

BridgeUSA 

# BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS 2024







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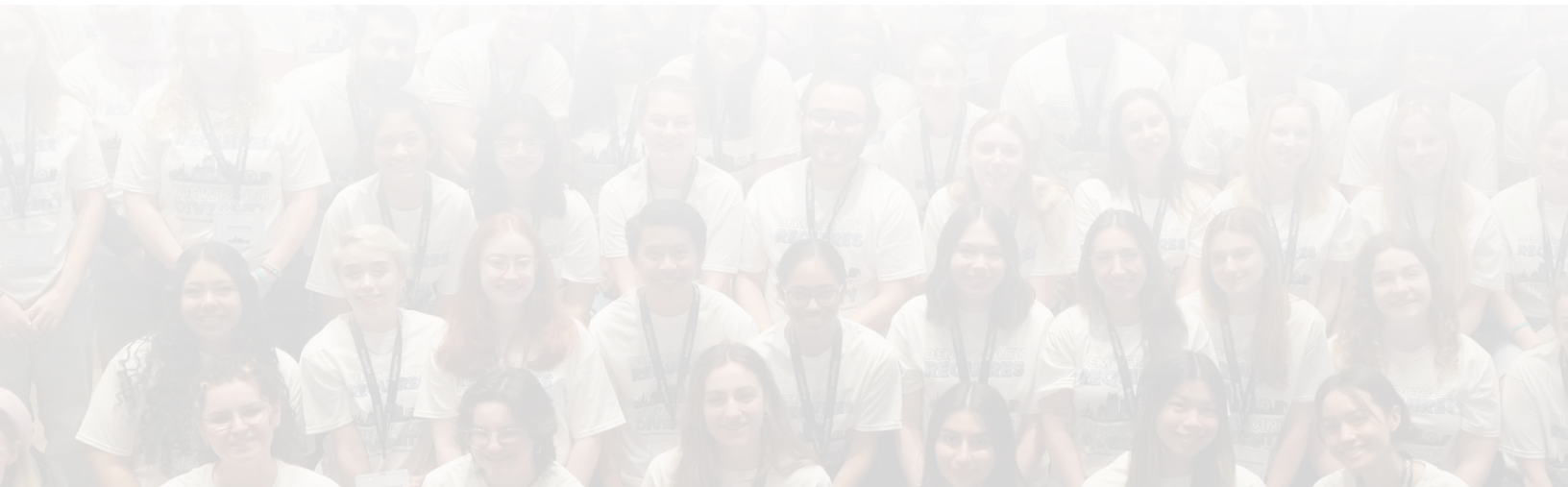
# WELCOME

## BETTER POLITICS STARTS HERE!

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*You are about to join the largest movement of young people fighting polarization by championing constructive dialogue on college campuses! Our generation will bear the cost of polarization and tribalism for years to come unless we do something about it.*

*Remember that BridgeUSA was built by young people for young people. You are fully capable of making your BridgeUSA chapter the home for dialogue and intellectual exchange on your campus! Never underestimate what you can achieve, and when the going gets tough, you have a community of like-minded young people ready to help.*





# How to Read This Chapter Guide

The chapter handbook is designed to be a supplement to the one-on-one support that you will receive as a chapter leader. Every chapter and campus is different, and you know your student body the best! We've compiled this guide of best practices because they work in the majority of cases, but some advice might not be applicable to your situation. To that end, view these best practices as recommendations, but not as the only way to be successful.

Throughout the Chapter Handbook, we have provided links to external documents which serve as Deep Dives, Examples, and Templates for specific topics. The Deep Dives are essential to understanding the topic. They are a must read when learning about a particular facet of a BridgeUSA chapter.



## BridgeUSA Mission Statement

BridgeUSA is a multi-partisan student movement that champions viewpoint diversity, responsible discourse, and a solution-oriented political culture. We are developing a generation of leaders that value empathy and constructive engagement because our generation will bear the cost of polarization and tribalism for years to come.

We believe that polarization is damaging our country and causing young people to either disengage from democracy or radically engage by fitting a partisan mold. Democracy is in danger if the next generation is disengaged and polarized because young people are the future of our country.

The purpose of BridgeUSA is to build a BridgeUSA community — one in which students from across the ideological spectrum can engage as a group working together to understand — to bridge — the various perspectives behind the important political and social issues of our time.

We rise above party. We do not force unity or compromise. We believe in the BridgeUSA Mindset: Viewpoint diversity, constructive engagement, and a solution-oriented political culture.

# The BridgeUSA Mindset

## Viewpoint Diversity

The hallmark of education is robust intellectual engagement that is defined by challenge and curiosity. Universities should provide a space that fosters constructive dialogue, exposure to new ideas and beliefs, and opportunity for open-minded and productive intellectual exchanges. No belief should be challenged by just one idea, nor two or three for that matter. Rather, all beliefs should be challenged by a range of perspectives. We use the term “Viewpoint Diversity” instead of “Ideological Diversity,” because we understand that not all ideas stem from ideologies or ideologues.

