consumers through multiple channels and through the use of differentiated marketing strategies. These marketing strategies typically include inbound/outbound marketing, publicity/public relations, advertisements, event marketing, SEO, influencer marketing, direct response, and interactive marketing, to name but a few (Brunello, 2013). Once a brand implements these strategies, there is a higher chance of forming successful brand equity and ultimately building the kinds of long-term relationships with customers that all organizations seek.

### **The Lofty Idea of “The Bridger”**

Bridgers are people “working to foster more constructive dialogue and understanding across group lines, bringing us together at a time when so many forces are pulling us apart” (GGSC, 2020, p. 5). Their work, often referred to as bridge building or interpersonal bridge building, promotes civic engagement, healthy conversation despite differences, and active listening. The bridge building world has grown dramatically and become more prominent in the last few years due to rising political tensions caused by a distrust of government, the Coronavirus



pandemic, and the mass media. In what follows, I will discuss the problems that bridge builders currently face.

### **The Problem For Which Bridgers Seek Solutions**

Countless surveys continue to show that Americans identify discord and division as major contemporary problems that are likely to worsen. For example, a 2019 PEW survey found that approximately three-fourths of both Republicans and Democrats believe they cannot agree on basic facts with members of “the other” political party. This has led to the majority of Americans feeling hostile towards their opposing counterparts and a loss of healthy public discourse. Indeed, 87% percent of Americans say that political polarization is a threat to our country (“Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal,” 2019). As perhaps the most striking example, in a review of several nationally representative surveys, Kalmoe and Mason (2018) found an estimated 15% of Republicans and 20% of Democrats “agreed that the country would be better if large numbers of opposing partisans in the public today ‘just died’” (p. 22). More profoundly, political polarization is only one among many types of distrust (Vallier, 2020), identity-based violence (Argo Ben Itzhak, 2019), and affective polarization (Edsall, 2021) that stand to threaten the American experiment. All of these markers have worsened or otherwise evolved in problematic ways, and it is trends like these that bridge builders work to reverse every day.

### **Some Solutions to Toxic Polarization**

Bridge builders have identified several solutions for the myriad types of polarization that threaten our country. Some are based on evidence that disinformation exists and is made worse by the kinds of media echo chambers created by social media and other platforms (Tucker et al., 2018). Organizations such as AllSides, The Factual, The Flip Side, and The Narratives Project

curate stories and provide analyses of media bias, allowing consumers to make more informed judgments on issues and read more widely than they might if left to their own social media feeds or preferred news outlets. Other solutions are based on the contact hypothesis originally proposed by Allport (1954) which asserts that contact improves intergroup relations. The fact that most people avoid intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998) has led to the formation of organizations such as Braver Angels, Crossing Party Lines, Living Room Conversations, and Resetting the Table that convene 1:1 and small group meetings as well as skills building workshops, providing opportunities to engage and the resources for how to engage others with whom you disagree.

Unpacking an extensive list of the various theories of change driving bridge building organizations is beyond the scope of this thesis (but see Hartman et al., 2022, for a recent review). Most relevant to our current discussion is a general agreement among those organizations dedicated to the work of depolarization that the best way to solve for these issues is by increasing opportunities for healthy dialogue between people who view themselves in opposition (Bodie & Godwin, 2020). If people can learn to engage in meaningful conversations with those on “the other side,” then there is a greater chance that people will realize that political, ideological, racial, socio-economic, and other demographic and psychographic differences are not what makes people human. A human’s political ideology is a trait, not an identity. And as important as it is to a healthy, functioning democracy to have dissension and disagreement, those cannot exist inside an ecosystem that creates rampant mischaracterizations of “the other” or deep-seated animosity for fellow humans (“America’s Divided Mind: Understanding the Psychology That Drives Us Apart,” 2020).

**There is Hope**

With all of this being said, there is hope for a brighter and more inclusive future for all. A large collection of data show that Americans believe healing our country is possible. According to a study conducted by More in Common, 66% of respondents expressed a belief that the differences between Americans are not so big that we cannot come together; only 34% reported that the differences between Americans are too big for us to work together anymore. Likewise, research by Public Agenda found that 72% of Americans reported believing Americans have more in common than what divides us, and 79% of people said that creating more opportunities for people to talk and interact with those who have different values and views would be effective in reducing divisiveness and destructive disagreement. Additionally, 62% of people said that if an effort existed to make it easier to support civility, they would be likely to participate (“Civility In America 2019: Solutions for Tomorrow,” 2019). According to Listen First Project, 75% of Americans are willing to set a good example by practicing conversation across divides, and 36% (more than 100 million people) want to see a national campaign promoting conversations. The bridge building field is dedicated to creating opportunities that invite people of all political and ideological, racial and religious, and generational or geographical stripes to come together and connect despite differences. The hope is that participants will realize their differences do not make it impossible to talk about current issues both positively and constructively.

The good news is that this kind of work does work; that is, bridge building is an effective method in reducing affective polarization (Baron et al., 2021). Once Americans take part in bridging workshops, get involved with campaigns, or take part in constructive conversation, many go on to express how the experiences brought them a new perspective and a greater sense of hope for the future. Too many Americans overestimate the level of ideological extremism that an “out-party” member possesses, making it seem difficult to come together in positive

discourse, but it is possible to lower these levels of animosity by conversing with someone on the “other side” (Drunkman & Levendusky, 2021). In fact, a large gap exists between how a group actually thinks versus how they are perceived by members of a different political party, something known as the perception gap (“The Perception Gap,” 2019). By bringing Americans together in bringing exercises, the gap shrinks, and the American Identity becomes more important. To support this claim, it is important to look at research that has been performed in the bridging field.

Braver Angels, one of the largest and most successful organizations working on the problem of political polarization, performed a study to assess the effects of reciprocal group reflection on partisan polarization. A total of 169 students at 4 universities were selected to participate in Braver Angels “Red/Blue” workshops. This research example is specifically important because participants are members of the Generation Z demographic and the future of the Democratic and Republican parties (Baron et al., 2021). “Red/Blue” workshops are based on couples therapy and marital counseling (Doherty, n.d.). Bill Doherty, one of the founders of Braver Angels, realized that, like a feuding couple, Democrats and Republicans can benefit from taking part in structured and facilitated dialogue. Specifically, Braver Angels workshops are based on the core principles of Couples Therapy: 1) altering the views of a relationship away from one sided responsibility, 2) modifying dysfunctional interactional behavior, 3) electing avoided private behavior, 4) improving communication, and 5) promoting strengths (Benson et al., 2012). The “Red/Blue” workshops are intended to evoke mutual vulnerability and seek to find commonalities in the midst of political differences. The purpose of these workshops is not to reach any conclusions, come to a decision on the “right” solution, or even to find “common ground,” but instead to gain a greater understanding of our shared humanity and the chance to

empathize with someone on the “other side” (Baron et al., 2021). This study concluded that these workshops significantly reduce polarization according to explicit and implicit measurements and an increase in willingness to donate to organizations that are dedicated to fighting toxic polarization (Baron et al., 2021).

### **Moving from Single Interventions or Programs to Integrated and Collective Campaigns**

Due to the ongoing global pandemic, online video-chat platforms are now a vital mechanism for cross-ideological communication (Binnquist et al., 2021). Video-chat platforms, like Zoom, make it easy for people to connect with others from the comfort of their own home, making Zoom and similar platforms a wonderful way to promote civic engagement with people who are different from you. There are both advantages and disadvantages to communicating over an online platform, but needless to say there is a great need for conversations in order to fight the polarization that exists in American society. Moreover, connecting people from different parts of the country is much more cost effective and scalable, making online platforms vital to bridge building work.<sup>1</sup> The more bridging conversations people can have with one another, the better.

A study was conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles to evaluate the effectiveness of cross-ideological communication by comparing participants’ feelings before and after taking part in an online workshop (Binnquist et al., 2021). A total of 122 people agreed to participate in cross-ideological communication with one another in order to measure the effects of virtual platforms on decreasing political polarization (Binnquist et al., 2021). This study intended to analyze emotions of participants after participating in a Zoom workshop to see if virtual platforms are successful communication mechanisms.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note here that polarization is not an exclusively US phenomenon. Work in other countries use similar technologies to connect people across difference (e.g., My Country Talks), and several organizations (e.g., Soliya) work to connect people across countries and continents as well.

As part of the study, participants were asked to rank their experience based on different questions on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree). According to this study the purpose of the research was to, “tackle the overarching paradox by showing how online video-chat platforms such as Zoom can be used to promote effective CIC among ideologically polarized individuals” (Binnquist et al., 2021, p. 5). The majority of participants rated the experience as much more enjoyable than they had expected. When asked to respond to the statement, “This interaction was enjoyable,” responses jumped from a 3.5 to a 5.5 after completing the workshop. On the other hand, when presented with the statement, “This interaction was stressful,” responses fell from a 4.5 to a 2.5. These statistics show that the video-chat space holds strong promise for the future of bridge building. The problem that marketers need to focus on is how best to market these online platforms because once participants join, the experience proves to be likable and stress free.

### **America Talks**

In 2021, the #ListenFirst Coalition kicked off its 4th annual National Week of Conversation with a virtual event called America Talks (AT). AT provided an opportunity for Americans of all stripes to experience a meaningful video-based conversation with someone who has experienced the world differently, either politically, spiritually, ethnically, geographically, or otherwise. Following the America Talks event that took place June 12-13 2021, participants were invited to speak about their personal experiences. Conversations are self-facilitated using a guided script and purpose-built platform to keep participants on track throughout the course of their conversation. Survey responses told a general story of positive interactions and a realization that political ideology does not make us less human. In addition, data from an earlier pilot of the event showed that 92% of participants expressed they felt heard, 60% reported they appreciated differences more, and 93% would join a conversation again. When asked about their America Talks experiences, responses included things like, the experience “reaffirmed my belief that most

Americans want the best for our country and countrymen and are more united than the media wants us to believe." Another participant said, "I had a meaningful conversation about politics with someone who, by their stats, would seem

likely to disagree with me. However, we agreed on the core of nearly every issue!" These are just a few of the many responses gathered from survey data that show that by having a conversation with someone on the other side of the political spectrum, people are able to see that differences do not need to tear us apart but instead bring us together in shared commonality.<sup>2</sup>

### **Bridge Building Through an IMC Lens**

Similar to an IMC approach to marketing and branding problems, the approach taken by the #ListenFirst Coalition is known as collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Collective impact refers to large-scale social change through broad cross-sector coordination (Kania & Kramer, 2011). According to the article by John Kania and Mark Kramer published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, the article that provides the framework for collective impact thinking, "large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations" (¶ 10). Cross-sector coordination is important to bridge building because organizations must align their goals to gain maximum reach on a marketing campaign.

Although research about collective impact is scarce, data are beginning to emerge suggesting it is a successful mechanism for change when dealing with complex, large-scale issues. Collective impact can be achieved when different groups or organizations come together to achieve lasting change by aligning their efforts to fit a common agenda.

Currently, the nonprofit sector commonly functions on the idea of "isolated impact" (Kania & Kramer, 2011). This type of approach refers to the idea that a goal can be achieved through a single organization working alone, usually by creating and deploying small-scale interventions or campaigns. According to "Collective Impact," 1.4 million nonprofit

---

<sup>2</sup> Although these quotes only provide anecdotal data in support of the power of collaborative bridge building work, other research shows similar trends. For example, Voice of the People and the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland run a program called Common Ground for the American People (CGAP). Using online (and nationally representative) public consultation surveys, CGAP "has revealed 170 policy proposals ... that elicit support from majorities of both Republicans and Democrats" (<https://vop.org/common-ground/>). This collaboration has recently been joined by Civic Genius and other #ListenFirst Coalition member organizations and is



a part of the 2022 America Talks+National Week of Conversation campaign.

organizations are working to tackle problems and often end up competing with one another instead of working together to reach a common goal. When organizations work in isolation, progress is significantly slower and the reach is far less than what would be achieved collectively (Kania & Kramer, 2011). It is no secret that social problems emerge due to both government and commercial activities and not by fault of the nonprofit sector, making it extremely difficult if not impossible for one non-profit to fix a complex problem on their own (Kania & Kramer, 2011). In “Leading Boldly,” Ron Heifetz, John Kania, and Mark Kramer discussed the difference between technical problems and adaptive problems. Technical problems are ones in which the problem is “well-defined” and the solution is already known beforehand, while adaptive problems “are complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change” (Heifetz et al., 2004, ¶ 17-18). Toxic polarization is an adaptive problem.

According to “Collective Impact,” there are five conditions for collective impact success: common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continued communication, and backbone support organizations. In order to achieve successful collective impact initiatives must, “involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (Heifetz et al., 2011, ¶ 6).

Collaboration is a fundamental aspect to achieving a successful collective impact initiative. Differing organizations must be aware of shared goals and be able to measure success using the same system. Additionally, it is important for organizations to promote the work of others in their collaborative network. One organization’s work is not more important than another when working within a shared collective initiative.

## **The Collective Impact of the #ListenFirst Coalition**

The collective impact network known currently as the #ListenFirst Coalition was born out of a meeting held in Chicago, IL in October of 2017. As described by Bodie and Godwin (2022),

A group of leaders doing conversation work across the country met in Chicago to explore the idea of a national conversation event. Out of that meeting, seven organizations worked together to build the first National Week of Conversation (NWoC) which debuted in April 2018. During that week, more than 100 schools, libraries, faith communities, activist groups, and nonprofits hosted conversations coast to coast in 32 states in celebration of NWoC. Organization asked participants to ground conversations in a commitment to “listen first to understand,” while the common #ListenFirst hashtag reached 2 million people through thousands of posts to various social media accounts (led by Twitter and Facebook). Survey data collected by member organizations showed that most NWoC participants walked away feeling more tolerant, understanding, appreciative, and curious toward people with different perspectives. Two-thirds rated the value of their conversation as a 9 or 10 out of 10, and more than three-quarters reported feeling better equipped and more likely to listen first to understand, as well as more likely to participate in future conversations across divides. In all, the events that comprised the first National Week of Conversation provided our team the initial evidence that a coordinated national strategy was not only possible but desirable...Building on momentum generated by the 2018 NWoC...an ongoing National Conversation Project was launched in fall 2018...Rather than commission a new organization, NCP was built in the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and shared ownership, taking the form of a consortium—a

group of organizations with similar needs that banded together to create a new entity to address those needs...More than encouraging specific conversations, NCP seeks to mainstream conversations across differences in which we #ListenFirst to understand.

As of January of 2022 (the writing of this chapter), the #ListenFirst Coalition features over 400 organizations who meet regularly to aggregate, align, and amplify the efforts of all partners into large scale, collective campaigns and strategies. Each organization seeks to recruit everyday Americans into their work. More importantly, those everyday Americans need to be a microcosm of America, recognizing all the diversity of thought, perspective, and experience. And herein lies the problem: How do you communicate with “all Americans” in such a polarized landscape? If Americans who call themselves conservative have a different vocabulary and preference for language compared to those who call themselves progressive, the notion of a single, broadly resonant message about bridging may be misguided. The main challenge of this work, therefore, at least from the perspective of IMC, is how best to identify motivated bridgers, seeking to understand the underlying motivations, values, beliefs, attitudes, and other characteristics of people who are likely influencers or “early adopters” of this work, and then how to leverage those champions to recruit others at various stages of readiness to change.

### **Who Are The Bridgers?**

Although I have provided an answer to “who are the bridgers” from the vantage point of those formal organizations and initiatives aligned around depolarizing our country, it is perhaps even more important for this work to begin to understand who are those individuals that populate the events, listen to the podcasts, read the newsletters, and participate in the campaigns that feature this work. Moreover, we must understand the demographic and psychographic profiles of the individuals likely to populate those events and engage in those activities in the future. If a

campaign to reduce toxic polarization is to be effective, it has to reach a wide and representative collection of Americans.

In January 2020, Citizen Data conducted a nationally representative survey of 2,400 Americans to better understand the makeup of a typical bridge builder. Based on their study, there are roughly 44.5 million bridge builders living in America today, roughly 13% of the population. Bridge builders can be characterized as people who value open-mindedness, collaboration, and compromise and who associate with and trust people who hold different views than their own (“Which Americans will work together,” 2020).

The Citizen Data report shows that the average age of bridge builders falls significantly younger than the average voting population, with an average age of 32 (“Which Americans will work together,” 2020). When it comes to gender breakdown, there are slightly more female bridge builders (52.4%) than male (47.6%). Research also shows that the average bridge builder is typically Caucasian, making up over 50% of the racial breakdown (Which Americans will work together, 2020).

The data provided by Citizen Data closely resembles that of Listen First Project, the backbone organization leading the collaborative impact movement. According to website analytics conducted by the Listen First team from January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021, the largest age group visiting the website was people ages 18-24, at 25.3%. The next largest age group includes ages 25-34, at 24.8%. Furthermore, we see that the gender makeup resembles that of Citizen Data, with females visiting the website more than males (59.7% vs. 40.3%).

There is extensive research from multiple sources that suggests the bridge building field leans heavily “blue.” Looking again at research from Citizen Data, who reports that a whopping 41.5% of bridge builders identify as progressive, and 41.12% identify as non-partisan; only

17.71% of bridge builders identify as Republicans. Similarity when looking at the audience breakdown for the 2021 America Talks event, 41.8% of participants identified as liberal, 17.5% identified as heavily liberal, and only 4.7% of participants identified as conservative (with just over 1% identifying as very conservative). This statistic accurately depicts the political makeup of the majority of bridge building events, meaning there is a significant lack of conservative participation.

The data provided in the previous paragraphs is intended to show an accurate representation of the typical bridger. By putting together the data presented, the typical bridge builder can be summed up as a Caucasian female in her early thirties with a Democratic or no political affiliation. The data above also provide evidence of Generation Z's place within the bridging field. The Gen Z demographic is in fact interested in the bridging movement and wants to be involved with ending toxic polarization in America. There are millions of GenZers in America today ("Which Americans will work together," 2020), but a large disconnect exists when it comes to Gen Z being actively involved within the movement. For example, only 4% of America Talks participants in 2021 were ages 18-25.

