

Increasing Civility, Pluralism, and Social Cohesion

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Philanthropy's Role in Increasing Civility, Pluralism, and Social Cohesion

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(Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement)

TODAY'S LEARNING QUESTIONS

- ❖ What is toxic polarization?
- ❖ Why should philanthropy care about polarization?
- ❖ How may philanthropy be contributing to polarization?
- ❖ How can your organization find another way through?

PART 1: DEFINITIONS: SOCIAL COHESION

A condition in which people in society have access to trusting social networks and a shared sense of solidarity, inclusion, and belonging.

Civility, bridge-building, and pluralism are all often discussed as ways to contribute to cohesion.

PART 1: DEFINITIONS: TOXIC POLARIZATION

The concepts of civility, pluralism, bridge-building, and social cohesion have received increased attention lately as potential antidotes to the (somewhat recent) phenomenon of toxic polarization.

Toxic polarization is the weaponization of difference (often along lines of identity). It is dangerous, illiberal, and anti-democratic.

Common characteristics:

- You are wrong→ You are evil
- Your existence is a threat to my existence
- “They” are enemies, animals, less than human
- Fuels animosity and hate that foster and/or create the conditions for violence to seem justified

TABLE DISCUSSION: 10 MINUTES

Have you seen evidence of toxic polarization affecting your own foundation's work or its ability to have the impact you seek?

SHARE BACK: 5 MINUTES

**2-3 examples of ways toxic
polarization affects your own
foundation's work or mission?**

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION: 10 MINUTES

**Is there anything you can think of that
your organization may be doing that
exacerbates toxic polarization?**

PART 2: PHILANTHROPY AND TOXIC POLARIZATION

- “We can only get funded for the extremes of our work.”
- “Our mandate is to advance ‘by any means necessary.’”
- “Funders over-simplify people and issues and can be overly moralistic.”
- “There’s so much groupthink and our evidence is dismissed.”
- “Our funders only resource relationship-building as a tactic.”

PART 2: PHILANTHROPY AND TOXIC POLARIZATION

“Grant making can’t flourish if the toxic divisions of our time are allowed to metastasize. These divisions promote rigid thinking. They limit the exchange of ideas. And they inhibit the kind of collaboration and partnership necessary to make and sustain long-term progress.”

- Hilary Pennington + Mark Freeman,
Chronicle of Philanthropy, February 2022

PART 3: ANOTHER WAY: A COHESION MINDSET

“Certainly, more investments are needed to fight polarization. But success isn’t possible unless philanthropy also transforms its own practices.”

Suzette Brooks Masters, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, March 31, 2022

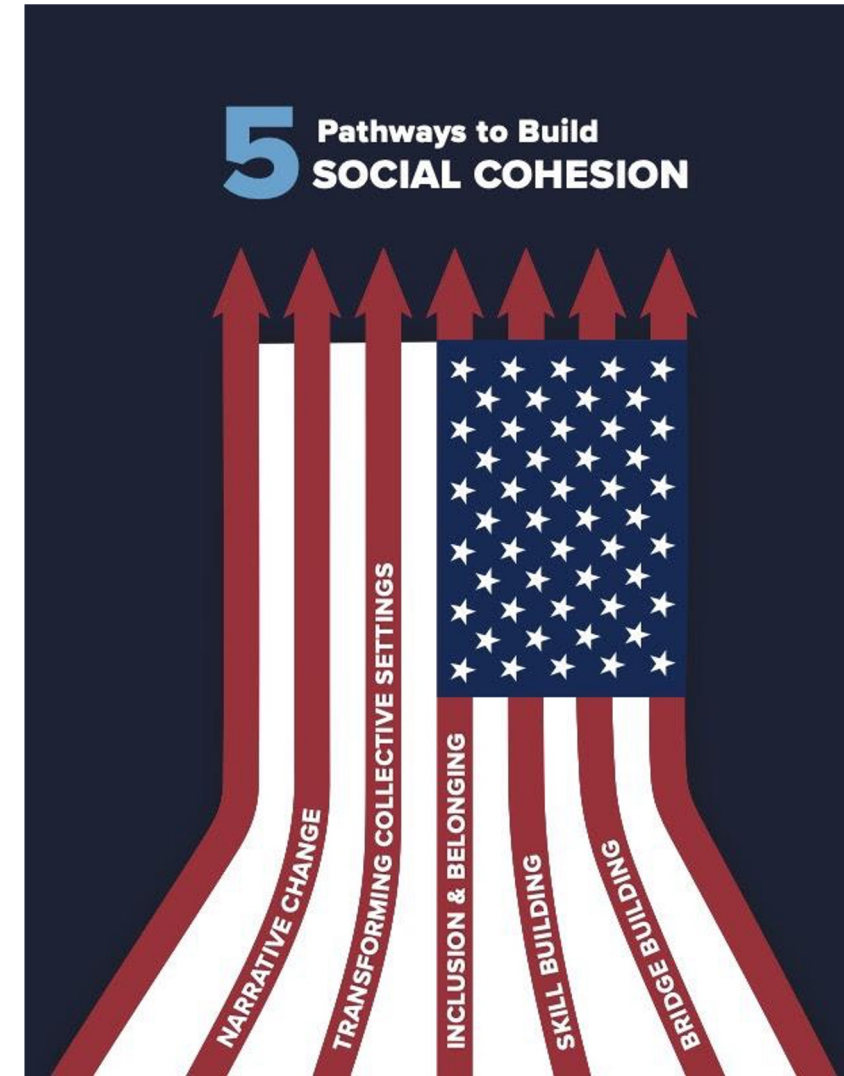
PART 3: ANOTHER WAY: A COHESION MINDSET

...is NOT about:	... IS about:
papering over differences in values or identity	avoiding dehumanization or painting the other side as an enemy to be destroyed
finding full unity or complete agreement	finding points of commonality, especially when "us vs. them" thinking is pervasive
ignoring or de-prioritizing outcomes for the sake of harmony	centering and prioritizing "means" as much as "ends"
advancing politeness at all costs or avoiding thoughtful critique or criticism.	shaping norms and behaviors that foster the mutual tolerance and forbearance democracy requires
achieving certainty or rightness	engaging with curiosity and humility
creating moderates	acting pragmatically to achieve overarching goals; considering moderation
eliminating partisanship	advancing pluralism and co-existence

PART 3: ANOTHER WAY: A COHESION MINDSET

WHAT can you fund?

- Bridge-building
- Skill-building
- Inclusion and belonging
- Transform collective settings
- Narrative change



PART 3: ANOTHER WAY: A COHESION MINDSET

HOW can you lead to support cohesion?

- Avoid zero-sum propositions when possible. Abundance > Scarcity
- Analyze language choice and receptivity
- Embrace nuance and complexity
- Center “means”, not just goals, and incentivize bridging behaviors
- Invite divergent points of view
- Reflect on assumptions about “the other side”
- Consider impact, not just intent

TABLE DISCUSSION: 15 MINUTES

Reactions? How easy or hard do you think implementing some of this would be in your organization? Why?

What else could you do? What would you need in order to be able to do it?

SHARE BACK: 5 MINUTES

**2-3 reactions or examples of
ways you think you could
embrace a cohesion mindset?**

SOCIAL COHESION PHILANTHROPY

A collaborative effort to shape the culture of philanthropy towards intentionally building social cohesion and mitigating toxic polarization. The goal is to create shared understanding and advance philanthropic practice by “Learning Out Loud”

Learn more about the campaign and find concrete tools, articles, stories, and resources: **PACEfunders.org/SCP**

Feeling inspired?

PLEASE RATE THIS SESSION BEFORE LEAVING



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