## Constructive Dialogue

Constructive dialogue is a process that transforms unproductive, winner-take-all discussions into dialogue that is engaging, fulfilling, and informative. In order to move the discussion in the direction of understanding and solutions, we must take on certain responsibilities as participants in these conversations. In particular, constructive dialogue includes a commitment to have courage, be honest, and strive for respect. We must have the courage to challenge opposing beliefs and have the curiosity to explore important issues.

## Solution-Oriented Politics

Politics has been rendered easy and dualistic, making blind-partisanship the principal mode of political practice. As a result, our system rewards the needs of parties and individuals over the needs of the American people. There is no constructive way forward so long as the focus is on winning political battles instead of finding common solutions. BridgeUSA believes that to achieve action and progress on the issues affecting Americans, we need to be committed to finding long-term solutions instead of waging short-term fights to score political wins.



## What is a BridgeUSA Chapter?

A civic space? A listening community? A home for dialogue? All of these fit! BridgeUSA chapters are communities of young people from across the political spectrum who advocate for the BridgeUSA Mindset, work with university administrations to institutionalize the BridgeUSA mindset, and challenge those who seek to further polarize the campus environment. BridgeUSA chapters are multi-partisan and do not endorse or advocate for any political party or candidate.

## JOIN THE MOVEMENT.



## Our Values.

- **Viewpoint Diversity**
- **Constructive Dialogue**
- **Solution Oriented Politics**

## JOIN THE LARGEST GROWING YOUTH MOVEMENT

BridgeUSA is the largest and fastest growing student movement improving our political discourse with over 50 college chapters and 20 high school chapters working to end polarization in politics.

- **Over 3,500 students engaged each semester**
- **Nearly 200 different types of programming per semester**
- **Chapters in 22 states**



**Access to exclusive internships**



**Networking with over 500 like-minded students**



**Annual student summit**



Socials  
**bridgeusa\_**



Email  
**chapterteam@bridgeusa.org**

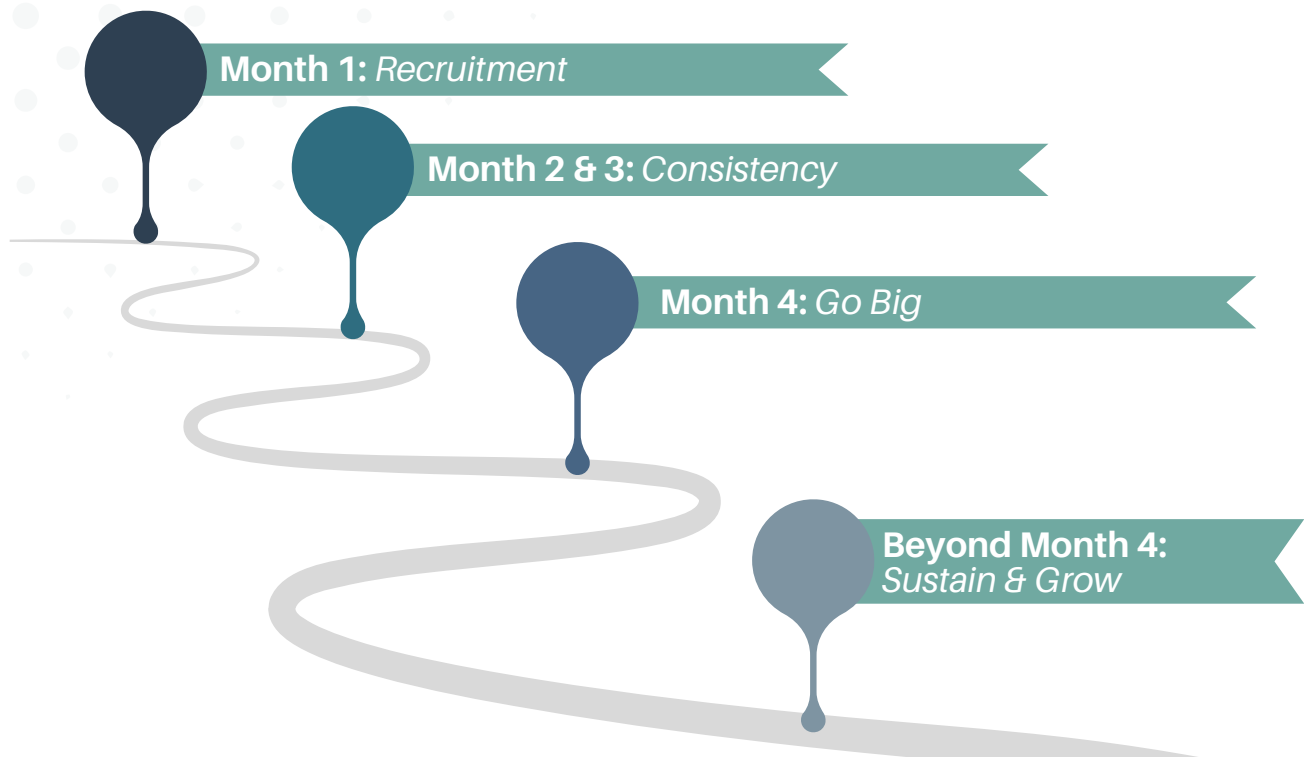


Website  
**bridgeusa.org**



# First Semester Timeline

This is an approximate timeline of how your Bridge chapter should progress within the first semester. Not every chapter will follow this timeline, but it provides good goal posts to keep in mind. The first semester can be the most important in laying the long-term foundation for your chapter!