The purpose of my research is to discover where the disconnect lies between GenZ's active interest and their general lack of active involvement within the bridging space. Data show Gen Z is a large, untapped market of potential bridge builders. This market could better be reached by methods and strategies of IMC. It is imperative that brands are able to market to the next generation of consumers through understanding values that drive decision making (Jacoby, n.d.). We already know that GenZers possess bridging traits, so it is important to create a brand message that is authentic, necessary, and relatable to their current position in life. As Caroline Jacoby of the Adrenaline Agency said, "Gen Z has been bombarded with images their entire

lives, so they are used to scanning, sifting and sorting in short order. That means it's vital to get to the point with a cliff's notes version of your brand message." With so many messages fighting for the attention of Gen Z on social media, non-profit organizations need to use IMC to get their message across in the most effective way possible. If so many GenZ'ers are visiting web pages and identify with bridge building characters, then there has to be a reason they are not participating in workshops and events. What can the bridge building community do to make the space a more attractive environment for young people?

### **Generation Z**

Generation Z is defined as anyone born after 1996 (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). According to data collected by PEW, 52% of US-based Gen Zers identify as white, 25% as hispanic, 14% as black, 6% as asian, and 5% as some other race or two or more races. The fact that 48% of GenZers are nonwhite makes this generation the most ethnically diverse the country has ever seen (Parker & Igielnik, 2018). The majority of GenZers reside in urban and suburban areas, with only 13% of this generation living in rural locations ("Meet Gen Z," 2020). Additionally, Gen Z is more educated than prior generations with higher high school graduation rates and more students enrolling in college. According to research conducted by PEW in 2018, 57% of 18-21 year olds who graduated from high school are registered at a 2 year or 4 year university.

The biggest reason Gen Z is unlike prior generations is because they grew up completely surrounded by technology. Kim Parker from PEW reflected, "This is the first generation to come of age with technological advances such as the smartphone not as something new to be adopted, but simply as an accepted part of everyday life," making it easy to consider GenZers "digital natives" as few remember a time before technology was a daily part of life (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Gen Z also has grown up in a polarized American society highlighted by a plague of domestic issues, including a worldwide pandemic, racial tensions, contested elections, school shootings, and cyberbullying. This has led to many GenZers feeling it is their duty to become activists in their own communities and a desire to share thoughts and feelings online through social media platforms. Indeed, research shows that many members of Gen Z feel as though it is their duty to fix the world that we live in today so that our next generation won't have to live through times of divisiveness and disarray.

Research shows that Gen Z is interested in getting involved with organizations committed to changing the current trajectory of America. Although with this being said, it is important that their voice is heard when becoming involved with different civic engagement organizations. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tisch College, "young people increasingly believe that they have the ability to work together to effect social and political change." After seeing so much divisiveness in this country, GenZers are interested in getting involved with movements that promote equality, fairness, and safety for all ("Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice," 2018). This generation is inspired by being able to heal America through collaboration with others in their age group. By comparing data from 2016 to 2018, there has been an increase in hopefulness when it comes to being actively involved in positive political change ("Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice," 2018). In 2018, 72% of respondents between the ages of 18-24 agreed that dramatic change could occur if people banded together compared to 67% in 2016. To add to this, in 2018, 72.6% of respondents agreed that we can work together to promote important political goals, compared to 64% in 2016 ("Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice," 2018). For so long Gen Z, has



been forced to remain on the sidelines as older generations have made decisions for our country, but now that many members of this generation are coming of age, they have the opportunity to have their voice heard in a meaningful way. A majority of the survey participants (55.4%) also reported that they are worried that older generations have not thought about young peoples' futures, and 62.9% believe older generations have not done enough to secure their futures ("Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice," 2018), meaning that Gen Z is eager to get politically involved in order to benefit one another.

According to CIRCLE, Gen Z is most concerned about issues dealing with environment/climate change, racism, and healthcare access/ affordability (Dispelling Myths about Youth Voting, n.d.). Gen Z is also more likely to push for an activist government and would prefer for the government to solve problems rather than business or individuals (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

### **Summary**

Gen Z stands out from every generation that came before because they are the most racially and ethnically diverse and most educated generation yet (Parker & Igielnik, 2018). They care strongly about promoting equality, fairness, and safety for all ("Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice," 2018), meaning that bridging

organizations must be able to create campaigns that evoke emotion from this group, and give GenZers the chance to be heard.

Bridging organizations will benefit from using IMC strategies to engage with Gen Z. We know that Gen Z is bombarded with so much information on a daily basis on the Internet and social media platforms (Jacoby, n.d.), so marketers must be able to stand out from the crowd with the use of differentiating IMC strategies.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods used to investigate the potential for bridge building organizations to target Gen Z. Toward that goal, I was able to recruit prospective interviewees through my ongoing work as an intern for Listen First Project. In order to attain the best secondary research, I reached out to bridging building organizations who claim Gen Z as their primary target audience. After receiving responses from perspective organizations, I was able to schedule and conduct virtual interviews. From here, I performed my own thematic analysis of the interviews to determine similarities in engaging Gen Z in the bridging space.

#### **Population**

In order to be interviewed, an interviewee had to be an employee or volunteer at a major bridge building organization. For purposes of this project, all organizations featured are members of the #ListenFirst Coalition. This is important because these organizations communicate regularly, use similar measurement systems to analyze success, and are working towards a common agenda to reach collective goals. In addition, the organization had to have an explicit focus on Gen Z. Table 4.1 and 4.2 provides a list of all organizations that fit these two criteria.

#### **Sample**

Sampling is the method of selecting a specific sample for research purposes. It is important because a sample is usually intended to represent a larger population (“Your ultimate guide to sampling and best practices, n.d.). Convenience sampling was used for the purpose of choosing interviewees, meaning that I chose respondents that were easily accessible (Lavrakas, 2008). This type of sampling worked best for my project because I already had strong connections within the space.

I was able to recruit for my interviews through relationships I have formed through my

work as an intern for Listen First Project. Over the last year and half, I have worked with many

non-profit organizations in the bridge building space. I am the lead copywriter and creator for the #ListenFirst Friday email marketing campaign for which I work with a different organization each week, providing me with insight on what organizations are actively involved with the Gen Z demographic. Additionally, I have worked on collective impact campaigns and witnessed how organizations are interacting with Gen Z. As part of the onboarding process for joining the #ListenFirst Coalition, organizations identify which populations they primarily target with their work. Any organization who claimed an explicit focus on GenZ or “youth” were included as possible interviews (see Table 4.1). I then reached out via email to heads of seven of these organizations as an initial, potential sample. The organizations that responded and were able to meet at a time that would work for my thesis project were Made By Us, CommonAlly, The American Exchange Project, and Bridge USA. The interviewees' respective organizations' work is geared heavily towards the Gen Z demographic. The interviewees are considered to be bridge builders and are dedicated to creating solutions to some of America's most divisive issues. I ended up conducting four interviews. The first interview was with David McCullough, executive director of The American Exchange Project, alongside Zoe Loza, creative director of The American Exchange Project, and Claire Jeantheau, social media at The American Exchange Project. The second interview was held with Manu Meel, Chief Executive Officer at BridgeUSA. In the third interview, I spoke with Howard Brodwin, co-founder and Chief Impact Officer at CommonAlly. The fourth and last interview I conducted was with Caroline Klibanoff, managing Director at Made By US.

Even though I interviewed individuals affiliated with four organizations, I believe that these organizations offer a representation of what is happening within the entire realm of the bridge building field when it comes to engagement with the Gen Z demographic. Indeed, in

conversations with my advisor, Dr. Graham Bodie (who also serves as Chief Listening Officer for Listen First Project), he agreed that these four organizations are among the key players in this space. After conducting four interviews, I witnessed saturation in my quantitative data, meaning that further sampling would have been redundant (Saunders et al., 2018).

## **Procedure**

All procedures used for this thesis were approved by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (See Appendix A). For each interview I conducted, I started out by asking the interviewee for their permission to record the interview to use for research purposes. All four interviews agreed to be recorded and expressed their interest in being a part of my thesis project (thus fulfilling the informed consent criterion). Each interview lasted anywhere from 15-35 minutes. Each interviewee also asked if I would share my thesis with their organization once completed as they believe my insights will be beneficial to their respective work.

The interviews were conducted virtually because the interviewees live in various parts of the United States. I conducted three of the interviews over virtual meeting platforms, Zoom and Microsoft teams, and one interview over the phone. Even though I was unable to hold these interviews in person, I believe that use of virtual platforms worked well for the purpose of my project.

I conducted in-depth interviews guided by a specific set of questions intended to learn more about how organizations are engaging Gen Z within the bridge building space (see Appendix B). I followed the same set of questions for each interview, but each conversation I had ultimately went in a different direction. For the interviews, I used a set of open-ended questions, rather than questions that would prompt a simple “yes” or “no” response. I chose to ask open-ended questions in order to prompt a conversation that would offer insights from the

interviews' personal experience. I wanted the interviews to feel like a conversation between friends instead of a structured interview. Based on the insight I received from asking open-ended questions, I was able to veer off script and ask additional questions based on their answers.

## **Analysis**

My analysis is based on the idea of “Thematic Analysis,” a method of qualitative research. In simple terms, thematic analysis can be defined as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 76). Thematic seeks to uncover important themes in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When uncovering themes, it comes down to the judgment of the researcher, but thematic analysis offers a theoretically flexible approach to the data set. In order for a theme to be noted, it needs to exhibit three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). Recurrence refers to an idea emerging more than once over the set of interviews (Scharp, 2021). Repetition means the amount of times and word or phrase was repeated (Scharp, 2021). Lastly, forcefulness relates to the amount of empathetic and evocative energy present about a given subject (Scharp, 2021).

I used thematic analysis to identify similarities in their responses to my open-ended questions. As mentioned above, in order for a pattern in response to be considered a theme it needed to fall under specific criteria: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). I then sorted themes and analyzed why these themes are important to Gen Z’s engagement within the bridge building space.

Through the four interviews I conducted, I quickly saw similar themes emerge. This was not surprising as all organizations featured are nonprofits working to achieve collective impact together. After conducting four interviews, I witnessed saturation in my quantitative data,

meaning that further sampling would have been redundant (Saunders et al., 2018). Thus, my choice to cap the interviews at four is reasonable; I believe that if I conducted more interviews, the same themes would have been highlighted.



AUDIENCE_C	MISSION_STATEMENT_C	NAME	PRIMARY_EMAIL_C	WEBSITE
College Students	The American University Project on Civil Discourse encourages and supports students in understanding speech not only as a matter of rights, but of responsibility, values, and opportunities. It works on the principle that each of us must be the architect of our own voice, choosing to use it in service of our goals and values and in a manner that contributes to our learning community.	American University Project on Civil Discourse	lchwart@american.edu	https://www.american.edu/spa/civildiscourse/
College Students	Non partisan events around the country with a flare of humor	Everybody Loves Lincoln	jacqueline.koppell@gmail.com	https://creativevisions.networkforgood.com/project/52161-creative-visor
College Students	Catalyze a generation of leaders to bridge divides and strengthen our civic dialogue.	Move for America	libby@move4america.org	www.move4america.org
College Students	Perspective is a platform striving to promote the common intellectual by stimulating thoughtful discussion and strongly emphasizing on interactions between contrasting viewpoints.	Perspective, Inc.	lyman@perspectiveapplication.com	https://www.perspectiveapplication.com/
College Students	The mission of the Bonnie and Bill Stubblefield Institute for Civil Political Communications is to serve as an active center for the study and promotion of civil political discourse. Inspire intelligent, authentic and constructive debate, and encourage positive civic engagement for both students and the public alike. We seek to demonstrate that when opposing viewpoints are respected and legitimized in ways that avoid negative labeling, alienation, and silencing, it can strengthen our nation. Ads ability to better face challenges and solve problems.	Stubblefield Institute for Civil Political Communications at Shepherd University	gfilds@shepherd.edu	stubblefieldinstitute.org
College Students	The Center for the Political Future (CPF) combines rigorous intellectual inquiry, teaching, and practical politics to advance civil dialogue and research that transcends partisan divisions and finds solutions to pressing national and global challenges. Our events, programs, scholarships, and internships inspire and train students for careers in public service and lifetimes of civic engagement.	USC Center for the Political Future	kakhaven@usc.edu	https://dornsife-center-for-political-future.usc.edu/
College Students	Bring everyone on the political spectrum on campus together to have small group conversations to build bridges and give students that experience	We Listen USA	welistenusa@gmail.com	https://www.welistenusa.org/
College Students	YapPolitics aims to bridge the partisan divide between affiliation by providing young people an interactive, productive, and enjoyable way to debate politics.	YapPolitics	aidan@yappolitics.com	https://yappolitics.com/
College Students	GVSU. Ads Padnos/Sarosik Center for Civil Discourse will prepare students to be agents of social change who practice and model civil discourse.	Padnos/Sarosik Center for Civil Discourse	perhamul@gvsu.edu	https://www.gvsu.edu/civildiscourse/
College Students	Up to Us is dedicated to building a sustainable economic and fiscal future for America. Ads next generation. Up to Us doesn't just educate and engage - it empowers. Our unique program provides emerging leaders a platform for facilitating a collaborative dialogue on the country. Ads most vexing challenges.	Up to Us	son@netimpact.org	https://www.itsuptous.org/
College Students	Vote by Design is an immersive, non-partisan, digital learning experience designed to promote more civic engagement, agency and action among all voters, and particularly next-gen voters.	Vote by Design	lisa@dschool.stanford.edu	https://www.votebydesign.org/
College Students	The Civics Corps is a national, community-college-based initiative that empowers students and their local communities to be leaders in civic service, intergenerational engagement, and civics education.	Bay College Civics Corps	kleej@baycollege.edu	https://www.baycollege.edu/student-life/clubs-activities.php
College Students	We envision a pluralistic world where diversity is embraced and conflicts are transformed into opportunities for collaboration and collective learning. Our mission is to prepare rising generations to approach differences constructively and lead with empathy. We teach social and emotional skills through technology, at scale, such as active listening, asking good questions, and emotional awareness through bias and stereotype recognition by using a dialogue model in the presence of highly trained facilitators and have participants tackle difficult political and cultural topics.  Soliya is an international not-for-profit organization and a pioneering virtual exchange provider. We combine the power of interactive technology with the science of dialogue to offer proven cross-cultural exchange and learning opportunities. Our work has been supported through strategic partnerships with the European Commission, the Government of Canada, and the Stevens Initiative of the Aspen Institute as sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. In 2019, Soliya was recognized by Canada. Ads Global Centre for Pluralism as an Honorable Mention recipient of the Global Pluralism Award.	Soliya		http://www.soliya.net
College Students	The Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition fosters connections and provides year-round support to campus, nonprofit, community, student, and philanthropic leaders working to build a more representative and equitable democracy by increasing college student voter participation and engagement in our democratic processes.	Students Learn Students Vote Coalition	danny@slsvcoalition.org	https://slsvcoalition.org/
18 - 30 year olds	By 2026, Made by Us will be a leading catalyst for shaping the future of our country. Ads democracy by empowering younger generations to know and act on the promise of America. Ads founding ideals: equality, rights, liberty, opportunity and democracy. This will be achieved by connecting Americans to more than 1,000 history and civic organizations nationwide through a digital platform and micro exhibits that puts timely issues in historical context. We want to help real people address real issues in real-time. Ads tools powered by history.	Made by Us	klihanoff@si.edu	www.historymadebyus.org
Millennials with some faith influence who aren't completely sold on a major party	Create a culture of American unity for the next generation by producing content, experiences, and leaders that inspire it today.	Liberatus	calebpaxton@liberatusdc.org	https://www.liberatusdc.org/
academic leaders and students	Establish a program that leverages Mercatus capabilities in academic research, attracting talent, convening experts, advancing ideas, and conducting outreach, to model civil discourse, develop tools to build bridges, and foster pluralism among academic audiences and civil society. We will become the premier hub for understanding the roots of illiberalism and developing various pathways for forging a more liberal and pluralistic society.	Mercatus Center at George Mason University - Program on Pluralism and Civil Exchange	manderson@mercatus.gmu.edu	https://www.mercatus.org/tags/pluralism-and-civil-exchange
		BridgeUSA	manumee@bridgeusa.org	bridgeusa.org
		Common Ally	howard@commonally.com	https://www.commonally.com/

Table 4.1. Bridge building organizations who target college students

AUDIENCE_C	MISSION_STATEMENT_C	NAME	PRIMARY_EMAIL_C	WEBSITE
High School Students	To foster interactions between Americans from different backgrounds. Study abroad in your own country.	American Exchange Project	david@americanexchangeproject.org	https://www.americanexchangeproject.org/#home
High School Students	Civics Unplugged is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) social enterprise whose mission is to empower the leaders of Generation Z to build the future of democracy.	Civics Unplugged	dariel@civicsunplugged.org	https://www.civicsunplugged.org/
High School Students	promoting monthly discussions in libraries and classrooms throughout America	ProjectCivAmerica	amanda.smithfield@mnp.org	https://projectcivamerica.com/
High School Students	To reach, inspire, support, empower - give kids a platform for their voices to be heard; instill a sense of belonging in other students (peer wellness); empowering students to empower each other	RISE @ Oxford High School	mehayden@oxfordsd.org	RISE Oxford High
High School Students	Creating a new generation of empathetic leaders, active listeners, and critical thinkers by facilitating civil discourse in high schools.	The Acceptance Project	tahavahanvaty@gmail.com	https://www.theacceptanceproject.org/
High School Students	Empowering students to amplify their civic impact together.	Youthquake	shah.r.rachna@gmail.com	https://youthquake.me/
High School Students	Allelo. Ads mission is to ensure that safe, open, and equitable student discussions are at the center of modern education.	Allelo	danhack@allelo.io	https://www.allelo.io/
High School Students	Growing leaders who lead by listening	The Lead Listening Society	leadlistingsociety@gmail.com	https://www.leadlisteninginstitute.com/lead-listening-so

Table 4.2. Bridge building organizations who target high school students

## **Chapter 4: Results**

In this chapter, I will analyze the themes that I uncovered in the interviews (see Appendix C for transcribed interview). These themes were highlighted in response to the following questions:

1. What motivates Gen Z?
2. What are the positive factors of working with a Gen Z audience?
3. What are the negative factors of working with a Gen Z audience?
4. What are strategies to engage Gen Z in bridge building work?
5. How do bridge building organizations define success with respect to the Gen Z demographic?

The interviewees are all experienced bridge builders and have worked in the bridge building space for multiple years. Additionally, each bridge building organization's mission is slightly different, but all are working towards healing America through collective impact with one another (see Appendix D for a short description of each organization and its mission.).

The first interview I conducted was with David McCullough, executive director of The American Exchange Project, alongside Zoe Loza, creative director of The American Exchange Project, and Claire Jeantheau, social media at The American Exchange Project. The second interview was held with Manu Meel, chief executive officer at Bridge USA. The third interview I spoke with Howard Brodwin, co-founder and chief impact officer at CommonAlly. The fourth and last interview I conducted was with Caroline Klibanoff, managing director at Made By Us.

### **Part One: What Motivates Gen Z**

Knowing a target market's motivation is the key to any successful integrated marketing communications campaign. One might argue that it is impossible to reach a specific audience without understanding what motivates their decision-making processes. By using thematic analysis, I was able to uncover what these four organizations have experienced as motivating Gen Z in their actions and what is most important in their respective work when it comes to engaging with this demographic.

Gen Z has lived through a plague of divisive, violent, and heartbreaking issues that have changed the course of America forever. Events including the COVID-19 pandemic, race riots, mass and school shootings, increasingly polarized elections, cyberbullying, a rise in fake news, amongst others, have been some of the most poignant that have likely influenced Gen Z in myriad ways. As many surveys have shown (Van Kessel, 2020), society is hurting, and we are told that the future is in the hands of Gen Z (Hamblin, 2020). Surveys show, among Gen Z respondents, there is a lack of trust towards older generations (“Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice,” 2018) because more and more issues continue to take place. So where is the hope? The hope is Gen Z and that this age group will be able to learn and grow from past mistakes. From these interviews, I have witnessed that these four organizations believe that Gen Z is motivated by a desire for change, a desire to be heard, and a desire to right America’s wrongs.

**A desire for change.** Bridge building organizations have witnessed that Gen Z is eager to see real change in America. This demographic is excited at the prospect of being able to take part in building a better future for all. Being involved in an organization, whether on a national or local level, is very appealing to Gen Z; they want to feel a part of something bigger than

themselves. Many Gen Zers also want to stand up and be activists in their own communities, as evidenced in my interview with American Exchange Project:

*With your generation, you have come up with social media and you have come up with issues that are actually uniquely American and so for a lot of folks it has actually decreased their enthusiasm in America while it has actually increased their desire to help those in need and advance causes of social justice.*

This is an important (and common) theme because so many people have lost a sense of trust and hope in America. With so much divisiveness and polarization, there has been a heightened desire to help other people who might be feeling lost. These bridging leaders expressed that the GenZers in their networks understand that real change won't happen in a day, but they feel the real possibility of making a difference. Seeing so many young people struggling, especially during the COVID pandemic, has caused a rise in empathy within this demographic (Perna, 2021). My interview with CommonAlly expressed this sentiment quite well:

*So, they see the world through more of that lens in being able to forge your own path, being willing to get your hands dirty, and get in and do the work. I will say that's been probably one of the most impressive things I've seen. And again speaking very broadly, I see this generation being very willing to get in and do the heavy lifting and the hard work and it's not like put up a fight about it or I shouldn't have to do it or anything. It's very much like wow there is a lot of problems in the world and the previous generation have a) caused them and b) haven't fixed them so I guess it's on us to do something about it, okay let's get to work.*

**A desire to feel heard.** So many bridge building organizations started because the founder(s) witnessed that a space did not exist where people could come together to simply listen to one another. I've heard similar stories time after time about the lack of outlets that provide people with a chance to take part in healthy, constructive dialogue. And it is quite a compelling argument: In such a polarized age, one that the majority of people feel is vitally important to change, why aren't more people coming together to discuss where the real problems lie in order to create real change? Manu Meel, founder of Bridge USA, is just one of the many founders of bridging organizations that experienced this situation first hand.

*So Bridge USA started in 2017. I was a freshman then so not much older than you, I think maybe a year older. We basically started because there were these huge protests on our campus because a speaker by the name of Milo Yiannopoulos was invited, and he is this sort of right wing [probably "wing"] provocateur; and essentially our campus environment really exploded that there was so much apathy, so much pessimism within, and I felt people in our generation there is just this real desire for people to have a conversation. And so we essentially created a space the next day where people could just listen and hear each other and think about what happened the day before. I had no interest in politics and still don't, frankly. I was a pre-med major then, and this idea of having this space where people could listen and hear each other really resonated, so we just kept doing it.*

This example is especially important to my work because the experience took place on a college campus. I would argue that every university in America deals with difficult issues from time to time, especially around political differences. Every campus across America invites speakers to campus that may express (or have expressed) perspectives that are offensive or otherwise problematic to at least some students on that campus. Do we just say, "Well, some of our

students don't like your opinion, so we're sorry to have to say no to your coming after all?" As hard as these issues are for the university to figure out, it also causes alienation and division amongst students. This leaves students feeling alone or without a safe space to voice their opinions. Of course, Bridge USA conversations are monitored by school faculty and use a set of guidelines to ensure the conversations are steered in a positive direction. Regardless, however, these conversations give students a place to feel heard without the fear of judgment. This theme is apparent in all four interviews that took place as each organization was created with the intention of providing Gen Z with a space where they can participate in healthy civic dialogue.

Too often than not, GenZers feel as though the only place they can feel heard is on social media. Again, this was likely exacerbated due to the pandemic, where face-to-face interactions were limited. But social media has also become a vital communication platform for this generation (Granados, 2017). Forbes Magazine described GenZ's relationship with social media by saying, "It's a lifestyle, not just entertainment" (Granados, 2017). It would not be uncommon for GenZers to have more virtual interactions than in-person conversations on a daily basis in spring semester 2020 and even into the 2021-2022 academic year. This, according to these organization leaders, has left Gen Z craving authentic, personal experiences that cannot be fulfilled by receiving a like on an Instagram post.

In my interview with American Exchange Project, they told me about an idea for a social media campaign around social media and its potential to distort reality:

*We're gonna use Instagram to say why your Instagram impression of a person is actually not enough to get to know somebody because we feel what we've seen in kids is that with young people and GenZers today that while they are very media savvy and social justice savvy that they got these other parts of their appetite that are totally famished,*

*unaddressed, unfulfilled. And those are real life experiences that get them into places where you're not comfortable, places you haven't seen before, get off of your screens and interact with the world and go have an adventure.*

Many GenZers are left feeling unfilled because satisfaction from social media is very temporary, while creating the real connection through in-person conversation is not. Gen Z is hungry to experience the world around them, and I am not talking about seeing pictures on the Internet. In order to fill the gap in GenZ's appetite, at least from a bridge building perspective, it is vital that they speak to people who are different from them. The American Exchange Project is dedicated to just that- offering GenZers an experience that will help them gain a new perspective, the chance to speak about their own experiences and share personal stories with others. Being able to sit down with someone from a different place in the United States or speak with someone whose childhood and adolescence looked completely different from their own is a life changing experience. So many times, we believe that there is no way we could relate to someone just because of the way we might look on paper, but that's not the case. By listening to someone, it is possible to realize the shared humanity that exists within the entire Gen Z demographic. And that is the power of bridging for Gen Zers who feel the need to be heard.

**A desire to right America's wrongs.** From my experience, and among my social network, Gen Zers typically believe some iteration of the following: America is far from perfect, and that's okay. The important thing is that we are able to learn from our past so we do not continue to making the same mistakes that got the world so polarized in the first place. The importance of history to a Gen Z audience was also expressed in my interviews. Particularly vocal about advancing a nuanced view of American history, something that should extend beyond the classroom, was Caroline Klibonoff of Made by Us:

*It is more important than ever to make sure that Gen Z has access to historic information and context about how we got here because as you know they are already shaping the country and they will continue to shape its future, and I think with the 250th anniversary of the United States on the horizon in 2026 there was a sentiment that you know history wasn't something that every American knows as much as they should and yet it can really help us as we figure out the next chapter for our country .*

Made by Us believes that studying history is essential to creating a more inclusive future. Gen Z has been taught in school about some of the people who came before us and many of the events that shaped our current country. But in order to be more historically aware, it is not only necessary to read history books and memorize facts, but to be aware of the bigger picture and your own role in building a better world. The future is literally in the hands of Gen Z, so it is that generation's responsibility to not repeat mistakes of the past. Many bridge building organizations promote the idea of history as it ties into civic engagement education, including AEP who said,

*Take a little bit of a look into history. You can see in history that sometimes changes happen through the institutions and initiatives in the moment and sometimes they are in direct reaction to those things.*

Gen Z is motivated by being directly and indirectly involved in changing the course of the world. It is both exciting and scary to realize that this responsibility lies in our hands. Gen Zers need to come together to spread the word that change is, in fact, possible. As we can see throughout history, change is often a ripple effect. By getting Gen Z involved in constructive dialogue, there is a real possibility of bringing change to the next generation.

## **Part Two: Positive Factors of Working with Generation Z**



Being the most educated and diverse generation in the world today, Gen Z brings real promise to the future of our country. Getting Gen Z more involved with bridge building is one way we can bridge the gap that exists in our society today. Gen Zers are not ones to lose hope and do not falter from the belief that change is possible. GenZers are known for their resilience, passion, and open-mindedness. It is these essential qualities that give my interviewees hope in reaching and mobilizing this generation in bridge building work.

**Gen Z is resilient.** GenZers are thought to be resilient despite the events they have lived through. After seeing so much fear and uncertainty in the last few years especially, Gen Z is said to have pushed through and never given up (Abrams, 2021). In times of struggle, they seem to remain strong and optimistic about the future. Even though Gen Z can sometimes be stereotyped as careless and politically unaware, research shows that this is not the majority (“Dispelling Myths about Youth Voting,” 2018). As expressed in my interview with The Made By Us Coalition:

*They're sort of like despite the circumstances, Gen Z people have grown up in from 9/11 onwards; they are really resilient and care about things and want to make the world a better place. So to me, we are seeing that kind of meaning. And a lot of older people will say like, “oh they don't believe in anything.” You know there is this type of nihilism, but I think it is there if you look for it. I think beneath the surface there is actually real craving to believe in something and be a part of something and make the world better.*

Gen Z has been forced to remain resilient during difficult times in our country. Bridge builders are dedicated to providing opportunities for GenZers to get connected to different organizations or to offer direct opportunities to participate in events and constructive dialogue. GenZers are experiencing a real craving to make a difference but sometimes do not know how to

get involved. Too often, GenZers probably do not realize that resilience is a key characteristic of a bridge builder. Working on bridging divides in your community is no easy feat, and it takes courage to stand up for what you believe in, as CommonAlly explains:

*So, it is a very different era and so you're right the things that you grew up around are right in your backyard. And you're like what can I do about this, and I think that's the other thing that's really impressive. It's a generation that recognizes we have some tools to do something about this.*

Being resilient also means being proactive in your daily life. The bridge building field is continuing to push the narrative of how small actions can have a large impact. According to the perspective of my interviewees, Gen Z is known for their ability to adapt in the face of adversity and face challenges head on. Many GenZers realize that current domestic problems have the potential to be only temporary if people are able to come up with solutions that benefit the greater good. If GenZers continue to move forward even in times of uncertainty, then it is possible for America to heal. Each person has their own set of internal tools that are too commonly left unused. These tools can include listening, being curious, extending grace, and suspending judgment. This demographic can show maturity from circumstance, a key trait to remaining resilient in times of hardship.

**Gen Z is passionate.** One key to getting Gen Z involved in bridge building is to use marketing and communications to light a proverbial internal fire. It is vital that marketers use specific techniques to encourage active involvement in a cause. The way to do this is by giving Gen Z a role in the process and making them feel as though their contributions are important to the work.

That sentiment was present in all of the interviews, perhaps most memorable by Manu Meel of Bridge USA.

*I think there is such an appetite right now because people are just pissed off. People in my generation and our generation are just like can't we just get along. And not along for some kumbaya sake but to get along to make progress. We're just shooting ourselves in the foot right now, so that frustration is what we are trying to tap into. That's the idea there.*

In the case of bridge building, Gen Z's role is necessary to change the current trajectory of America. Cause marketing has the ability to directly increase levels of passion in the nonprofit sector. Cause marketing can be defined as “a mutually beneficial collaboration that aligns the power of a company's brand, marketing, and people to a charitable cause's brand and assets to create shareholder and social value, connect with constituents, and publicly communicate values” (Daw, 2006, p. 37). Bridge building work is a perfect fit for cause marketing to increase passion for the work of depolarization. Marketers can drive engagement within Gen Z by uplifting their message in a fun and exciting way. Gen Z is a passionate demographic who wants to feel like they are directly connected to an organization's mission.

*The positive is they're so passionate, they want to do things (Made By Us).*

Perhaps enhanced because of Covid insolation, this demographic wants to be involved in something meaningful. They also are craving engagement with something outside of their academic studies. For example, this demographic demonstrates a high level of interest in fighting for what they believe in and expressing their ideas on different issues over various social media platforms (“The Importance of Incorporating Youth Voices and Perspectives in Media,” 2020). Of course, there are plenty of pros and cons to using social media as a mechanism to insight change, but these platforms are where GenZers are residing (Kim, 2021) with 66% of GenZers saying that social media is an essential part of their lives (“How Different Generations Use

Social Media—and What this Means for Your Business,” n.d.); thus, it is vital that bridge builders meet them there.

It is also important to point out that the word “activism” comes with many different connotations. An activist is often considered to be someone who is heavily liberal and progressive (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Many bridge building organizations want to change the way that people view activism to make it more inclusive and less political.

*One of the things we're trying really hard to do as well is we wanna' kind of reframe, or reimage even what the term activist mean. Because I think in general, like an activist is painted primarily as a liberal; as someone who is taking action against something that they want to change and be progressive. And it's different for everybody, not everybody is going to go on a march somewhere. Not everyone even has the ability to do that. So, I think for us it's more about kind of reframing and reimagining what does that mean like what does it means to just get involved.*

*Like I said being an activist doesn't mean we're having a march on Saturday and you have to show up and if you don't show up you don't get to call yourself an activist. Like that's bullshit. So that a big thing for us, is being able to again connect, to meet your generation where you are. And say “you want to get involved” here's 8/10 ways to get involved and supportive of something thats important to you. And every single one of them is meaningful and impactful if you are willing to put the time in (CommonAlly).*

In order to increase the levels of passion for bridge building efforts, it is important that bridge building organizations redefine what it means to be involved, to be active (or activist) participants in making a difference. One example that seems promising comes from the 2021 AT campaign. Benji Backer served as co-host with Zoë Jenkins. Benji is founder of the American

Conservation Coalition that inspires conservative youth to be activists for climate issues. Zoë was a fellow with Civics Unplugged and was drawn to this work after the Parkland School Shootings, and she was further motivated to create DICCE after racist microaggressions in her school.

Currently the bridging space is heavily liberal; most of the organizations in the #ListenFirst Coalition were founded by progressive-leaning individuals, though there is increasing diversity in that regard. Clearly, progressives are not the only intended target market for bridging organizations. For these efforts to flourish, the Coalition must represent a mix of different political ideologies and backgrounds. Progress is not going to happen by only talking to people who think the exact same way or convening groups when the overwhelming majority of participants lean left. Additionally, being a bridge builder does not mean that you have to necessarily be the most politically involved person. Second to liberal leaning individuals at the 2021 America Talks event were individuals self-identifying as moderates. To add to this, there has been an increase in people self-identifying as Independent versus Democratic or Republican (Jones, 2022). If you are passionate about being involved with positively impacting the future of America, then the bridging space is the perfect outlet for you.

**Gen Z is open minded.** After conducting my interviews, I was able to witness how these organizations believe that Gen Z is open-minded to new possibilities and ways of living. My interviewees compared Gen Z's outlook and worldview to the perspectives of their parents and grandparents. Within Gen Z, there seems a more universal desire to change the narrative and build a more inclusive society, one that is welcoming of all genders, races, sexual orientations, and ethnicities. Interviewees believe that this generation considers advocating and standing up for others especially when people are being discriminated against for identity-based reasons.

Gen Z

is continuing to push for equality and fair treatment, making bridge building the perfect outlet for action (“The Importance of Incorporating Youth Voices and Perspectives in Media,” 2020).

Bridge building organizations push the message that differences are what make us stronger, and GenZers believe that differences make us unique and special. As voiced by McCullough of AEP,

*So I will say and I am going to paint this with a very broad brush so it's been very interesting for me to kind of engage with this younger generation and learn a little bit about who they are and what they are motivated by and kind of how they see themselves and their place in the world. In juxtaposition to the generation just ahead of them and with very, very broad strokes, I noticed that the millennial generation, they tend to be the kids the grew up with the every kid gets a trophy, right, the participation trophy. They are used to kind of everything kind of being given to them and there is a bit of sense of entitlement. And I've experienced it myself, and I've spoken to plenty of other colleagues in our industries and it is a fairly prevalent thing. And it's not everybody but it does tend to be more common. And what fascinated me about engaging more with the Gen Z demo is you're not like that at all. They see the world and their place in it very, very differently.*

The topic of equality for all is definitely more prevalent than it was a few decades ago.

The four organizations in my sample have witnessed how Gen Z believes that the world needs to be more inclusive and welcoming of different types of people. Indeed, being open-minded is a key characteristic of bridge builders of any age. Being able to converse with people who are different then you takes courage. It can be scary to go into a conversation knowing other people have different political ideologies or perspectives and experiences. Prior to a person's first conversation across difference, many express fear of judgment. It takes patience to speak with others about tough issues. In our country today, the issues we are confronted with often are

viewed differently based on the way people were raised or where they grew up. By coming into a conversation with open-mindedness, it offers people the chance to explore their shared humanity. At the end of the day, progress will come by people realizing that issues aren't so blue or red, and that people agree on way more than what the media shows us ("America's Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness," 2021).