## Month 1: Recruitment

- ☐ You should have **2 info sessions** within the first week of school
- ☐ Have **first discussion** within two weeks of info sessions

## Month 2 & 3: Consistency

- ☐ **Host 2 discussion** events monthly
- ☐ Begin **planning a larger event** in 4th Month
- ☐ Ensure all Board Members are familiar with plans

## Month 4: Go Big

- ☐ Begin **planning — or executing — large scale events** with other student organizations

## Beyond Month 4: Sustain & Grow

- ☐ Once you've established a solid base of students and raised awareness about BridgeUSA on campus, you should **begin organizing larger and more impactful events and partnerships**
- ☐ Aim to be the **face of student-led dialogue on campus** and a stable institution of campus politics

# Interaction With the National Team

## Chapter Development Consultants

Every chapter is assigned one Chapter Development Consultant (CDC) as your main point of contact with the national organization.

## Bi-weekly Calls with your CDC

Every other week your president has to have a meeting with your CDC. This is mandatory for the president though other members of leadership are welcome. At least 2 hours prior to the call, the president is required to fill out the Bi-Weekly Check In Form, linked [here](#).

## CDC Meeting Agenda

On the call, you will go through bi-weekly updates from the national organization, which can be found [here](#).



# FIRST STEPS

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*Let's get started! This section contains information on the basics of starting up a chapter, pitching BridgeUSA, and building an internal leadership structure. In other words, the first steps required in building a successful foundation for your chapter. .*





## Pitching BridgeUSA

In order to recruit a leadership team & new members, build relationships with other organizations, get a faculty sponsor, or any of the other various activities associated with chapter development, chapter leaders must develop a compelling pitch for Bridge. To create a successful chapter, you must convince a wide array of people to join in order to have a multi-partisan membership!



## Officially Registering Your Chapter on Campus

Find out what it takes to register on campus and become a registered student organization as soon as possible. Typically this involves a school form, a constitution, a specific number of members, and faculty advisor — but each school is different. Sometimes schools will require a letter of approval from the national organization. Reach out to Ross (irwin@bridgeusa.org) if that is the case. [Here are some tips for getting registered.](#)

## Finding an Executive Board

The executive board is the internal leadership team that runs all BridgeUSA operations on a day-to-day basis. Leading a BridgeUSA chapter is not something that you can do on your own! You will need a team of fellow students who are both competent and committed to the mission. Finding the right people for your core team is the most important investment you can make in your chapter. There is no single Executive Board format that works for all chapters. Check if your university has specific position requirements for student organizations.

## About the E-Board

As you search for students it's important to keep a few things in mind. First and most importantly, does this person believe in the mission of BridgeUSA? Secondly, does this person have the time and energy to fulfill a role within your organization? And finally, does this person add to the diversity of my chapter in terms of viewpoint and identity?

To see different types of roles you can add to your team and view examples of leadership structure, read on in the handbook!

**DEEP DIVE**



About E-Board



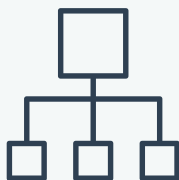
## Internal Structure

This document serves as a guide to structuring and maintaining your internal structure as an organization. You should not use this document, especially the chapter roles, as a goal. These roles are to help you think about all that is possible within a BridgeUSA chapter and what additional roles could help you do

**DEEP DIVE**



Structure



Leadership  
Conflicts



Roles  
Handbook



## Finding a Faculty or Staff Advisor

Building a healthy working relationship with a faculty advisor can help elevate your chapter's standing on campus and lead to partnerships with faculty and administrators. While some universities automatically assign advisors, be ready to replace them if they are not interested in the BridgeUSA mission. Ask your team to identify faculty who may be interested and remember that they can be from any discipline, not just political science! Focus your pitch on asking for feedback and the mentorship aspects of the advisor role.

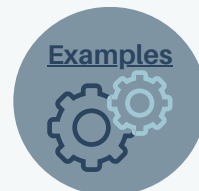
Good professors tend to enjoy giving advice!

## Constitution

Creating a chapter constitution may sound daunting but many universities provide templates for student organizations that include most of the necessary components. In order to create an effective constitution, use the BridgeUSA constitution examples and tips below.

### EXAMPLES

#### Constitution Advice



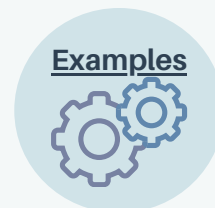
## Recruitment: Hosting an Info Session

The purpose of hosting an info session is to engage interested students in BridgeUSA. By the time students attend the info session, they should already know a little bit about BridgeUSA (through tabling, engagement fairs, word of mouth, etc). Remember, students are attending the info session to see if BridgeUSA is worth their time! The documents below will help you plan, delegate tasks, and provide templates for your first info session!

**DEEP DIVE**



#### Info Session





# HOSTING BRIDGEUSA DISCUSSIONS

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*It's time to get to the real purpose of your BridgeUSA chapter, hosting conversations. This is the bread and butter of BridgeUSA. In order to change the way people think about their opponents and political discourse, we must immerse them in a conversation that is constructive, respectful, and prioritizes effective communication.*

*The primary way we do this is through our BridgeUSA discussions which we'll explain below. Here you'll learn how to set up a discussion, create questions, and moderate tough conversations.*



## Purpose of Events

The purpose of regular discussion events is to build a BridgeUSA community – one in which students from across the ideological and intellectual spectrum can engage with one another not as partisan rivals trying to push their viewpoints, but instead as a group working together to understand the various sides to an issue. The ultimate goal of a BridgeUSA discussion is to not only understand the viewpoint of those who disagree with you, but to also understand WHY they believe what they believe! These events form the backbone of a BridgeUSA chapter. The type of events may differ from school to school, but if you can create compelling and interesting discussions between your fellow students, your BridgeUSA chapter will grow and be successful.

## BridgeUSA Discussion Norms

Our goal is to create spaces for constructive dialogue, and these norms are essential! The BridgeUSA Discussion norms form the foundation for dialogue and discourse at BridgeUSA chapter meetings and campus events. Reminding the attendees of these norms before a conversation begins, displaying these norms prominently in a room, or distributing the norms at the start of an event are all ways to reinforce these norms.

After you read the rules, don't hesitate to say that "if you do not wish to follow those rules you can leave now, and if you choose to stay, please abide by the rules."

### #1 Listen to listen, rather than to respond.

Instead of planning on how to respond or thinking about what to say next, we should focus our thinking on listening to and understanding the ideas of others before formulating a response.

### #2 Try not to interrupt or have side conversations.

We are all here with the best intentions. We want to genuinely engage with others and learn from one another. By not interrupting and talking on the side, we ensure that all voices are heard and respected.

### #3 Address the statement, not the person.

When responding to statements, arguments, and comments, we address what was said, not the person who said it. Remember that the discussion is about ideas--not the worth, morality, or goodness of the people who hold the ideas, including those ideas that offend or oppose one's own beliefs or those of others.

### #4 Participants represent only themselves and are not representatives of social groups they belong to.

Though we may reflect the views in our respective communities or groups, within the dialogue, no one is expected to represent organizations or groups. Nonetheless, social and personal identities are often of vital importance to the ideas we hold, and when brought up in discussion should be treated with respect. Experiences that stem from identity, not just arguments that stem from knowledge, are welcome in discussion.



## Moderating a Discussion

Being able to moderate dialogues and facilitate constructive discussion is the core of our work! Ensuring a productive, empathetic exchange of ideas is BridgeUSA's ultimate goal. However, moderating is a difficult task and it will take practice. You won't feel comfortable as a moderator until you've moderated multiple conversations.

BridgeUSA provides moderator training (reach out to your if you wish to participate), but the information is also included here:

## BASIC MODERATION

[Training Guide](#)





# Possible Issues You Will Have to Address

These are some of the most common issues within BridgeUSA discussions. They are listed in order from least disruptive to most disruptive. As a moderator it is your duty to see these issues arising before they become prohibitive to constructive engagement.

**DEEP DIVE**



## Addressing Problems in a Discussion



## Types of Discussion Events

There are many different types of discussion events that can create productive conversations! Some things to consider are the size of the group, the seriousness of the event, availability of moderators, and your end goal. Right now, your focus should be on small group discussions which generally consist of 6-8 participants (outside of your executive board). As you grow in participants you can maintain one large group or break out into smaller groups of 6-8 for parts of your discussion.

Prioritizing regular, engaging discussions is the foundation for fostering a thriving community. By hosting consistent discussions, you not only cultivate a dedicated group of participants but also lay the groundwork for successful and impactful events. As you establish a solid core of committed attendees, you can confidently progress towards organizing larger and more ambitious gatherings!

## Frequency of Gatherings

Your chapter should be hosting small, regular, student-led discussions with a consistent schedule. These discussions are where participants will learn and practice the skills of constructive dialogue and will change their bad dialogue habits over time. You should host these discussions regularly - every 2 weeks is most common and doable for chapters starting off. These bi-weekly discussions should be the same day and time every two weeks as well as in the same room so participants know when and where they can find your chapter's discussions!

# Picking a Topic for Your Discussion

Selecting a topic that is engaging and interesting will set your event up for success! Consider topics and issues that are relevant nationally, such as artificial intelligence or student loan debt. For a list of potential topics currently relevant in the news, check out the [Trending Topics](#) list!