Living through a wide range of domestic struggles, Gen Z has been forced to digest the idea of polarization. Gen Z has been forced to really think about the struggles of others at a very early age. This has provided the demographic with lots of insights on what it means to be truly American in this day and age. Because of this, Gen Z is open-minded to new ways of taking action in their community.

*One of the things that really struck me when the students were participating in conversation during the exchange was how insightful they were, how open minded they were, and just how engaged they were in those conversations that it almost seemed like when we brought an adult in a room was kind of when things shifted but when the students were talking to each other there was such a maturity in the way that they were conversing that really kind of surprised me (American Exchange Project).*

All four bridge building organizations featured in this report concluded that GenZers benefited from participating in structured discourse. This age group is responsive to different views and ideas. Additionally, Gen Z once again is able to show a maturity from circumstance by the way they are able to process views that are different from their own. After taking part in bridging events, many GenZers are left with the question, "What can I do?" It is the work of

organizations like those in my sample to provide them paths to work with dissimilar others to build the kind of society that works for all.<sup>3</sup>

### **Part 3: Negative Factors of Working with Gen Z**

It is of utmost importance that marketers understand the negative factors that come with working with Gen Z. Understanding the hardships that this demographic faces on a regular basis is key to being able to engage in the most effective way. It is vital that marketing teams are able to transform these negatives into something positive, so that they are able to actively engage with this target market on various platforms.

**The fight for attention.** It comes, perhaps as no surprise, that marketers from any sector are struggling for GenZ's attention. There is so much on the mind of this demographic and so many corporations and issues fighting for their attention that it can be difficult to stand out. Gen Z is so social media savvy, and they are constantly scrolling through their different accounts and seeing thousands of advertisements on a daily basis (Jacoby, n.d.). This can make it difficult for bridge building organizations to remain present in the mind of this demographic. From an IMC perspective, brands exist in the minds of consumers; thus, bridge building organizations must learn to grab the attention of Gen Zers where they are.

The competition for Gen Z's time is the biggest struggle faced in this field. Gen Z has so much going on in their lives at any given moment, so why would a young person want to fit a bridging event into their already hectic schedule? What can bridge building organizations do to incentivize or otherwise encourage Gen Z to engage as bridgers in their daily lives? Even though we see that bridging works once we get GenZers there, what approach can marketers take to

---

<sup>3</sup> It is instructive to note that initial A/B message tests for the 2022 America Talks and National Week of Conversations found the highest conversion rate for messages stressing how we can come together to act.



Increase levels of involvement? There is no simple answer, but being able to understand the difficulties can provide insight to better understand the problem in question.

*Most of the people that do this bridge building stuff are older, and why would you want to spend your twenties, when, you know, you're trying to find your people and your friends? You know what's the incentive going across the aisle or, you know, just meet different people? You're probably trying to find people like you for the first time. You know you're not just in high school with everyone, you're finally like "okay, I'm on my own." I'm talking about adults Gen Z here, I guess. So, I guess while the mission of bridge building is really important, and I believe in it, I think there needs to be critical thinking around why, why that matters to people in that stage of their life. On the other hand, it is a really important stage of your life to meet people who are different than you because you know otherwise like when are you gonna' meet them?*

Caroline Klibanoff from Made By Us gives great insight to the paradox of the problem in the quote above. This stage of life is crucial for forming new relationships to better understand yourself and your place in the world. On one hand, many GenZers are craving to discover themselves by meeting people similar to them, to find their place in the world, a place where they belong. Bridge builders believe it is equally, if not more, important to meet people who are different. Because this demographic is not content with the status quo, I believe that they are eager to converse with people from different backgrounds. As Caroline pointed out, many GenZers are now reaching early adulthood with the oldest members of the age group turning 25. This means that GenZers are now able to start their own lives and pave their own path. It is pivotal that this age group is able to take part in bridging at this stage of their life so that they can take the wisdom to their future life endeavors.

With all this being said, it is important to note that the older or young adult GenZers are not the only sector of the group that requires a strong fight for attention. One could argue that it is even more difficult to get the middle or high school students involved in this work. It definitely takes a very different approach to understand the younger parts of this generation because many might not understand the world yet. According to the organizations I interviewed, it may not be appropriate to bring together a group of middle school students and ask them to talk about some of America's most polarizing issues, so there are different ways to approach what it means to be a bridge builder so that the younger portion of Gen Z is learning to speak constructively at an early age.

*All of our chapter focuses right now are on community colleges, large public state schools, and trying to get local private colleges involved and actually a lot of them have a huge appetite for it. And to expand beyond just that 50%, that's why we have started high school chapters. It's purely experimental right now because it is a very different dynamic. And with high schoolers you're competing with a lot more of their attention and time, but that's why we're going to high schools to go beyond sort of that elitist approach, and you're absolutely right (Bridge USA).*

In order to get younger generations actively involved, it is vital to provide a fun and enlightening space with a less serious tone. To reach Gen Z, marketers must be able to understand the makeup of the demographic. Even though this demographic is motivated by similar things, it would be unrealistic to assume that the group is identical. When it comes to the fight for attention, each GenZer has their own set of priorities and interests. It is important that the bridging space is inclusive and meets the wants and needs of a wide range of people.

**Lack of civic education.** One of the biggest patterns I witnessed from my interviews was the challenge of lack of civic education curriculum in schools. The majority of Gen Z is not 18, meaning that they have not yet been able to register to vote. The makeup of Gen Z that is of voting age has been able to vote in one or two elections. So how are they being prepared to be conscious and thoughtful civic participants?

Too often than not, Gen Zers are not educated on even the simplest political terms or issues. The media and social media often paint issues in simplistic terms such as “red” or “blue.” Bridging organizations offer many opportunities to fix this problem including interactive educational resources, access to unbiased media, and the chance to uncover how historical information is shaping the future.

*The other side of what we did out of the gate was a lot of just education and I think what we've found and I'm curious again if you've stumbled across this too is that there is a large chunk of the population both the Millennials and the Gen Z population that just don't have a very broad basis of civic education because they just weren't given it in school and it's not their fault and that's the thing, it's not just this you know you should know these things. It's that you just weren't taught this in school. And I think that was a big eye opener for me was to see the disparity across the country of civic education curriculum in school systems. You know I learned all that stuff when I was in school and I'm like that doesn't exist anymore. It was completely shocking to me so it's like well of course then how would you expect people to want to be civically engaged if they don't know how the process works. So that became a big one of us, how do we start with the just the basic education? (CommonAlly).*

Many GenZers did not (and still do not) receive adequate instruction on how to be an informed and active citizen, part of the American democratic experiment. Consequently, getting involved with civic engagement opportunities can be eye-opening for this generation. Young people all over the country are struggling with their own political identity at least partially because they were never taught about what it means to be politically involved. This generation gets their news and information from social media and the internet (Shearer, 2021), and this can be dangerous. According to PEW, 64% of Americans say social media has a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. today (Auxier, 2020). Learning about the news of the world by catchy headlines designed to motivate link clicks can leave many GenZers feeling lost and confused on where they are supposed to stand on the political spectrum. Bridging organizations are dedicated to making this process easier and more exciting for young people.

CommonAlly is one of the organizations working to fight political deformation and make civic education accessible to young people. The CommonAlly app was created in the summer of 2019, during the presidential debates. This app performs candidate matching by giving the user the opportunity to share what is important to them. Additionally, the app takes away party affiliations when looking at certain issues to create an unbiased and more personalized user experience. This is a great tool for young people because it makes it easier to see where you stand on the political spectrum. It also creates a fun learning experience. If more people can get involved on the CommonAlly app, it will make the political process less stressful, and you will be able to learn more about yourself in the process. Another app that targets a general population is Activote.

There is also a lack of education when it comes to the historic side of education. Many times, young audiences do not have the proper knowledge of historical events outside the things

they learn in school. Made By Us witnessed a large disconnect between the historic education system in schools and what this generation is doing with the information. GenZers do not realize that they have a wide range of historic resources available to them through bridging organizations. It is vital that Gen Z understands how we got to where we are as a society so that they can positively shape the future for generations to come.

*So Made By Us is a coalition of museums and historic sites that has teamed up because they realized that they didn't know how to individually engage Gen Z, that was a big gap in their knowledge and skills. And at the same time it is more important than ever to make sure that Gen Z has access to historic information and context about how we got here because as you know they are already shaping the country and they will continue to shape its future and I think with the 250th anniversary of the United States on the horizon in 2026 there was a sentiment that you know history wasn't something that every American knows as much as they should and yet it can really help us as we figure out the next chapter for our country. So Made By Us connects GenZers with history and we do that in a number of different ways, you know online, we do brand partnerships, we try to help museums kind of step into the civic space which is also something new to many of them and we do research and we do big programs that are designed around Gen Z needs and prioritize their interests and their needs over the interests of the institutions (Made By Us).*

Civic and historic education go hand in hand. It is important that Gen Z has access to resources that enable better understanding of themselves and America as a whole. Bridging organizations want to help Gen Z become more civically engaged so that this cohort is able to communicate with one another in a positive and effective manner. If Gen Z is able to be properly

educated about the polarization that exists today, there is a possibility that it won't exist tomorrow.

**Hard to measure success.** Being able to measure success from bridge building is difficult. This is an issue prevalent not only with the Gen Z demographic but within the entire bridging field. In order to achieve collective impact in this field there needs to be a shared measurement system between organizations (Kania & Kramer, 2011). A current grant funded project is underway toward this goal. With this generation being so new and data being limited, it can be difficult to conclude if this type of work is actually making a difference.

*The trap that most people in our field fall into is not acknowledging how difficult it is and also acknowledging how improbable the goals and objectives are. The reason I say that is so that we can come to terms with the fact that this is really an uphill battle with those on the extremes and also to instill a level of realism and understanding into how we approach these problems (CommonAlly).*

The overall goals and objectives of the bridging space make it difficult to define success. This is because the goal of the bridge builders at the end of the day is to heal America and decrease polarization, and both these goals are largely long term and dependent on factors other than bridging. It is improbable to suggest that success will happen quickly, but the smaller achievements of this space is what gives it hope. Collective impact makes bridging goals possible because no one organization is capable of achieving success on their own. When organizations work together to benefit the greater good rather than in isolation, remarkable progress can be made.

It is important to set reasonable goals that are clearly understood within the organization

and the entire bridging space. Additionally, it is important to be realistic about the goals being set so that they have measurable outcomes. For example, measuring depolarization rates in America is complex, but it is possible to measure the number of people attending events or rates of engagement on social media for a bridging campaign. All these smaller objectives are working to achieve a bigger, longer lasting goal.

*It is very difficult to define success in this space because the ability to measure depolarization outcomes is really tough. It's not concrete. I know one of the things our field is doing is working on goals and measures. It's something I'm working on. And it goes back to your negative aspects like I think you should identify this, I can't confidently tell you right now that our work actually depolarizes a space. I can tell you that students love it, that they learn about it, they come out with a great experience, and a lot of testimonials. But the actual measure of depolarization is tough right now (Bridge USA).*

As Manu suggested, one way that bridge builders can measure success is by collecting testimonials after participants take part in bridging workshops, events, or campaigns. All four organizations interviewed have received feedback that shows their work is making a difference in the lives of young people. Even though evidence that polarization rates are dropping as a result of bridge building is only nascent, the more young people that can become involved in this space, the more hope there will be for these goals to one day be achieved.

#### **Part 4: How to Engage Gen Z**

It will take patience and perseverance to engage Gen Z in this space. If organizations can show Gen Z that they have the ability to become bridge builders in their own communities and their voice is needed in this space, this feat will become more plausible. It is no secret that a place to meet GenZers is on social media, so the bridging field needs to create exciting

campaigns to encourage this demographic to become involved. After meeting Gen Z on social media, organizations need to build relationships on trust. Lastly, bridge builders need to provide Gen Z with opportunities that are unique and relatable to their place in life. Based on my interviews, if bridge builders can meet Gen Z on social media, build authentic relationships with them, and give them places in their work where they feel important, there will be a rise in Gen Z engagement within bridge building.

**Meet on social media.** Gen Z grew up completely surrounded by technology, referred to as the iGeneration (Dimock, 2019); thus, social media is an ideal avenue to meet this demographic. This age group resides on virtual platforms, so it is vital that bridge builders meet them there. If it is possible to engage Gen Z on social media, then they will at least be aware of these opportunities and perhaps become more interested in getting involved in different programs.

One of the ways to increase engagement on social media within the Gen Z demographic is by creating interesting and humorous campaigns. Most of my interviews suggested Gen Z is not going to be interested in a campaign that is completely focused on political awareness because this generation already sees enough of that on by seeing the news across social media platforms.

*But in terms of like, how to directly get people engaged. The other thing that we're trying to do, we're trying some innovative campaigns that just tap into the sentiment of people. So an example of that is we're thinking about launching a campaign next year called the F word campaign, pardon my language but its straight up just f\*\*\*\*\* listen to each other, just f\*\*\*\*\* get along and just publishing and getting merch thats focused on driving people to that feeling because that's the feeling that's so pertinent right now. The*



*other thing is partnering with celebrities, partnering with political leaders. Right now we are doing an event on October 14th, where we're partnering with a celebrity to get people there, and there is a lot of students there. So, yeah, there are ways to get people engaged, but I think on social media we just need to be a lot more punchy and a lot more and a lot less risk averse.*

Bridge USA created the "Let's Talk" campaign as a way to increase Gen Z engagement. There is so much animosity in the air, and this campaign gives GenZers the opportunity to let loose and speak their minds. Campaigns, like this one, encourage young people to express what about the current political atmosphere is bothering them, and this is not referring to a certain political opponent or party; instead, the focus is on what about America's polarized atmosphere can be fixed. This campaign is not meant to be inappropriate, but instead taps into the frustration that so many GenZers are feeling. As expressed in my interview with American Exchange Project, messaging to Gen Z should bring a human element.

*So you need to find a product that's gonna' have wide appeal to everyone and therefore play on things that are much more human that way you can be consistent in your messaging. Absolutely you can vary based on your audience but the biggest thing I've seen that has been successful in marketing is the quality of the product because if you look at what draws most young people to our program it's that they get impressions through our social media and answers through our website but they come to us through word of mouth (American Exchange Project).*

It is important to always stay authentic in the messaging being put out on social media. In order to get Gen Z involved, they are going to need to feel as though they relate to the organization in some way. When Gen Z sees a social media campaign, the goal is that they feel

as though they can benefit from this type of work and want to take the next step to get involved. Marketers need to remember to create a sense of community across social media platforms. This social media community should be welcoming of all people from all walks of life. Bridge building campaigns succeed when they create a picture of a shared sense of humanity in a fun and interactive way.

**Build a relationship.** To get Gen Z involved in bridge building, organizations must build relationships with their target market. It is not enough to simply hide behind a computer screen and come across as a robot. Marketers need to show GenZers that they will be able to form real connections through being a part of a given organization. Through bridge building, GenZers will be able to form relationships with members of the organizations' community.

*So that for us is how do we build a bridge and be able to say you want to meet young people, you got to meet them where they are, and you gotta' to be clear and accountable and transparent and build a relationship and we will bring of you together if we do this properly and that speaking towards both sides about again that trust and that accountability and transparency. So, to me that's the foundational principles of how to engage with this generation (CommonAlly).*

With so much fake news on the internet, GenZers do not know who to trust. It is important that organizations are clear about their actions from the very beginning, especially if members are providing personal information about their political views. Organizations need to remain transparent at every step of the process so that participants feel comfortable sharing their stories. One of the reasons that bridging is so popular is because many participants do not feel as though they have another space to express their opinions or views, so a loss of trust would be detrimental to this work.

Another way that relationships are formed is through participants getting to know each other on a personal level. Bridge building is a great outlet to make new connections and get to know people who would never meet otherwise. This is especially important for the Gen Z demographic who crave a deep relationship with others.

*We know our programs can work and we've seen them work. And they work because of the interactions and the relationships that are built. So, there are kind of two ways we can gauge success. Way one is how well the programs go but way two is how many kids we can get engaged in those programs (American Exchange Project).*

The American Exchange program takes high school students from around the United States on an exchange program to another place in the United States, following their high school graduation. During this trip, GenZers are able to experience an American culture different from where they grew up. By spending time with a fellow American student, amazing relationships grow. While on paper these kids may look quite different from each other, this program helps foster life-long friendships.

**Give Gen Z a role.** Many GenZers are not okay with standing on the sidelines; they want to be actively involved in a cause. Based on this characteristic, bridging organizations believe they should provide Gen Z an active role in the bridging process, motivating deeper involvement because they feel their voice is important. One way to look at it is by viewing bridge building as a journey, and Gen Z's voice is needed to keep the voyage afloat. It's not enough to have Gen Z involved for the sake of being involved; rather, it's important, as expressed by Caroline of Made By Us, that bridging organizations give this demographic a place in their work.

*Give them a role. And you know ideally a paid role. And make them a part of the process the whole way. I feel like you have to expect, you might have expectations in like dialogue*

*or civic engagement or whatever else. They are an expert in what it is like to be Gen Z today like they are an expert in their own world, inviting them in to bring that perspective is really, really important .*

It is also important to note that bridge building organizations have a lot to learn from Gen Z, too. The majority of these organizations are run by older demographics, which is not a negative thing, but there needs to be more opportunities created for Gen Z to be involved with leadership opportunities.

### **Summary**

The interviews I conducted offered me insight on how to better understand and engage with Gen Z. Each organization leader mentioned the importance of meeting this generation on social media platforms, and giving them an opportunity to be heard. Engaging with Gen Z is no easy feat, but it can be possible if bridge building organizations use clear and concise marketing messages to reach this demographic. Through analyzing the four interviews, I now am able to make recommendations on how the bridging field can best engage with Gen Z.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

When I began working for Listen First Project, I honestly had no clue about the scope and potential of bridge building. The work sounded important, but I was unsure of my place in the movement. After working alongside the staff at Listen First and their hundreds of partner organizations, I not only see my place in this work but can also speak, from my perspective as a member of Gen Z, to what may motivate other young Americans to accept a bridging identity. Added to my perspective are the voices of four leading bridge building organizations dedicated to increasing the reach of this work to the next great generation. Below, I provide some general insights I have made from my secondary and primary research.

### **How to Reach Gen Z**

Through gathering data from various sources and performing my own thematic analysis of the interviews I conducted, I am able to make recommendations on how the bridging field can best engage with the Gen Z demographic. Although my recommendations are limited to the research I conducted for this thesis, I believe that they will benefit the bridging field as a whole. At minimum, they provide a compelling and empirically defensible starting point for how an IMC perspective is a needed component of reaching Gen Z.

Each organization I interviewed mentioned the struggle of engaging Gen Z, so it is vital that bridging organizations incorporate new marketing practices into their work. It has become evident that the bridging space will be most successful by working together on collective impact campaigns. The mission of bridging is too large to be done in isolation, so organizations need to work together to engage Gen Z in meaningful and effective ways. There is a greater chance of

reaching this specific audience when organizations are able to align their missions and goals to serve a common purpose.

In order to make the best recommendations for the bridging fields, I have separated the recommendations into three different categories: short-term goals, mid-term goals, and long-term goals. I believe looking at what we can do immediately, what we can plan to accomplish within the next 12 months, and what is possible in the next 3-5 years is the most effective manner to present my recommendations because organizations will be able to benefit from using a timeline to achieve the recommendations in question.

**Short-term recommendations.** The purpose of my short-term recommendations for the bridging field is to give direction to organizations on what they can be doing in the current moment. It is important that bridging organizations do not wait to meet the Gen Z demographic. Currently, there are many active campaigns across social media that organizations have the chance to uplift on their own channels. In other words, organizations that do not have a current message that appeals to Gen Z can borrow and adapt messages from other organizations in this space, or better yet collaborate and amplify those messages that already exist. The more organizations that are involved, or just spreading the word across social media, can greatly increase the reach of any given campaign.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Bridge USA currently has a campaign running targeted toward the Gen Z demographic. The campaign's tagline is "Let's f\*cking talk to each other" (see here for more information). The purpose of this campaign is to point to the proverbial elephant in the room: Our society has seemingly lost the ability to engage meaningfully with each other. Through analyzing my interviews, I noticed the four organizations witnessing a similar theme of how it is increasingly difficult for Americans to come together in conversation.

This campaign gives GenZers the opportunity to express themselves and their feelings toward the current political landscape. According to BridgeUSA's research, 60% of college students avoid talking about issues such as politics, race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender, to name but a few. Bridge USA's campaign gives GenZers the opportunity to talk about their frustrations, and gives this age group the chance to take America's problems into their own hands. There are so many misconceptions about how or why people believe the things they do, and through conversing with others about beliefs, progress can be made. It is vital that bridging organizations looking to engage Gen Z get involved with this campaign on social media, so that this age group can feel as though their voices are heard.

**Mid-term goals.** (In addition to immediate steps for engaging Gen Z), it is important to recognize the underlying civic engagement arc that helps organize the work of bridge building organizations. This arc runs the course of the year, beginning in January and ending in December. It typically starts in January with National Day of Dialogue, followed by America Talks and the National Week of Conversation in April, and the Made By Us Civic Season during the summer months. After July 4, around the start of most fall semesters on college campuses, there is an increased focus on voter engagement and enacting one's civic responsibility of electing public officials. This arc, graphically displayed as Figure 5.1, is used by Made By Us when they explain to their member organizations how their work fits with the work of other organizations and coalitions.

The campaigns just mentioned are some of the largest in the bridging field, and they rely on support from many organizations coming together to make it happen. If bridging organizations want to engage with Gen Z, then it is vital that this generation is aware of the events and campaigns taking place. Organizations need to create campaigns for these events that



Figure 5.1. Civic Arc Schedule



are directed towards GenZers' specific wants and needs. It is not enough to use the same ads and social media posts towards people of all ages and backgrounds. Organizations must develop exciting ways to reach the Gen Z audiences on social media platforms by reaching into the sentiment of young people.

**Long-term goals.** Finally, bridging organizations should look beyond the next 12 months, or what a typical year-long bridging engagement arc might look like, and explore what shape this work takes among GenZers 3-5 years out. It is important to set reasonable long-term goals for the future so that organizations are able to achieve maximum impact. Without a roadmap for the future, organizations will not be able to grow. In the bridging fields, it is important to set standards for how you see the organization changing in the next few years. For example, organizations in the bridging sector must work on creating a strong corporate image by having a strong media plan. Having a trustworthy corporate image is vital for two reasons: to create strong relationships with your target market and to develop stakeholder relationships. Large bridging events, such as America Talks and NWoC would not be possible without funding from large corporate partners. America Talks 2022 is sponsored by Walmart, Google News Initiative, Fetzer Institute, Microsoft, Twitter, and The Bridge Alliance. This would not have been possible without bridging organizations providing concrete evidence that bridge building does in fact work, and has the ability to grow with donations and funding. On the other hand, creating a meaningful image for any given organization is vital to growing a target market. Additionally, it is vital that organizations work to expand leadership and employee relations because having a strong team will make or break how successful a business will become.

Bridging organizations aren't just looking for GenZers to attend a singular event or get involved with one campaign, they need this demographic to keep coming back and continue

participating. It is important that participants enter their communities and express their positive experiences to families, friends, and neighbors. The bridging field will continue to grow every day, just as Gen Z continues to grow.

There has never been a better time for bridging organizations to bring the message of hope to Americans all over the country. The research I have provided throughout my thesis, including secondary research and my own primary research, shows time and time again that America is hurting. So many Americans are frustrated with the current political landscape, but believe change is out of their control. But bridgers know that this is not the case, it is possible for America to heal by coming together, and creating something more powerful than what any of us can do alone.

Bridge building puts power back in the hands of Americans, and gives them the opportunity to form relationships with people who they would never have met otherwise, and the chance to form a better relationship with their own self. A political ideology should not separate us but bring us closer together as differences are what make each person special. And, at the end of the day, the majority of Americans want the same thing, a society that values: safety, equality, and fairness, and that is welcoming of all different races, sexual orientations, genders, backgrounds, and cultures. I would attest that our differences are what make each and every one of us uniquely American.

Gen Z has grown up in a deeply polarized America, a world where people are constantly fighting about things that are largely out of their control. Bridge building gives GenZers the opportunity to build a better future than the one they grew up in. We know that GenZers care deeply about one another and the world around them, so bridging gives them the chance to put their beliefs into practice.

With all this being said, none of this matters if Gen Z does not know about bridging opportunities or how to get involved. Bridging values are deeply aligned with the values that GenZers hold near and dear to their own hearts. In order to increase engagement, marketers must use an IMC strategy. Cause marketing and collective impact campaigns can be used to bring awareness to this nonprofit work, but it is not enough. Marketers must create a comprehensive digital marketing strategy that works to engage with Gen Z in all steps of their lives. Organizations must build up trust and give Gen Z a place in this work, so that they can feel like they are making a difference beyond their normal scope of life.

If there can be a rise in Gen Z engagement within the bridging space in the next few years, then it is possible for the world to become less polarized and to see a real decrease in negative political discourse. Gen Z is the most educated and diverse generation the world has ever seen and is open to new ways of thinking, making them the perfect target market for bridgers to focus their attention. The future of America lies in the hands of the Gen Z demographic, so if the next generation of Americans are also bridge builders, amazing things will happen.

## List of References

- Abrams, S. J. (2021, January 30). *Op-ed: Generation Z's surprising optimism should give the rest of US hope*. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-01-30/generation-z-politics-optimism-activism>
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018, May 31). *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2018*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>
- Argo Ben Itzhak, N. (2019, November 27). *The Science of Polarization and Insights for Bridge-building*. Medium. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://medium.com/office-of-citizen/the-science-of-polarization-and-insights-for-bridge-building-c8a12bf8c87e>
- Auxier, B. (2020, October 15). *64% of Americans say social media have a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the U.S. Today*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/15/64-of-americans-say-social-media-have-a-mostly-negative-effect-on-the-way-things-are-going-in-the-u-s-today/>
- Baron, H., Blair, R., Choi, D. D., Gamboa, L., Gottlieb, J., Robinson, A. L., ... West, E. A. (2021, May 10). *Can Americans Depolarize? Assessing the Effects of Reciprocal Group Reflection on Partisan Polarization*. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/3x7z8>
- Benson, L. A., McGinn, M. M., & Christensen, A. (2012). *Common Principles of Couple Therapy*. *Behavior Therapy*, 43(1), 25–35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2010.12.009>
- Beyond Conflict . (n.d.). *America's Divided Mind*. Beyond Conflict. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://beyondconflictint.org/americas-divided-mind/>
- Binnquist, A., Dolbier, S., Dieffenbach, M., & Lieberman, M. (2021). *The Zoom Solution: Promoting effective cross-ideological communication online*. *Research Square*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-907468/v1>

- Bodie, G. D., & Godwin, P. (2020). On the limits of listening for bridging divides and cross-cultural understanding. In L. Chao & C. Wang (Eds.), *Communication across differences: Negotiating identity, privilege, and marginalization in the 21st century*. Cognella.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. p. 76
- BridgeUSA. (n.d.). "*Let's F\*cking Talk to Each Other*". BridgeUSA. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.bridgeusa.org/lets-f-ing-talk/>
- Brunello, A. (2013). THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND BRAND EQUITY. *International Journal of Communication Research*, 3(1), 9–14. Retrieved April 6, 2022.
- Centola, D. (2020, October 15). *Why social media makes us more polarized and how to fix it*. Scientific American. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-social-media-makes-us-more-polarized-and-how-to-fix-it/>
- Citizen Data. (2020, January 14). *Which Americans will work together?* Citizen Data. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://citizendata.com/news/internal-news-article/>
- Civility in America 2019: Solutions for Tomorrow*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.webershandwick.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CivilityInAmerica2019SolutionsforTomorrow.pdf>
- da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.020>
- Daw, J. (2006). In *Cause-Marketing for Nonprofits: Partner for Purpose, Passion, and Profits* (p. 37). essay, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where millennials end and generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
- Doherty, B. (n.d.). *Couples Therapy Principles in the Design of the Braver Angels Red/Blue WBilorkshop*. Braver Angels. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://braverangels.org/couples-therapy-principles-in-the-design-of-the-braver-angels-red-blue-workshop/>
- Druckman, J. N., & Levendusky, M. S. (2019). What do we measure when we measure affective polarization? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 83(1), 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz003>
- Edsall, T. B. (2021, September 29). *How much does how much we hate each other matter?* The New York Times. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/29/opinion/political-polarization-partisanship.html>
- Friedman, W., & Schleifer, D. (2021, April). *AMERICA'S HIDDEN COMMON GROUND ON OVERCOMING DIVISIVENESS CHARTING A PATH FORWARD*. Public Agenda. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.publicagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/HCG-Overcoming-Divisiveness-2021.pdf>
- Godwin, P. (2017, November 14). Divisions have never been worse. Why? [web log]. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.listenfirstproject.org/listen-first-blog/?offset=1513267200883>.
- Godwin, P. (2021, May 18). *America talks: Toxic Polarization threatens our nation's future. Here's how we can save it*. USA Today. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/05/18/how-america-talks-can-help-save-us-from-toxic-polarization-column/5035082001/>
- Granados, N. (2017, June 20). *Gen Z Media Consumption: It's A lifestyle, Not Just entertainment*. Forbes. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nelsongranados/2017/06/20/gen-z-media-consumption-its-a-lifestyle-not-just-entertainment/?sh=4808c93318c9>
- The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. (n.d.). *Bridging Differences Playbook*. Greater Good Berkeley. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging\\_Differences\\_Playbook-Final.pdf?\\_ga=2.216476437.228652250.1613596670-205390209.1613596670](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Bridging_Differences_Playbook-Final.pdf?_ga=2.216476437.228652250.1613596670-205390209.1613596670)

- Grove, S. J., Carlson, L., & Dorsch, M. J. (2002). Addressing services' intangibility through Integrated Marketing Communication: An exploratory study. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 16(5), 393–411. <https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040210436876>
- Hamblin, A. (2020, October 21). *Gen Z is ready to change the world. They just need you to let them*. Viewpoint. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://viewpoint.pointloma.edu/gen-z-is-ready-to-change-the-world-they-just-need-you-to-let-them/>
- Hartman, R., Blakey, W., Womick, J., Bail, C. A., Finkel, E., Schroeder, J., Sheeran, P., Van Bavel, J. J., Willer, R., & Gray, K. (2022). Interventions to Reduce Partisan Animosity. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ha2tf>
- Heifetz, R. A., Kania, J. V., & Kramer, M. R. (2004). *Leading Boldly*. Stanford Social Innovation Review: Informing and Inspiring Leaders of Social Change. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/leading\\_boldly#](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/leading_boldly#)
- Jones, J. M. (2022, January 17). *U.S. Political Party Preferences Shifted Greatly During 2021*. Gallup. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/388781/political-party-preferences-shifted-greatly-during-2021.aspx>
- Kalmoe, N. P., & Mason, L. (2018). Lethal mass partisanship: Prevalence, correlates, & electoral contingencies. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA.
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). *Collective impact*. Stanford Social Innovation Review: Informing and Inspiring Leaders of Social Change. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)
- Kelly, J. S., Jones, S. K., Hagle, R. A., Schultz, D. E., Moore, D., Galka, R., Hughes, A. M., Azzaro, M., Weinberg, R., Moore, J., Hunter, V.L., Zelenski, S. T., Kreutzer, J. J., Stevens, R. P., Glasgow, J. B., Ellis, D., Prescott, C., Noriega, J., Lieber, M. A., ... Walker, K. L. (2015). *The Imc handbook: Readings & cases in Integrated Marketing Communications*. Racom Communications.

- Kim, K. (2021, July 27). *How to make sure you're marketing to Gen Z the right way*. Sprout Social. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/marketing-to-gen-z/>
- Kitchen, P. J., & Burgmann, I. (2010). *Integrated Marketing Communication*. Wiley *International Encyclopedia of Marketing*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316568.wiem04001>
- Lavrakas, P. J. (2008). *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. SAGE.
- More in Common. (n.d.). *The Perception Gap*. Perception Gap. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://perceptiongap.us/>
- Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70(3), 274–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638409383697>
- Parker, K., & Igielnik, R. (2020, May 14). *On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What we know about Gen Z So Far*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>
- Perna, M. C. (2021, July 27). *How The Pandemic Is Inspiring Gen-Z To Rethink Their Education And Career*. Forbes. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2021/07/27/how-the-pandemic-is-inspiring-gen-z-to-rethink-their-education-and-career/?sh=68edc7b110ca>
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup Contact Theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49(1), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65>
- The Pew Charitable Trusts. (2020, December 9). *Meet Gen Z*. Living Facts. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.livingfacts.org/pl/articles/2020/meet-gen-z>
- Pew Research Center. (2019, October 10). *1. the partisan landscape and views of the parties*. Pew Research Center . Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/10/10/the-partisan-landscape-and-views-of-the-parties/>
- Pew Research Center. (2019, September 10). *Partisan Antipathy: More intense, More personal*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from



- <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/10/10/partisan-antipathy-more-intense-more-personal/>
- Pew Research Center. (2021, April 9). *Political polarization in the American public*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>
- The Practical Guide to Grounded Theory. Delve. (n.d.). Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <https://delvetool.com/groundedtheory>
- Public Agenda. (2021, April 27). *America's Hidden Common Ground on Overcoming Divisiveness*. Public Agenda. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://publicagenda.org/reports/overcoming-divisiveness-charting-a-path-forward/>
- Qualtrics. (2022, February 17). Sampling methods: Types, Techniques & Best Practices. Qualtrics XM. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/experience-management/research/sampling-methods/>
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907.
- Scharp, K. M. (2021). Thematic Co-occurrence Analysis: Advancing a Theory and Qualitative Method to Illuminate Ambivalent Experiences. *Journal of Communication*, 71(4), 545–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab015>
- Schultz, D. (2015). Solving marketing problems with an integrated process. In J. S. Kelly, S. K. Jones, & R. A. Hagle (Eds.), *The IMC handbook: Readings & cases in integrated marketing communications* (3rd ed, p. 7). Racom Communications.
- Schultz, D. E., Tannenbaum, S. I., Lauterborn, R. F., Schultz, H., Lauterborn, R., Schultz, D., Tannenbaum, S., & Tannenbaum, S. L. (1993). *Integrated Marketing Communications*. McGraw Hill Professional.
- Shearer, E. (2021, January 12). *More than eight-in-ten Americans get news from digital devices*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/12/more-than-eight-in-ten-americans-get-news-from-digital-devices/>
- Sprout Social, Inc. (n.d.). *How Different Generations Use Social Media—and What this Means for Your Business*. Sprout Social. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/guides/social-media-use-by-generation/>

- Thorson, E., & Moore, J. (1996). *Integrated Communication: Synergy of Persuasive Voices*. Psychology Press.
- Tucker, J., Guess, A., Barbera, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>
- Tufts University . (2018, October 11). *Ahead of the 2018 Midterms, A New Generation Finds its Political Voice*. Circle: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/ahead-2018-midterms-new-generation-finds-its-political-voice>
- Tufts University . (2020, June 30). *Poll: Young people believe they can lead change in unprecedented election cycle*. Circle: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement . Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/poll-young-people-believe-they-can-lead-change-unprecedented-election-cycle>
- Tufts University . (n.d.). *Dispelling Myths about Youth Voting*. Circle: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement . Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://circle.tufts.edu/understanding-youth-civic-engagement/dispelling-myths-about-youth-voting>
- Tufts University. (2020, October 7). *The Importance of Incorporating Youth Voices and Perspectives in Media*. Circle: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement . Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/importance-incorporating-youth-voices-and-perspectives-media>
- Vallier, K. (2020, October 26). *Restoring Trust in a Polarized Age*. Knight Foundation. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://knightfoundation.org/articles/restoring-trust-in-a-polarized-age/>
- Van Kessel, P. (2020, February 5). *How Americans feel about the satisfactions and stresses of Modern Life*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved April 6, 2022, from  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/05/how-americans-feel-about-the-satisfactions-and-stresses-of-modern-life/>

Zahay, D., Mason, C. H., & Schibrowsky, J. A. (2009). The Present and Future of IMC and Database Marketing. *International Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications*, 13–30.