## DEEP DIVE

### Choosing a Topic



### Possible Topics & Questions



Also consider local issues: are there any issues affecting students directly or indirectly on campus? This could include campus housing, parking, dining, or anything else that affects students.

Remember — politics is often local!

As you look to build a base of members, we encourage you to begin with topics that may not be as heated or divisive in conversation such as abortion, guns, or gender issues. These issues will require a lot of preparation and planning on the moderation side of things. Consider running topic ideas by your CDC for inspiration!

Additionally, it can help to solicit input from your campus community about which topics to discuss. Consider having members vote on your next topic during a meeting.



# General Discussion Tips

All discussions will be different depending on the campus, topic and attendees. However, there are some general guidelines to follow to make a welcoming and productive environment.

**DEEP DIVE**

## Discussion Tips



## Doing Research For Your Discussion

Research is a vital task when it comes to any BridgeUSA discussion. Due to the nature of good discussions, it is important that the moderators understand the topic and the positions that will be in the room. It is also important for participants to have a common base of understanding to work from. You can start with a few facts and definitions on a slide deck or print out for your early discussions.

As you grow and your discussions become larger and more contentious, plan on taking your research to the next level by providing a fact sheet. This should include studies that are in favor of both sides of the argument, news and articles from each side, and opinion pieces from supporters of each side. This will help participants see for themselves the range of opinions and facts from each side.

**DEEP DIVE**

## Topic Research



# Discussion Operations Checklist

There is a lot that can go into the pre-planning process of a discussion or event. From deciding on the date/time to the intricacies of marketing, below is a checklist of things to know to execute effectively on your discussion or large event.






We also recommend you download and use our Template Task List (available as both [Google Sheets](#) and [Google Docs](#)) to organize and plan for who is doing what, and when tasks/projects are due:

## Executive Team Task List

Task	Assigned to	Status	Due Date	Notes
Schedule two tabling sessions for March 30 discussion	Name1 ▾	Not Started ▾	March 15	
Create Bridge The Gap event graphic	Name2 ▾	In Progress ▾	March 25	
Make Divvy funding request for pizza	Name3 ▾	Complete ▾	March 10	
Create presentation for March 23rd discussion	Name4 ▾	Blocked ▾	March 19	
	Unassigned ▾	Not Started ▾		
	Unassigned ▾	Not Started ▾		

One of the most important things we recommend for chapters looking to get off the ground: consistency is key. If your chapter can host discussions on a regular basis – like weekly or bi-weekly – that makes it more likely members will continue to show up and stay engaged. Ensuring tasks are established well in advance of a discussion or event will be important to your success.

**For your first discussions your checklist will be short, but should include:**

-  **Date & Time**
-  **Location**
-  **Topic**
-  **Questions**
-  **A Graphic or Posters for Social Media**



# Discussion and Event Checklist

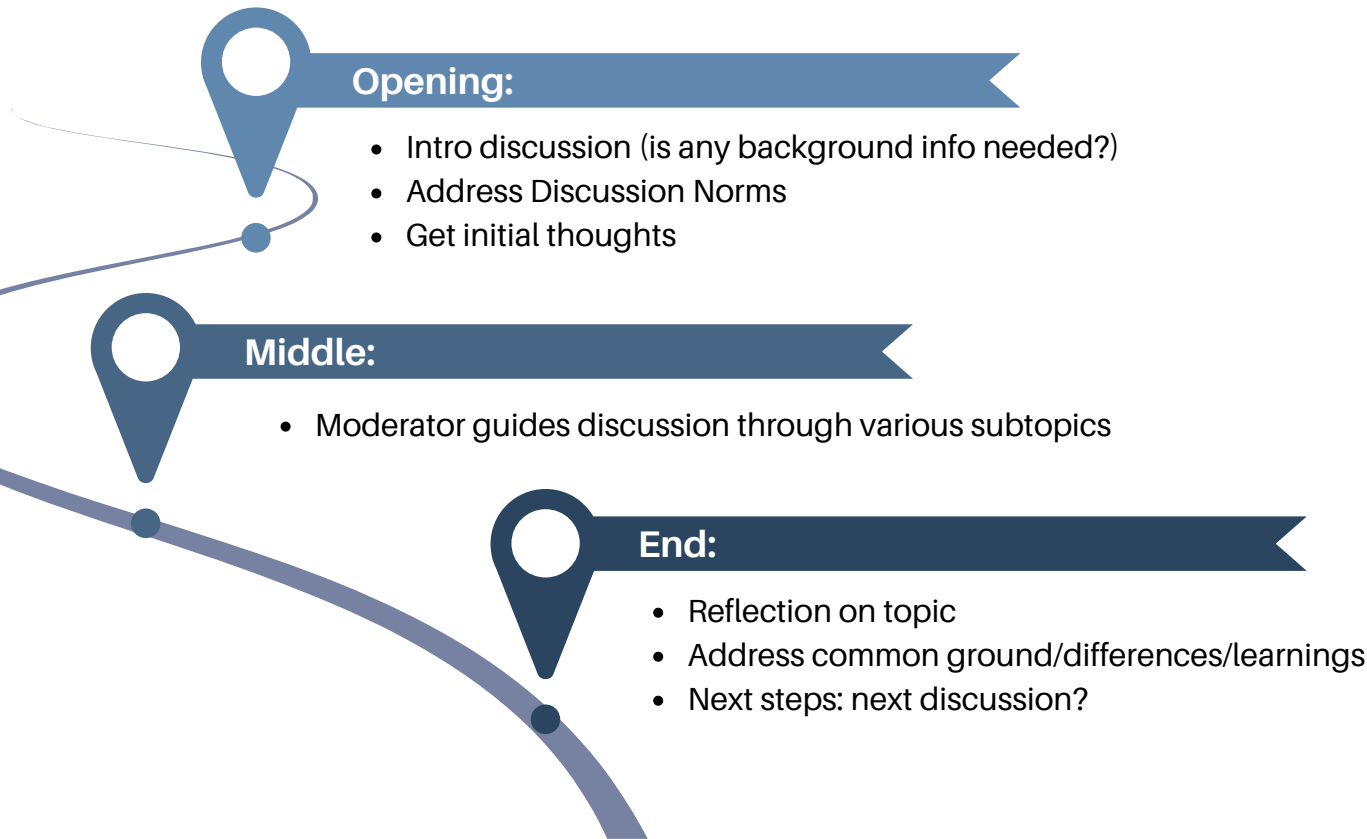
## Discussions

BridgeUSA defines discussions as general, recurring meetings usually focused on a single topic. They do not generally involve any bells or whistles (such as partners).

While your mileage may vary, here are a couple of recommendations for a discussion planning timeline (and note that you may want to consider planning more than one discussion at a time):

Option 1:	Option 2:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 weeks before: decide on topic</li><li>• 3 weeks before: research topic</li><li>• 2 weeks before: start marketing</li><li>• 1 week before: Create agenda &amp; finalize moderator guide</li><li>• After discussion: debrief with team &amp; how to improve</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 weeks before: decide on topic</li><li>• 2 weeks before: research topic</li><li>• 1.5 weeks before: start marketing</li><li>• 1 week before: Create agenda &amp; finalize moderator guide</li><li>• After discussion: debrief with team &amp; how to improve</li></ul>