## **APPENDICES**

### **A. IRB Approval**

Bridging Divides with Generation Z Using Integrated Marketing and Communications"  
(Protocol #22x-249), has been determined as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#2).

## **B. Interview Guide**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and participate in this interview. My name is Grace Bynum and I am a senior Integrated Marketing and Communications major at the University of Mississippi. This interview is being conducted for the purpose of research as I am completing a thesis. My thesis is a requirement for graduation from the Sally Barksdale Honors College.

In order to be able to use this interview as part of my research, do you mind if I record our conversation today? Do I have permission to use your name in my thesis?

1. Do you mind providing me with some background information on your organization and your position there?
2. How have you engaged Gen Z through your programs or campaigns?
3. What are the positive factors of working with Gen Z?
4. What are the negative factors of working with Gen Z?
5. What do you think makes the Gen Z demographic special?
6. What advice would you give to someone looking to engage Gen Z in the bridge building space?
7. Do you think Gen Z would be interested in getting involved with bridge building?
8. What is your desired audience size? How many GenZers do you want to be engaged with?
9. What does success look like to you? What does success look like to your organization?

As we are finishing up our time today- do you have any questions for me or final thoughts? Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I will be sure to

follow up once I complete my thesis in May and am happy to share it with you once it is completed.

### **C. Transcribed Interviews**

Grace: American Exchange Project

What does the American Exchange Project do?

David: AEP is the American Exchange Project. The best comparison for understanding it might be a study abroad program in your own country. AEP takes high schoolers from around the United States, high school graduates for the year leading up to their graduation, their senior year and they engage in hangouts on Zoom and meetings in person. They do Zoom hangouts with people across the United States and then meet in person with people with different backgrounds in their own community to get to know people and build up friendships and this culminates the summer after they graduate in an exchange program where they travel to a different community in the United States like somewhere that is totally different from their hometown, socioeconomic status, or in the people groups that live there or in the physical geography and they take in life in that community and really immerse themselves to learn about a different part of the United States and experience it for themselves in a way that they couldn't have just reading about it at a distance in their hometown. At the end of the time away things reverse and they host a group of other students who are visiting their hometown for the first time and get to show them what's unique about where they live and kind of come back with this new perspective on their own town. The whole goal of the project is to build these friendships and help to fight some of the polarization that is happening by getting people outside of the bubbles they grew up in and introducing them to other young people and new communities.

Grace: How do you engage Gen Z in your programs and how have you seen success in that area?

We engage them in a few different ways. The exchange itself being the main thing. That's where they come together, talk to each other, they meet with other members of the community both that are their age and adults. The main thing is the exchanges but we also engage them through social media, through our website, through outreach, through our community leaders, are all kind of a bunch of different ways we connect with those students but I do think through social media is our primary way when we are not face-to-face with them and then the hangouts and the exchange itself being our other primary thing.

Grace: What positive and negative factors have you seen working with Gen Z?

One of the things that I thought was interesting this last summer was our first time getting to do an in person exchange because of COVID and we had not been able to travel. It was my first time being really engaged with the students because a lot of what I do is at the back level. One of the things that really struck me when the students were participating in conversation during the exchange was how insightful they were, how open minded they were, and just how engaged they were in those conversations that it almost seemed like when we brought an adult in a room was kind of when things shifted but when the students were talking to each other there was such a maturity in the way that they were conversing that really kind of surprised me. What I have noticed most about Gen Z is that it is a very social media generation. And if you think about this thing right here (pulls out iPhone) it makes you really self- aware. And we're sitting on Zoom right now but how many conversations in real life are you able to look at your face while you're talking. And then think about what you think of the people that want to have you over to your house and want to show you their old photo albums. That's kind of Instagram right. SO this generation is very influenced by social media and the self- reflected qualities of social media and how it shapes your image of yourself within the context of a larger whole. On the flip side, this is



a generation that has grown up with a lot of issues and deep exposure to domestic problems in the United States whether that is division, Black Lives Matter, mass shootings. My generation when we were young it was 9/11, terrorism, and War on Terror and those were the issues that my generation paid attention to. With your generation, you have come up with social media and you have come up with issues that are actually uniquely American and so for a lot of folks it has actually decreased their enthusiasm in America while it has actually increased their desire to help those in need and advance causes of social justice. Combine that with this self reflective, Instagram, I need to look great all the time, I need to post my meals and everything I'm doing everyday, my worth is attached to the amount of people who are giving me the little thumbs up icon on my pictures, and you get folks who might be a little too inward looking. And one thing we've noticed with our programming for Gen Z, you can focus on change through existing ideas or you can focus on it outside of existing ideas. We initially saw a generation of young Americans that were really tech savvy so we thought why not use technology, why not use this thing that is negatively impacting a lot of kids and turn it into something positive and let's do that through using group video call platforms because kids love being online anyway and they are already on their computer and here we can use these things to bring kids together and get them to hang. And sounds like a good idea right? Didn't work though. Take a little bit of a look into history. You can see in history that sometimes changes happen through the institutions and initiatives in the moment and sometimes they are in direct reaction to those things. Do you know anything about transcendentalism in the 18th century? So the transcendental movement was a move back to nature, it was a rush to nature and into the natural world to discover what was wonderful about life and meaning in life. It happened in a time when cities were blowing up so you can see how this reaction against urbanization pushed and propelled folks into nature to

discover what was great about it. It also pushed them away from religion that God was in the natural world, not in the world ordained through priests, that it was in this world of logic. So AEP is kind of taking a similar note. We're saying that we can promote this through social media, we can promote this through online, we can use Zoom to contribute to it but really what this has to be about is a by and large rejection and reaction against the media forces that are really hurting and inhibiting kids growth today. Yes, we're gonna use social media and we're gonna use social media to say why you need to meet in person. We're gonna use Instagram to say why your Instagram impression of a person is actually not enough to get to know somebody because we feel what we've seen in kids is that with young people and GenZers today that while they are very media savvy and social justice savvy that they got these other parts of their appetite that are totally famished, unaddressed, unfulfilled. And those are real life experiences that get them into places where you're not comfortable, places you haven't seen before, get off of your screens and interact with the world and go have an adventure. And go look at the map that is over there and there is a massive country out there with lots to do. Take a picture of it, don't take a picture of it. It'll still be an amazing experience for you to have. So what we've seen Grace in order to promote and engage GenZ, you need to have a complete and cohesive picture about what is impacting kids as they grow up today, what they care about, what they don't care about, how those cares are manifesting themselves and then what are their shortcomings in their development. What do kids need to feel complete and whole and how do you come in with a message that gets people saying the following and this is what I think all effective marketing is "That's what I've been thinking of, You just said what I've been thinking of and haven't been able to put words to all this time. You must know this a little better than me so we're gonna hop on your bandwagon." And we feel that message is about adventure and travel and connecting it

to the American identity and healing all the problems that are inherent in our country right now. So in terms of what you're talking about with engaging GenZ, it's a combination of the two and painting a holistic picture of how they interact and how they shape the lives of young people. I think one of the hard things about using social media or any web or text based tool to start conversations is that conversations are really hard to have over text. And so getting people to be engaged in a conversation or to bring people together over social media I think is a lot more challenging than using social media as a tool to get them to the conversation being face to face. The struggle of how you get them from seeing the social media post to showing up for the conversation is a whole separate problem that is definitely hard to tackle. I think one of the things that we are fortunate to have at our disposal is a group of 20 or so kids that went on the trip with us last year that are great resources for us. You know we have the opportunity to speak to them, to survey them, ask them questions: What do you not like about our social media, what do you not like about our website, what would make you click on this. And we're able to focus group that a little bit and I think has been really helpful in determining what sorts of things like we were posting memes on social media until a few kids were like "your memes are lame" and I was like alright no more memes I promise. A lot of it for us is listening to the students and seeing what they have to say and adapting what we are doing based on feedback and just playing with different things till we find what works.

Grace: How do you determine success with your trips?

David: We know our programs can work and we've seen them work. And they work because of the interactions and the relationships that are built. So there are kind of two ways we can gage success. Way one is how well the programs go but way two is how many kids we can get engaged in those programs and that is where Zoe and Claire come in. From a marketing

perspective, success is how many students signed up, how many towns are on board, how many community leaders did we get for the following summer because our goal is always to reach you somewhere on the internet and get you back to our website and get you to sign up for our program.

Zoe: So for me, I watch follower count, I watch engagement, I watch to see how many students are looking at our social media but that matters far less to me than how many of those students are coming to our website and signing up after seeing our social media. So that's my major metric of success is our students signing up for our programs and our towns signing on for our programs. And that is an important point to note because what we've seen is that it's not enough in our work to just make an impression on someone. It is not enough to say well a million people saw that post. That won't work, that won't change anyone's mind, that won't move the needle.

The nature of the issue as it sits with so many young people today but really sits with so many Americans necessitates a deep engagement to actually create change and so that's why it's not so much about impressions. It's about engagement. So as you create solutions for these things it's about how do you drive people to deeply interact with and deeply engage with whatever your trying to launch and not just say well 300 million people viewed this post or laughed at this video. 300 million views means nothing if people don't sign up for the program.

Claire: I was just gonna go along with what you were saying Zoe, because that is definitely something I have to think about to when I'm looking at how individual posts or campaigns have been performing from week to week. Because there is definitely the number side of it which is important. I'm always looking at when people are most active on particular apps, how many views things got. I can even get specific and granular and look at if we put up a blog post about applying, how many people went and clicked on it after they saw something. But then there is a

more abstract engagement that I have to look at too which you can't always measure with just the numbers. Like on Twitter I might put something up and it gets one or two likes but another post might instead get picked up by one of the larger civic engagement organizations like Listen First that engage a lot with us on Twitter and generates some actual replies or people adding their own thoughts on the end or people starting some sort of larger conversation. That to me shows success in a way that goes beyond just the numbers when it moves people to actually interact with us or share to their friends. That is how I know something really moved somebody in a way that just like the impressions or numbers on the analytics page did not.

Grace: What is your desired audience size?

One million. One million young people per year enjoying programs like this. That is what is gonna create change. The vision is to get about 25% of every highschool graduating class to our program and our big dream come true statement is: Imagine if stapled to every single diploma we give out in this country was a ticket to a town that was totally different from the one that you grew up in where you can go spend a week, you'll meet people your age and hangout and learn about a different culture, you can talk about different political views, you can learn about how the local economy works, and you'd also experience some really important civic lessons that will help your life as an American citizen. That's our goal. Often in this organization and in the material that Zoe and Claire are creating we're not just thinking about today, we're not just thinking about if we're at student number 20 we need to get to student number 21. We're also thinking what's gonna cause this thing to blow up and can we manage that when that happens. Think about the analogy of pushing a rock up a hill, really hard to do and then there is a time when the hill kind of flattens out but guess what is also really hard to do is control that rock as it is suddenly rolling down hill. How do you manage that so that it doesn't go out of control and

destroy everything in its path because that can also happen with things that are very successful. You asked in the beginning about how we market to Gen Z and we use all sorts of marketing platforms but the other thing we do to market to Gen Z is create an idea that is really strong and kind of sells itself. You know the mission of Apple computers is to put a phone in every pocket and laptop in every lap and a desktop on every desk. Is that why you have a Mac? No, it's the best product, it's the coolest looking product that everyone has. So a big piece of marketing is also just the inherent nature of the product your trying to sell because when you are trying to market to a broad and diverse audience because if we're only bringing liberal voices to the table or if we're only bringing young people to the table or if we're only bringing old people to the table or only conservatives this isn't gonna work. We need to market to a diverse audience and what's gonna throw a diverse audience off is if you're changing your message based on your target demographics. So if folks in Iowa hear that I'm giving a different speech to the kids in Massachusetts that's a little bit off. So you need to find a product that's gonna have wide appeal to everyone and therefore play on things that are much more human that way you can be consistent in your messaging. Absolutely you can vary based on your audience but the biggest thing i've seen that has been successful in marketing is the quality of the product because if you look at what draws most young people to our program its that they get impressions through our social media and answers through our website but they come to us through word of mouth. Someone trusted heard about the program that can vouch for it and they vouch for it because they've experienced it or talked to somebody and it's just kinda clicked with them. Have you ever heard of Theranos? So Theranos was a company in Silicon Valley that was trying to revolutionize medical diagnostic and it was spearheaded by a very young social entrepreneur named Elizabeth Holmes. There is a good example of a catchy idea that was probably marketed

very well and the marketing was from the actual direct marketing in their department but also that their CEO wore a black turtleneck everyday so they could say “Hey I’m the next Steve Jobs.” That’s a marketing decision. They are selling the CEO. They chose a young woman to be the lead entrepreneur because that would fit well with the Silicon Valley ethos of what they wanted. But finally at the end of the day the product stopped, it didn’t work and what happened? If you wanna know what happened just read the New York Times. So as you are thinking through what’s gonna engage Gen Z, marketing is a huge piece of it but also the quality of the product you are having to market will really change the nature of what you are doing. That’s a big thing I think we’ve all seen in the program because in our discussions you know we keep falling back on the idea when we try to create new materials. Like when Claire and I are talking about Instagram or social media, just show what the kids are doing, just show the pictures. Tell us what it is. We do not need to spruce it up too much or when Zoe and I are talking about language we are often talking about simplifying, simplifying, simplifying not saying get it make it bigger or more exclamatory because we’re gonna have a hard time selling this thing as it is. And that is a very different thinking process. Its just an easier process than the opposite.

Claire: The very first conversation David and I had we we’re talking about what we wanted social media to look like and we made this really great comparison. Let’s make it look like national geographic. Don’t make it too complex on Instagram. Don’t try to get down into all the political complexities just show what people are doing in such an interesting way it makes you want to be there too based on the photos. And then later another thing, another person from AEP Chris and I we’re talking about this and I brought up David’s national geographic example. AND he said you know that a really interesting point because in national geographic photos things aren’t okay all the time. It’s not just hyper stylized photos where people are really happy and

smiling at the camera like sometimes uncomfortable things are going on or you're not quite sure what is happening in the photos the first time you look at it. It's not sanitized. And both of those things really helped me when I'm looking at what kind of photos I pick out or how I portray it especially on Instagram which is so visual and showing that this isn't a stylized program. Here's what's happening in real time, here's this real experience that's out there in the US that's waiting for you. It's not always gonna be comfortable but it definitely looks based on these photos interesting and maybe something you wanna dig into a bit more.

David: And then I think how do we make the jump from showing that photo to getting the students to say wow that's fascinating or wow I should do that. And then we come in and say we'll guess what you can. It can be you too. You can go there too. National Geographic shows you what you probably will never see in your life. We're trying to show young people what through our program they can go and do. This is possible. This is there for you. And what we're working on everyday is building to a place where folks know that and we're able to accommodate that and really convey that.

BridgeUSA

Grace: Can you give me an overview of what Bridge USA does? And specifically with Gen Z?

Manu: So Bridge USA started in 2017, I was a freshman then so not much older than you, I think maybe a year older. We basically started because there were these huge protests on our campus because a speaker by the name of Miley Opolis was invited and he is this sort of right wing provocateur and essentially our campus environment really exploded that there was so much apathy, so much pessimism within and I felt people in our generation there is just this real desire for people to have a conversation and so we essentially created a space the next day where



people could just listen and hear each other and think about what happened the day before. I had no interest in politics and still don't frankly. I was a pre-med major then and this idea of having this space where people could listen and hear each other really resonated so we just kept doing it. You were looking for an internship, we were just looking for something to do in our free time, we were freshmen. So that dorm room project turned into the idea of Bridge Berkley and that turned into Bridge USA. And the idea behind Bridge, is building the sort of largest and fastest growing student movement, trying to bring Gen Z together on important political and social issues. The ideas that no matter where you are on the political spectrum, there is so much humanity and common experience that really brings a lot of us together especially younger folks where we are in one of the most diverse generations in history. We've lived through in our lived history of the United States is really encapsulated in 4 or 5 events: 9/11, the Great Recession, the 2016 election, the 2020 election. Not a great sample size of progress and optimism and so the idea is how can we create skills within our generation to have these constructive dialogues. I know for a fact that most people in our generation understand the problems and are largely in agreement with what is wrong with our country. This disagreement is more on the solutions and that is not a bad divide to bridge and so that is really what Bridge USA does. We are on different college campuses and different high schools and our job is to essentially get people to talk to each other.

Grace: How specially have you engaged Gen Z through your different programs?

Manu: Good that you asked. So there is basically four things that Bridge does. The first thing is on college campuses, we have chapters. And these chapters are really homes, imagine spaces on campus where you can really have civic, vibrant conversations, dialogues, a place where students are just listening to each other, engaging. These are student led but supported by faculty. The

theory and thesis behind this is that faculty really want to have these conversations but if they don't feel like they have the student support then they look like they are going up against a mountain of sort of grassroots activism. Our theory here is that actually there are those on the extremes that are the loudest but they don't represent the majority of students so our job is to empower the students that just want to have conversations to actually support their faculty in those dialogues so that's what chapters do. Then you have high school chapters. Those chapters are focused on having one event every month with the idea of basically having young people just plant the seed in their mind that they can have these conversations with other students their age so we get high school students across the country to engage. The third pillar is our political impact so we have this thing called the Gen round table and what that does is it essentially identifies 3 to 4 policy issues that most young people agree about are real issues and they are trying to claim them as generational issues so we get Republicans and Democrats to basically get on the same page about climate, democracy reform, criminal justice, and economic mobility. And then the final thing is basically our international work, so that is Bridge Africa and Bridge Europe and the idea there is that the problems that we are facing in the US are not American problems, they are global problems. This idea of collapsing institutions, lack of trust, people hating each other, everyone losing their shit, like this is across the board so our job is to figure out how we can empower people in different areas to actually engage. That's sort of the four pillars, the easiest way to sort of think about how we look at our work.