## Recommended Discussion Structure



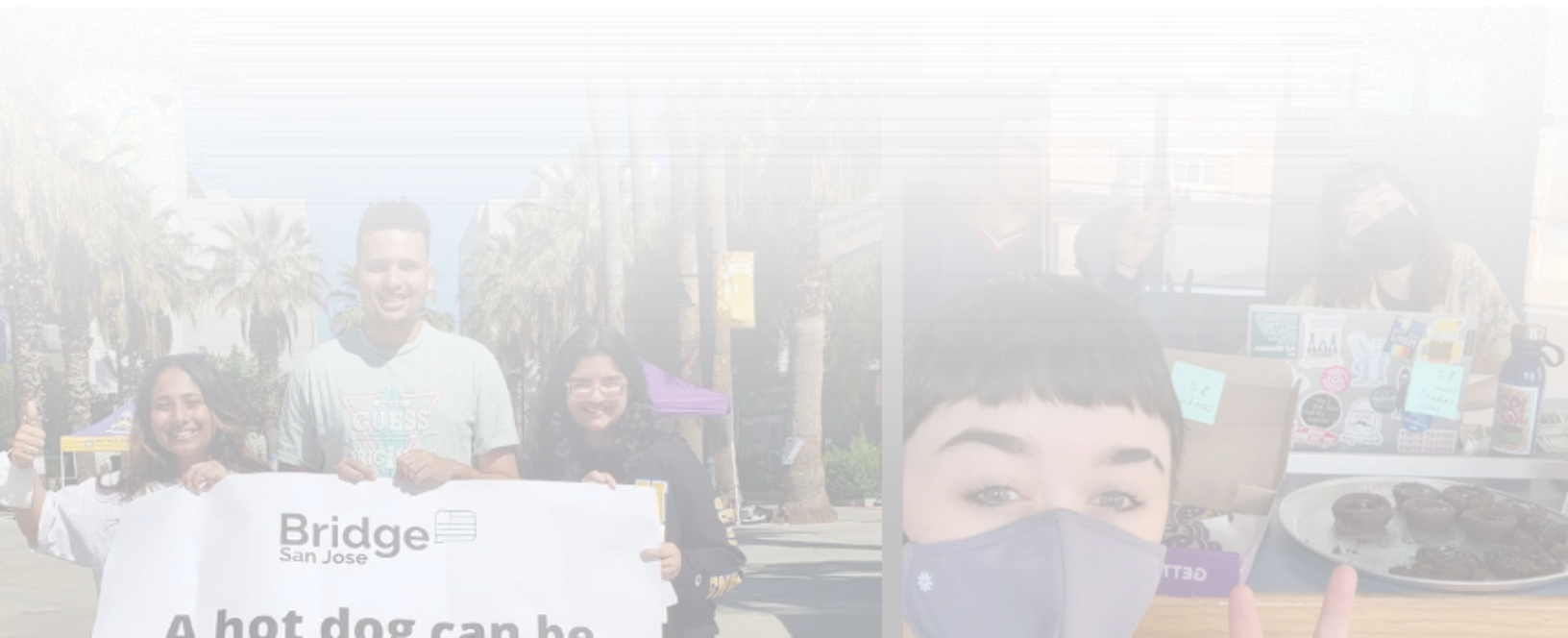
## Events

Events are generally larger-scale than discussions, and involve programming that may include speakers, partnerships, and substantial marketing to bring out audiences larger than a regular general discussion. We will explore them in-depth in future handbooks. For now focus on nailing your discussions.



# MARKETING & OUTREACH

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# Branding Guidelines

Having a consistent brand for our movement across all campuses ensures that students know what we stand for, and what things they can expect from you at your school.

Please use these branding guidelines for the creation of your chapter materials.

Not every chapter document or marketing material has to follow this, and you can modify these guidelines to reflect specific event topics.

## Style Guide

TOOLKIT



## Marketing Timeline

### 1 Week Before

- Have the topic finalized and have digital marketing material and flyers ready to go.
- Book tabling times if necessary
- Post on Social Media
- Make announcements in group channels (Slack, GroupMe)

### 5 Days Before

- Begin tabling (Collect emails here)
- Message people on social media to attend
- Email professors

### 2 Days Before

- Repost on Instagram Story
- Continue social media messaging

### Day Of

- Have a tabling session earlier in the day
- Send a big reminder in group channels and message everyone individually (**do both!**)
- Send reminders to professors if they agreed to attend.
- Post one more time on social media (Story or Post)

### Day After

- Make post on social media
- Message people who attended, thanking them for coming
- Stay in touch with everyone for the next event!



# In-Person Marketing

This guide is meant as a comprehensive list of the various ways to find students for BridgeUSA in general. These can be used to find an executive board, recruit more students each semester, bring students to events, or even send a survey out to your school. Before we get to the list of methods, a few general tips:

## **Hire freshmen and sophomores.**

Freshmen students usually have less they are involved in and more willing to join clubs, but are also more likely to leave in the short-term and the following term. Sophomores typically have less time to give, but they already have a year of experience on campus and are more likely to make a long-term commitment.

## **BridgeUSA is more than a discussion club!**

BridgeUSA hosts student-led discussion events, but it can be so much more than that. Most Bridge chapters have roles in not just events, but in marketing, finance, and outreach as well—all of which are valuable job skills and resume items. Of course, you don't want students joining only for advancing their career, but they can build their resume at the same time that they are engaging in productive, multi-partisan discussion.

## **Your own network.**

Reach out to friends/acquaintances who you think might be interested, with whom you are well-connected, or who you know are connected to social circles with which you are not familiar.

## **Present yourselves to students at club fairs.**

Most universities hold a fair where student organizations can present themselves on a semi-annual basis. These fairs are extremely important for recruitment as students who attend such fairs are very inclined to become active.

## **Tabling.**

Now that you have experience tabling at the club fair, make it routine! At least once a week you and your team should be setting up a table in a busy area on campus promoting your chapter as well as any and all discussions going on that week.

## Social Media

Social media is an excellent tool to use in conjunction with in-person marketing to increase chapter success. When using social media, you want to pay attention to the attention spans of college students. When creating social media posts, you want to be short and to the point, while being bold. Doing all three can amplify the BridgeUSA mission and create interest on any platform you choose. Furthermore, recruitment can be done over social media in the same way by messaging people from your school.

Some basics of social media may include posting your executive board, making a "What is Bridge" post answering some basic questions that one might have, then posting about your discussions.

TOOLKIT



Social Media  
Content Sheet

## Resources

To get started, here are digital templates that you can use for your chapter! These will hopefully give you the first step in creating a legacy on your campus, reaching more students.

TOOLKIT



Social Media  
Guide



# Outreach

Outreach comes in many forms, whether that be in-person tabling to social media messaging. Whatever way you choose, it is important to build relationships with students, clubs, professors, administrators, and the larger community. By doing so, you expand your overall reach. When using outreach, be creative and think of the goals and desires of the person you are reaching out to.