Grace: So what positive and negative factors have you seen?

Manu: The trap that most people in our field fall into is not acknowledging how difficult is it and also acknowledging how improbable the goals and objectives are. The reason I say that is so that we can come to terms with the fact that this is really an uphill battle with those on the extremes

and also to instill a level of realism and understanding into how we approach these problems. So in terms of the negative side of things... I don't know how things are at Ole Miss but we do have a chapter at Alabama and at Alabama you'll have like a contingent of students on the extreme left that think that having a conversation with someone else is legitimizing their hate and also is directly in contradiction with their existence like why should I talk to someone who thinks that I don't exist. That is a really difficult thing to go up against so often times are conversations don't actually include the people on the extremes, they include people in the middle and the reason why that is a negative is because you want to be breaking out of our echo-chamber of just bridge builders right. Positives i mean there is like when you get a student into a conversation with another student and they came into the conversation with zero expectations frankly like negative expectations, the idea that they leave the conversation with like that recognition like this is possible, there is something here and then they come back like the retention rate at Bridge chapters is awesome. It's through the roof. That tells us that people want to come and engage. So yeah that is a little insight into negatives and positives. But i think the key thing here is like the biggest obstacle we go up against is people feeling like this is impossible and now just us being unapologetic of the fact that there is no alternative, and in addition to the fact there is no alternative being unapologetic about the fact that all we do is get people to listen and talk and there is nothing else around it, nothing novel, nothing complex because democracy needs people to listen to each other. And the other piece of this grace is that over the last year, instead of answering a lot of these questions for myself or what I think is difficult or what I think is happening, I've just been on this massive listening tour on like hearing what everyday young people are feeling on their campuses and whether on not my perspective on this is a little bit out of touch but that is neither here nor there

Grace: What is your desired audience size/how many people in Gen Z do you want to be engaged with?

Manu: So currently we have about 350 student volunteers across our chapters so we have currently 49 college chapters and so each chapter is an average about 5 or 6 people that actually work for that chapter so there your president, secretary, ect. Some chapters have a lot more, some have less so that's kind of teh average. We affect about 31-3200 students a year that go through brudge programming. And then when it comes to the intended audience size is for us I look at it less of how many students we want engaged but more as how many chapters we want engaged. And the vision is to basically to have a bridge chapter on every single college campus in the country. And the idea here is that not just having chapters on your elite schools like Ole Miss, Alabama, Harvard but going to like your community colleges, going to the schools that actually most Gen Z students attend so we can access and approach them. And then in terms of the vision here, the idea is not for every young person to have Bridge USA as their chief political activity like thats not gonna happen and also that's not realistic. You have beliefs, you're a college Democratic, you're a college Republican, you wanna be a part of those things that's great. The idea is to have bridge as a supplement to your diet, so like imagine if our information diet right now is really crappy, Bridge is like the broccoli to your crappy diet. So it shouldn't be like what you're spending all your time doing, it's like go to one Bridge discussion a semester. It's the way to kind of stay sane so that's the vision here- setting up a Bridge chapter on every campus and trying to have as many young people as possible have this supplement to their experience.

Grace: How do you define success?

Manu: So that's the practical way. But as I'm sure Professor Bodie can tell you, it is very difficult to define success in this space because the ability to measure depolarization outcomes is really

tough. It's not concrete. I know one of the things our field is doing is working on goals and measures, it's something I'm working on. And it goes back to your negative aspects like I think you should identify this, I can't confidently tell you right now that our work actually depolarizes a space. I can tell you that students love it, that they learn about it, they come out with a great experience, and a lot of testimonies. But the actual measure of depolarization is tough right now.

Grace: Do you think that Gen Z is interested in getting involved in the bridge building space and what advice do you have more someone wanting to increase Gen Z participation?

Manu: So imagine a classroom with like 10 students, now this was my experience at least at Berkley please disagree with me if you don't think this is the case or if you haven't heard this but I'm in a classroom with 10 kids and your professor is starting to talk about something really controversial and you'll have like 2 kids that are super engaged, they know everything about the topic, they can't possibly stand this idea that we're creating open, intellectual inquiry, they like want to shut the event down, and these two are kinda like students on the left. And then you have like this one kid that feels like its his or her moral obligation to stand up against these two kids so he's kind of like your far right by definition and they are just going at it. They are loud and they are extreme and the other seven wanna like leave class, go get a drink and graduate with their degree. And our job is to empower those seven and maybe two out of those seven to be as loud as those on the extremes because right now those people on the extremes are the ones who control the entire narrative. If we can get two kids to stand up to go against these other three and support their professor in that dialogue and engagement and support the other seven that are with them to have those dialogues and conversations that is what's gonna make it happen so to your question, "do young people want to get involved?" absolutely. Its just that those seven kids never see an outlook or option. The only thing they see are those people I call your "psychotic

partisans” and nothing to them, that's totally fine, they have strong opinions but that is what our objective is. I think there is such an appetite right now because people are just pissed off. People in my generation and our generation are just like can't we just get along. And not along for some kumbaya sake but to get along to make progress. We're just shooting ourselves in the foot right now, so that frustration is what we are trying to tap into. That's the idea there.

Grace: How have you used social media to engage Gen Z?

Manu: I'll start with what doesn't work because I think that is more important to address in our space. In terms of what doesn't work, one is just that it is really tough to have a conversation over Facebook. That's the most obvious point. The second thing that is difficult is people have a much harder time rallying around let's talk to each other, let's listen to each other, that's much harder. People need an enemy. People need an outgroup. And one of the strategist decisions and one of the things we can think about enterally is do we actually have an outgroup and if so do we want to channel people's anger towards that and is that in itself contradicting our work. Not sure. In terms of what works. I think what works is we don't view social media like Bridge USA personally from our organization, we don't use social media as a way to get supporters. We view social media as purely as a brand awareness plate in the sense that we're gonna do the weirdest, craziest stuff on social media because I don't think the majority of American people live on social media. I think your most extremes do. Our job is not even to try and get those extremes right now engaged, our job is to get everyone else. So on social media it is purely how do we get people talking about the Bridge, how do we get people listening, engaging, even if criticizing Bridge- that's all right. So do you know Reddit by chance? So I did an AMA on reddit the other day, an ask me anything, they'd invited us to do an AMA. And Reddit is like the worst place for anyone to go, and I was just like I get conservatives and liberals to talk to each other, ask me

anything. And I mean it unloaded. People just unloaded and that's great. Like they are talking about Bridge. So for us social media, I don't look at it like in a way to convince people of the Bridging ideology. I don't look at it as a way, I don't think we are gonna win on social media. But that's not the place necessarily for us to win. Our job on social media is to show people that we exist. I got as many DM's, private people that we're messaging me saying, "Hey this is awesome" but I am nervous to say it out loud. As long as we use social media to show those silent people and the rest of America that this exists, I think that's a win.

Grace: So how do you get Gen Z to want to get involved?

Manu: Yes, so in terms of just like pure involvement to answer your question directly because I know the idea of not viewing social media as a way to get people involved is kind of a non answer but it's true that's actually how we approach it. And then we actually get a lot of people involved because then we actually a lot more controversial about how we have our social media engaged. But in terms of like, how to directly get people engaged. The other thing that we're trying to do, we're trying some innovative campaigns that just tap into the sentiment of people. So an example of that is we're thinking about launching a campaign next year called the F word campaign, pardon my language but its straight up just fucking listen to each other, just fucking get along and just publishing and getting merch thats focused on driving people to that feeling because thats the feeling thats so pertinent right now. The other thing is partnering with celebrities, partnering with political leaders. Right now we are doing an event on October 14th, where we're partnering with a celebrity to get people there and there is a lot of students there. So yeah there are ways to get people engaged but I think on social media we just need to be a lot more punchy and a lot more and a lot less risk averse.

Graham: Who's your competition on college campuses/ do you have an idea of who your competing against?

Manu: It's a good question so we don't actually have direct competition on a campus because we have started to position Bridge again as a supplement to people's college experience. Right so with that supplement language, like I am a student and I am thinking about how to get politically active on my campus, I'll probably go and first join student government, and then if I'm really interested, I'll go and join like the college Republicans or Democrats club and add that to my resume. But if I want my engagement to be interesting, excellent, want to listen to different people and different ideas I'll go and attend a Bridge discussion so Bridge is more complimentary to a lot of students' experiences as opposed to mutually exclusive of their time. Obviously like in terms of direct competition, we have people like Turning Point USM on the right, you have your like socialist Democrats, you have like by any means necessary antifia on the extreme left but again we've started to go with the strategy of turning out sort of your not ideological middle but turning out your temperamental middle. And temperamental middle is like on the top of the temperament axis you have super engaged, crazy like hates everyone and on the bottom of it you have totally apathetic and disengaged. We're trying to get people here (shows middle w hands). Mainly anywhere on the x axis but they are kinda here in terms of their temperament.

Graham: What are the strengths or limitations of focusily exclusive on, I know you said you have high school chapters but it seems like most of your effort might be on college campuses. You know that excludes maybe 60/70% of Gen Z? You know, does it matter? Is that okay to exclude them or is this like an elitist thing? You know, if it's only on college campuses, is it then branded as elitist or privileged as opposed to something that's available to all people?



Manu: Yeah that's a great point. To back up your point really quickly, I think it's 49% of Gen Z actually are gonna graduate with a college degree which means that if we get college campuses we're getting 1 in 2 and then if we go after only the elite schools your getting like 2% of that 49% so you're already like missing the boat. And so that just elevates the first half of the problem, which is trying to get the max of the 50% of their generation, it's going after not elite schools, we don't have a chapter on any of the Ivy's yet. All of our chapter focuses right now are on community colleges, large public state schools, and trying to get local private colleges involved and actually a lot of them have a huge appetite for it. And to expand beyond just that 50%, that's why we have started high school chapters, it's purely experimental right now because it is a very different dynamic. And with high schoolers you're competing with a lot more of their attention and time but that's why we're going to high schools to go beyond sort of that elitist approach, and you're absolutely right. Granted though the people I think we're most at risk of missing and this is a point to concede, is that you have a large swatch of your population especially in inner cities, midwestern states, and a lot of southern states, definitely inner cities is the case, is students that are like high school juniors and seniors that'll just drop out and it's a hard way to get in touch with them. And those people are often the most susceptible to narratives of alienation and resentment and that's a real challenge for us. Going back to some research on communication, for instance, what we know is that the kind of model of communication that we're pushing as a bridge building field which is like let's talk about everything almost to death is not the model of communication for non-college educated individuals.

Graham: Right in other words, there is a really great study called "Speaking like a Man in Teamsterville" by a guy named Jerry Phillipston out of the University of Washington which is a huge ethnography he did on the south side of Chicago. And he talks about Teamsterville speech

while is like white, blue collar, factory worker, primarily males. And he compares that to what he calls *nacierma*, which is just American backward. So college educate, white, affluent speech and you know one of the rules of *Speaking like a Man* in Teamsterville is that you don't talk about your feelings and if a female member of your family is disparaged or whatever you don't talk at all you hit, you fight. And so the struggle is real in terms of what we're doing in the bridging field, is if we're only reaching out to the well-educated or likely to be well-educated population who are we missing and is the message and if we force the message that communication is about talking about our feelings and all this kind of stuff then who are we missing.

Manu: And it's not just Bridge that suffers from that, it's the entire field that suffers from that. So anyway.. It's a really good point actually. And I think this is why David McCullough's American Exchange Project, I think they have a lot of promise specifically to that question because I think the two ways were going about bridging is one is sort of dialogic right and speech based which is kind of what our general field is consensed around. And then your second approach is more experimental and more of a broad program and David's model might offer some promise there. And to directly put a button on that point, when I was talking to David and we might launch high school chapters but don't want to like ruffle any feathers, are you fine with that. We were actually at the consensus that both of us are actually approaching this problem in a complementary way. Right where one of us is focused on domestic experiential programs right and that's David's work and I think that's particularly attuned to people that Professor Bodie you were talking about and folks that might just have a need for some politics. And were going at it from more of a dialogic sense and I think those two might actually have a really good synergy with one another and we're actually seeing a lot of program overlap.

CommonAlly

Grace: What does Common Ally do?

Howard: There is so much in common that we have that if we can start talking about that then we can figure out how to get there. We might differ on how to get there and that's where you get into liberal and conservative ways to achieve the same goal but usually it is sort of a similar goal. So how do we start with that and then start some healthy dialogue and ways to achieve that around things that are important to them. So that's kind of the genesis story around where it all came from. So a lot of 2017 and early 2018 was just him ideating around what is that, is it a piece of technology, is it events, like what is it? And you know he pulled me in around that time and that's when it started kind of evolving more into its an app and what can you do on the app and started kind of growing it from there.

Grace: Awesome! So I have actually been working as an intern for the Listen First Project for the last year almost two years now and I also serve as an undergraduate research assistant in that same work so working to try and get students more involved in conversation and all of that so yeah that's awesome to hear that backstory and I've really enjoyed working in the bridging space and I feel like more people my age definitely need to be more involved. It's just getting people involved and that's kind of what I've seen through my research so far is that like Gen Z do have the characteristics to be bridge builders and data is showing that they want to be but there is a disconnect between active interest and active involvement when it comes to the field.

Howard: Well we are seeing the same thing so good to hear you saying that that's what you are seeing. And it's been interesting for us because both Aaron and myself we don't come from the world of politics at all so I come from for the last twelve years the world of social impact and nonprofit and you know kind of cause related programming and Aaron's been on the creative

side worked in fintech for a long time but he's more of a content producer and creative talent so we've kind of tried to bring those two things and that's what we're finding in really connecting with young people as well if you think really fun, engaging content which is his skill set around the things that they really care about how to get involved which is my skill set we think we have bit of good formula to kind of start to engage and like you said there's interest but then how to you get them involved but we think we have some ways to kind of encourage people to get involved. But yeah this bridge building space its new, I think to a lot of us. And there are starting see a little bit more folks from younger groups, younger organizations that want kind of bring this out to a younger group to perceive it.

Grace: Definitely, to go off of that. How have y'all at Common Ally been engaging Gen Z in your programs? And what have you seen in that area?

Howard: There's been a couple things. I think for us we launched our beta version of our app in really in the summer of 2019. So literally on the day of the first Democratic debate and at the time there were like 26 Democratic nominees for president and there were still even three on the Republican side because Joe Walsh and Bill Wells were mounting campaigns to challenge Trump as well. So there were a lot of candidates out there so we took more of an angle around the 2020 general election and doing a lot of things around candidate matching and just getting people to see by even taking away party affiliations of saying well you tell us within the app what you care about and we're gonna kind of show you which candidates match up with you based on their voting record, and the things they publicly said or have published on their website around what they are going to be doing, what's their platform around these specific issue so we really got a lot into the candidate matching of things just to start to kind of work off the election. The other side of what we did out of the gate was a lot of just education and I think what we've found and I'm

curious again if you've stumbled across this too is that there is a large chunk of the population both the Millennials and the Gen Z population that just don't have a very broad basis of civic education because they just weren't given it in school and it's not their fault and that's the thing, it's not just this you know you should know these things. It's that you just weren't taught this in school. And I think that was a big eye opener for me was to see the disparity across the country of civic education curriculum in school systems. You know I learned all that stuff when I was in school and I'm like that doesn't exist anymore. It was completely shocking to me so it's like well of course then how would you expect people to want to be civically engaged if they don't know how the process works. So that became a big one of us, how do we start with the just the basic education?

Grace: That is very true especially with Gen Zers literally being the future of both Democratic and Republican. Education is so important in that sense I feel like. Because how are they supposed to know what to do and where to stand without proper education. Instead they are turning to the media and things that aren't always true or fake news, or however you want to put it.

Howard: Exactly so we kind of took that task and we have some advisors that work in education and curriculum development space and so I think we've got that in our plans a little later on to really go deep and heavy into that. But we at least started out of the gate in 2019 and 2020 with just educational videos, just short form, fun content, we're doing out on Instagram and on Youtube just to give young people... You know one of the big ones was when Trump was being impeached, what is impeachment? Do you even know what impeachment is and how it works and what it means? So what's impeachment? What's the supreme court? What are all these things and how do we get a better understanding of who they are before you can then say "yes I think

we should do that” or “no I don't think we should do that at all” you have to know what it is and how it works so that's definitely been an approach and we are continuing to do that as well as we go forward but we were able to do that and do that directly within the app too but starting a lot of that and staying much in that lens of we just want to talk about issues and we're not talking about how you should feel about an issue but just what is the issue. So people talk about immigration and immigration reform and it's like well what are we reforming, what are the immigration laws in the first place. So let's talk about what they are so you have an understanding before you can say I believe we should change this or pull this or add this like we need to know what we're starting from. So I think that a big part of it for us, is just some of the basics of terminology and issues in the lens of what are the they

Grace: That is so true because I feel like too often people don't really know what they are agreeing or not agreeing upon and I think that leads to such a disconnect and polarization between people that think they feel this way but once you really break it down you realize that people really think more so with other people and agree more than they first think they do when you talk about the broad issue.

Howard: And you make a good point so much of it is if you turn to the media and again this is the era that your generation is growing up in. The media now has sides, it's not a nonpartisan, unbiased media. The media is very partisan. So depending on what you're reading, you're going to have a very specific thought process around what that should be but you're only seeing one side of it. And it's like that, in fact you've probably come across it from you know being in the bridging space with Listen First, is the folks at All Sides

Grace: I have been writing about them in my thesis quite a bit about how they bring different sides together. So then it is easier for people to see how different issues really have different sides. It's not just so simple or red and blue as people think it is

Howard: They are vital to this space because its like as clear cut as being able to say here's the same issue, here's the headline in these three sources, here's the headline in these three sources. Do they sound different? Yes they do. And they can completely turn into a different topic based on what they think there readers will want to consume so just having that healthy perspective of you need to take a look at the entire thing from multiple points of view rather than just I see it in the one feed that I get and that's how I am gonna believe that's what it is.

Grace: Yes I totally agree with that. And I think that is something young people need to be more aware of so like how do we get that information to young people out there to get them interested which I think is very important. So going off of that I am also wondering what positive and negative factors have you seen working with Gen Z

Howard: So I will say and I am going to paint this with a very broad brush so its been very interesting for me to kind of engage with this younger generation and a learn a little bit about who they are and what they are motivated by and kind of how they see themselves and their place in the world. In juxtaposition to the generation just ahead of them and with very, very broad strokes, I noticed that the millennial generation, they tend to be the kids the grew up with the every kid gets a trophy right the participation trophy. They are used to kind of everything kind of being given to them and there is a bit of sense of entitlement. And I've experienced it myself and I've spoken to plenty of other colleagues in our industries and it is a fairly prevalent thing. And its not everybody but it does tend to be more common. And what fascinated me about engaging more with the Gen Z demo is you're not like that at all. They see the world and their

place in it very, very differently. And what struck me was kind of interesting, that I read an article I think it was in the New York Times awhile back and it talked about the differences in the generations and it mentioned the fact that the millennials are primarily kids of the baby boomers so their view of the world is shaped very much like the baby boomer view of the world which coming out of World War II and the Korean war and that was like the white picket fence, the home, and 2.5 kids and the whole like you have the perfect life and so their parents grew up with that in mind and have built that life for themselves and then transferred that kind of thought process to their kids. The GenZers are the kids of the GenXers and the GenXers are the ones that came after the baby boomers that said we're not like you at all, we don't see the world this way at all. And the GenXers had a very different ideology and mindset about the world around them. They grew up with very different things around them as well so it's been really interesting to see the parallels and I think now it kind of makes sense, I'm like these are the GenXers kids so they see the world through more of that lens in being able to forge your own path, being willing to get your hands dirty, and get in and do the work. I will say that's been probably one of the most impressive things I've seen. And again speaking very broadly, I see this generation being very willing to get in and do the heavy lifting and the hard work and it's not like put up a fight about it or I shouldn't have to do it or anything. It's very much like wow there is a lot of problems in the world and the previous generation have a) caused them and b) haven't fixed them so I guess it's on us to do something about it, okay let's get to work.

Grace: I was talking to the American Exchange Project doing one of these same talks with them and they made a great point that GenZers have had to deal with a lot of domestic issues in our time with race riots, and school shootings, very polarized elections that have made us want to be activists in our community which is why I feel like GenZers are great for this work and would do



so well if we can just get a few to start out really working and getting it out there then a lot of people will want to join

Howard: Spot on. You know I think back to when I was in junior high and high school the biggest threat was are we gonna have a nuclear war with the Russians. It was this giant external, existential threat and it is very different then as you just said school shootings. In the era I grew up, that did not happen. Nobody brought a gun to school. I remember somebody brought a knife to school once and they got suspended and you never heard about anything ever happening again. So it is a very different era and so you're right the things that you grew up around are right in your backyard. And you're like what can I do about this and I think that's the other thing that's really impressive. It's a generation that recognizes we have some tools to do something about this. When I grew up in my mind there wasn't anything I could do around solving the cold war crisis with the Russians like what was I gonna do about it but to see this generation like we've met and have had great conversations with some of the kids from March for our Lives In Parkland and they we're like "no, we're not gonna just let this keep happening, we're gonna do something about it" and they stood up and found a way to do something and that just seems to be the ethos of this generation like we can do something, we have the tools, we have the ability, we have a voice and we are an enormous and hopefully recognizing we're an enormous voting block. We can do something about this, and move the needle if we want to, and that to me is super compelling and super exciting so I am very optimistic versus where I was, I'd say before working on Common Ally 5 or 6 years ago. Back then I was a little more pessimistic and now this generation that is coming up behind me, they want to be told everyday that they are doing an amazing job because they are used to kind of growing up in that environment, but I was like this better not be where we are headed because that's not how the world works. Like to see this next

generation, come in and go your right that's not how the world works and like ah thank god it feels so much better.

Grace: Definitely and I feel like if we can just get Gen Z involved and they are gonna want to be activists and they are gonna want to stand up in their community and make a difference. Even getting involved and getting bridge building on school campus and universities, I feel like would go a long way with both the education and just the bridging sector, both of them.

Howard: Real quick comment. One of the things we're trying really hard to do as well is we wanna kind of reframe, or reimage even what the term activists mean. Because I think in general, like an activist is painted primarily as a liberal; as someone who is taking action against something that they want to change and be progressive. And it's different for everybody, not everybody is going to go on a march somewhere. Not everyone even has the ability to do that. So I think for us it's more about kind of reframing and reimagining what does that mean like what does it mean to just get involved. Just to figure out what are the things that you believe in and how do we point you in the right direction and be able to show you well if you care about this particular issue and now your educated on what it is and you kind of see the big picture of all the different sides of how it is presented, now you want to move forward and you want to do something, well okay here are some nonprofit organizations that are working in this space, here are the candidates that match up with you based on how you now see this issue. Here is what your city or town or state government is doing around this particular issue like these are the things that are happening and now here are the ways that you can get involved. Do you want to volunteer, do you want to donate, do you want to canvas, do you want to just read more content, do you want to share that content with your friends, do you want to go to an event, do you want to go to a town hall, what does that mean to you? Like I said being an activist doesn't mean we're

having a march on Saturday and you have to show up and if you don't show up you don't get to call yourself an activist. Like that's bullshit. So that a big thing for us, is being able to again connect, to meet your generation where you are. And say "you want to get involved" here's 8/10 ways to get involved and supportive of something that's important to you. And every single one of them is meaningful and impactful if you are willing to put the time in.

Grace: To go off of that, what advice would you give to someone looking to engage Gen Z in the bridge building space?

Howard: There's a couple things. And again I'm curious and I want you to reflect back to me if these land well with you but from what we've found and trying to build our business around is a couple of things. Number one is transparency. So that is a big thing for us as a business so we're a for-profit, for-purpose company. So we are a social enterprise, we are a public benefit corporation. So we have written into our bylaws, we need to be doing things that benefit the world around us. It is not just about how much money can we make. So for us it is very much about being fully transparent about what we are trying to accomplish, to be held accountable when we do meet or don't meet those things that we say we are going to do. And to build that level of trust. So those to us, those are the foundational principles. And that should be for anybody building any businesses to connect with any audience specifically I think working with a younger audience, I got to say your ability to sniff out bullshit is pretty solid. So it's not about us walking in and saying "ah, we do all these things and we'll promise you all this." No we're gonna be upfront and we have been and will continue to be very transparent about who we are, what we're trying to accomplish, and how our entire process works. We wanna be held accountable because if we step out of line, we need people to say that's not right and in a similar light with what we're building because we are building kind of an ecosystem within this app to

allow young people to engage. If we're gonna hold everybody accountable within the ecosystem so that's the users themselves but it's everybody else, it's the nonprofits that come in the ecosystem, the campaigns, the municipalities, the businesses, everyone is gonna be held to the same standard to be held accountable. And if you step out of line, you're out. Like that's it. Because the bottom line is trust. We know we need to build trust between these audiences because that's I think for us without getting too deep into our business model but our whole core of what we're building is we wanna facilitate relationships between Gen Z and the folks who want to meet Gen Z and know what they think and what they care about. And those things are campaigns, nonprofits, municipalities, and businesses. They are hungry to figure this stuff out and especially in the world of campaigns and certainly in nonprofit municipalities there used to like you know having people fill out a survey on a clipboard in front of the supermarket or they call their landline. But our whole point is like that's not how you engage this audience. So that for us is how do we build a bridge and be able to say you want to meet young people, you got to meet them where they are, and you gotta to be clear and accountable and transparent and build a relationship and we will bring of you together if we do this properly and that speaking towards both sides about again that trust and that accountability and transparency. So to me that's the foundational principles of how to engage with this generation.

Grace: I definitely agree with trust because I feel like with Gen Z being all over social media and the internet there are so many people they can't trust and they just don't know who to trust and that's definitely really important to engaging that audience.

Grace: How do you guys define success?

Howard: Good question. We're at an interesting juncture because we're in the process of really reconfiguring. And I guess if anything its more the evolution of our model. Because now that

we're past the general election for 2020 and moving into kind of the next piece of our business model. So even like the app that we have is old and outdated and we're literally in the process of building a new version of it right now. So for us I think success, success looks like creating these healthy relationships between those groups that I mentioned and your Gen Z generation. For me that's really where the success lies. If we build an ecosystem the way we've imagined it and we start to create these engagements and these relationships and both sides feel like they're getting value out of it then we're successful. Because that means that, Gen Z are engaged around the issues that they care about, there engaging with campaigns and nonprofits and municipalities and cities and places that they live. And those organizations are learning what's important to Gen Z and at the end of the day for us, everything for us is built around are system of education, activation, and reward. So our whole model is built around data ownership and data privacy. And this again goes back to transparency and the trust and accountability side of things. And I think again as you said, your generation has grown up with social media, at the same time your generation has grown up giving away every single piece of data about who you are, what you care about, what you like, to a couple of big companies that have made billions of dollars. And so has my generation, and the generation in between us, we've all done it. But what I think is starting to emerge is that your generation is saying "this isn't right" and "this isn't fair" and my voice and my opinion matters and it has value and no, I shouldn't just be giving it away to you for free. And stories just keep coming up and coming up, I read a fascinating piece just an hour ago about one of the largest crisis text lines that was scrapping the data and reselling it without people's permission. And this just continues to happen. And that's a big part about what we wanna put an end to. So more us success is kind of establishing this whole point of you own your data. It is yours. And when you engage with a platform like ours, the whole point is there has got

to be hey I am willing to do all of these things but I want to know where it is going and who's gonna have it, what they are gonna do with it and what am I getting back for doing all of this. So that to me is like if we like build that system that can do all of that, that right there is successful.

Grace: That is a great point. Thank you so much for sharing that. This stuff is gonna be so helpful. So I guess for my last question... What is your desired audience size when it comes to Gen Z and just in general? How many people do you want to be on the app or interacting with? And how are you trying to go about that?

Howard: That's hard for me to put a number on. My easy answer is everybody. But part of the reason that is interesting for us, we're building our entire platform, you know everything that I was just telling you, like we're building this really all for Gen Z but it doesn't mean that other people can't be on the platform. I think that is a part of it too, is that we're building this for a group of people who see the world differently and what I am hoping is that you know I am a GenXer so hopefully my generation which our your parents generation and the generation in between us, that those people go, "hey wow actually that's a really good way to approach all of this, like that is a healthier way to share your voice and be compensated for it and if I'm on the business side how to learn and connect with young people so we're hopeful that it's not just young people that it expands to you know a really broad audience. But I mean yeah our hope is that it is in the millions. I mean we want the 70 million roughly in Gen Z umbrella if you will give or take. So yeah I mean the 70 million there plus the however many millenials and the GenXers like yeah we're hoping that its a large chunk of the population that sees the value in this and says this is a really good way for me to get engaged around the things I care about and feel like I am part of the process now and I can really do something and I am really valued for what I'm putting into all this. Yeah I mean I can't put a number on it

Made By Us

Grace: So could you give me an overview about what Made By Us does?

Caroline: So Made By Us is a coalition of museums and historic sites that has teamed up because they realized that they didn't know how to individually engage Gen Z, that was a big gap in their knowledge and skills. And at the same time it is more important than ever to make sure that Gen Z has access to historic information and context about how we got here because as you know they are already shaping the country and they will continue to shape its future and I think with the 250th anniversary of the United States on the horizon in 2026 there was a sentiment that you know history wasn't something that every American knows as much as they should and yet it can really help us as we figure out the next chapter for our country. So Made By Us connects GenZers with history and we do that in a number of different ways, you know online, we do brand partnerships, we try to help museums kind of step into the civic space which is also something new to many of them and we do research and we do big programs that are designed around Gen Z needs and prioritize their interests and their needs over the interests of the institutions

Grace: What success have you seen in that area and from those programs with Gen Z?

Caroline: So I think the biggest success has come from a relentless insistence that we put Gen Z first. I mean it is so easy for institutions, especially big ones, you know I work at the Smithsonian and there's many kind of esteemed, important institutions that we work with. It's hard for them to put the needs of young people first simply because they have so many other buckets to fill. And they think well we're the experts, we know what history is important. So what has been most successful for us is really relentlessly hammering that we have to listen, we have to do research, we have to understand the needs of Gen Z and speak to those needs. So that might look like, let

me think for a second of a good example, okay so I guess with the 250th, there is a lot of like entities that are working towards that. And they are going out and saying this is an important anniversary, why? Because it is important, why? Because it's 250 years. Well regular people don't care, Gen Z doesn't care. That is not enough of a need, as much as, you know what job am I gonna have when I graduate or what does social life look like, how can I date during the pandemic or what's happening with the climate. There is much more pressing needs for people then just a random anniversary thats coming up that you know depending on how you feel about the country on any given day, you might not feel like celebrating or maybe you don't feel like doing all this work just to make democracy stick. So anyway all those to say that putting those user needs first has worked really well. And then the other piece is just being digitally competent, that is a struggle for a lot of organizations of all sizes and shapes. And in our work it's not because Gen Z only cares about the online space but if you are not online and you do not have Gen Z people working for you or with you, how do you know what their needs are? You know building that into your process that piece of like living in the spaces and channels where they live is really important.

Grace: What positive and negative factors have you seen working with Gen Z?

Caroline: The positive is there so passionate. We have seen really great, they want to do things. There sort of like despite the circumstances, Gen Z people have grown up in from 9/11 onwards they are really resilient and care about things and want to make the world a better place. So to me, we are seeing that kind of meaning. And a lot of older people will say like oh they don't believe in anything, you know there is this type of nihilism but I think it is there if you look for it. I think beneath the surface there is actually real craving to believe in something and be apart of something and make the world better. I don't really see any negatives I guess the only thing is



like they're new, they are kinda green, so you don't always know everything that's been done before but again that's where we think studying history can help.

Grace: What advice would you give one looking to engage Gen Z in the bridge building space?

Caroline: Give them a role. And you know ideally a paid role. And make them a part of the process the whole way. I feel like you have to expect, you might have expectations in like dialogue or civic engagement or whatever else. They are an expert in what it is like to be Gen Z today like they are an expert in their own world, inviting them in to bring that perspective is really, really important

Grace: Do you think Gen Z would be interested in being involved in bridge building?

Caroline: So I am going to be totally honest as this is resertach you're doing. I don't know. I see both sides. Most of the people that do this bridge building stuff are older and why would you want to spend your twenties, when you know you're trying to find your people and your friends. You know what's the incentive going across the aisle or you know just meet different people. You're probably trying to find people like you for the first time. You know your not just in high school with everyone, you're finally like okay im on my own, I'm talking about adults Gen Z here I guess. So I guess while the mission of bridge building is really important and I believe in it. I think there needs to be critical thinking around why, why that matters to people in that stage of their life. On the other hand, it is a really important stage of your life to meet people who are different then you because you know otherwise like when are you gonna meet them so.

Grace: How does Made By Us define success?

Caroline: We want to see young people using history as a tool. So if you care about bringing people together across divides, you're a young bridge builder, you might look to examples from the past where you know like the civil rights movement was not one idea it was like many people

with many different views having to kind of figure out a path forward; it was messy. So what lessons can you take from that into your own work? Whether you're organizing people or just having a conversation with people so that's how we measure success is like the number of young people who are using history as a tool. And that's hard to get at, we do that through surveys, polls, external data that we have from other sources that kind of possess knowledge and action but you know the whole field both history and civics needs a little better impact measures.

Grace: How many people in Gen Z do you hope or aspire to be engaged with in the coming years?

Caroline: So last year our biggest program reached about five million people between 18 through 30. That's reach you know so that's like the most people that you touch but then there's people who get more and more involved. We have about 100 young people that are actively involved. They are on what we call our BFF list so they do wanna work with us. So in this year you know we hope to double that number. We hope to reach at least 10 million people in that age range through social media, the press and bringing them in and having events all across the country. And then by 2026, our goal is that we reach about a third of Gen Z.

## D. Organization Profiles

### The American Exchange Project



The American Exchange Project was founded in 2019 by David McCullough III to foster interactions from different backgrounds through a study abroad program in their own country. McCullough founded AEP after taking part in a road trip that changed his life. He spent two months traveling across the United States, and witnessed how even though his fellow “Americans” seemed like strangers at first, they were bonded through a shared humanity. McCullough wanted to restore faith in the government, democracy, and each other. AEP offers a summer exchange project (for free) to every high school student in the country. The exchanges last 7-10 days and students get to fully immerse themselves in the culture of a different region of the United States than the one they grew up in. AEP fosters lifelong friendships and networking opportunities for high school students.

### BridgeUSA



BridgeUSA was founded in 2016 by Manu Meel to create a student- led organization for young people by young people. While in college, Meel witnessed a growing level of petemission

and apathy, and realized there wasn't a space on campus where students could listen to one another, and truly feel heard. Bridge USA is dedicated to developing the next generation of engaged, informed, and constructive citizens. Their work includes a college chapter network, BridgeUSA Institute, and BridgeUSA Summit. BridgeUSA now has over 40 college chapters across the US and recently launched high school chapters.

Common Ally



CommonAlly was founded in 2018 by Howard Brodwin and Aaron Lyles to facilitate civic engagement through content, technology, and incentivized actions. CommonAlly is a non-partisan platform created to amplify the voice of young voters and drive civic engagement. After witnessing the lack of a civic education curriculum, Brodwin and Lyles decided to create an app that would educate Gen Z on politics and help them to find what is most important to them.

Made By Us



Made By Us was founded by Neil Barclay and a steering committee in 2018 to create programs and digital platforms to connect young people with our shared past, present and future. This organization works to bring together America's history museums and sites to better engage Gen Z in American history and civic engagement, leading up to the 250th anniversary of the country. The Made By Us coalition includes 90 historical sites, museums, and societies, and is growing everyday. Made By Us is dedicated to creating programs and digital platforms to bring history into everyday life.