## What is outreach?

Developing relationships with stakeholders for advice, partnerships, promotion, co-hosting, or further connections

### *Guiding Principles*

- Prioritize relationships over outcomes - every person can be learned from
- Bridge is difficult to explain, ensure they are fully on the same page about our mission
- Figure out what motivates and drives them, not if they have the most experience. Skills can be taught but passion can't
- Persistent Documentation - we can only learn if we know what we've done
- It's a numbers game! Many people will not respond, or they will say no. If you become discouraged by this early on you will prevent yourself from seeing results

### *Why are you reaching out?*

- To build relationships
- Outreach starts with relationships
- Easier to ask for things
- Always start by asking for advice
- To co-host an event
- To speak at an event
- To build officer base

### *Who are you reaching out to?*

#### **Students!**

- Students are the backbone of BridgeUSA - so why not reach out to them directly? Here's an excellent method for finding students at your school: [Summer Recruitment Suggestions](#)
- Furthermore, word of mouth is very effective in pitching Bridge, and the more friends you can make on campus the larger the organization will grow!

### *Where do you find them?*

#### **Student clubs**

- "Student organizations or clubs at [College Name]"
- Student Involvement Fairs
- Tabling
- Campuses often have an organization list you can sort through
- Instagram



# FINANCES

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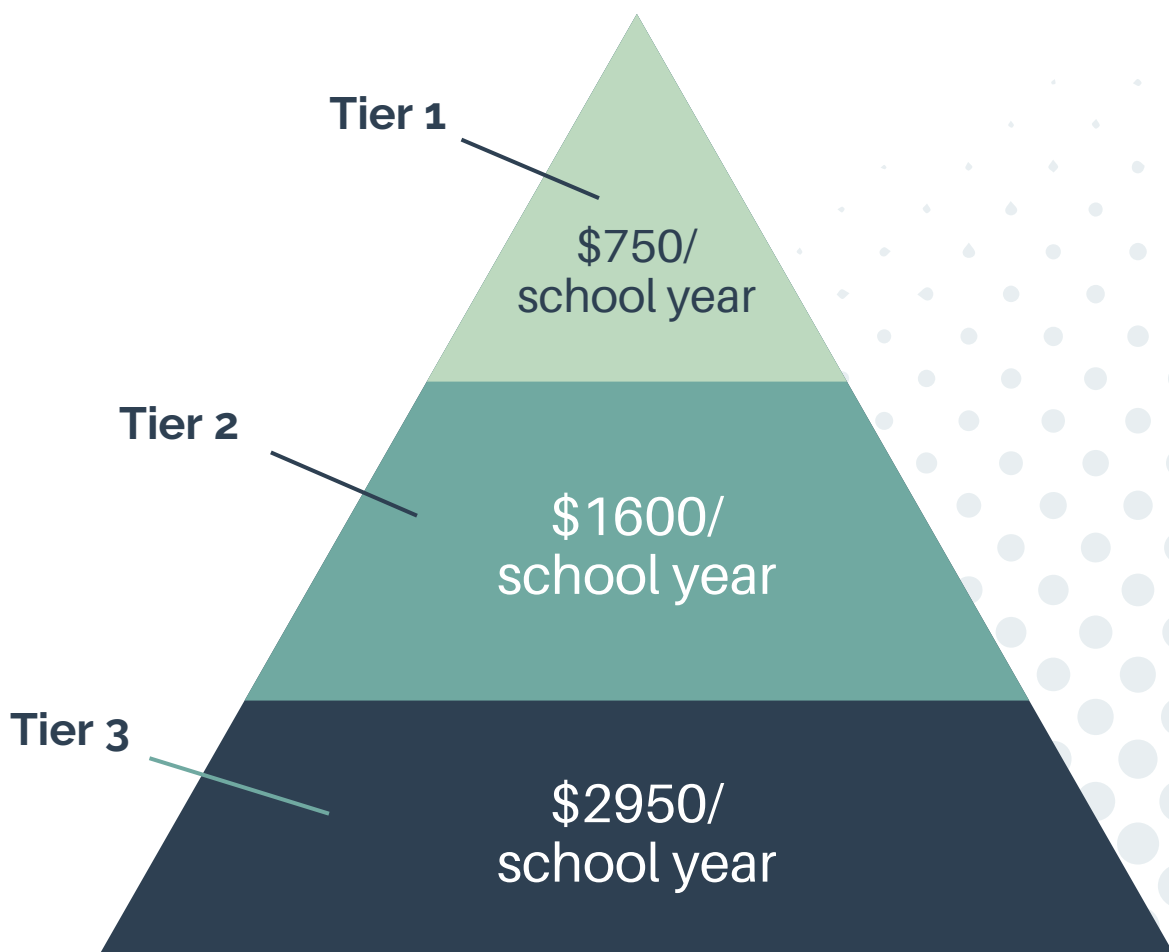
# What is Your Chapter's Budget?

BridgeUSA funds chapters based on a tiered system, based largely on the amount of time your chapter has existed. In your first year as a chapter, you're eligible for either tier 0 and/or tier 1, which ranges from \$150 to \$750. That number increases to up to \$2,950 after being a chapter for three academic years.

You can visit your Chapter Sheet to see information such as your total budget for the academic year, amount spent, and amount available to request in your budget.

For detailed information about finances from BridgeUSA, please visit the [2023-2024 Chapter Funding Handbook](#), which details the system used, how to request and spend funds, and additional rules for chapters using BridgeUSA funds.

Each chapter interested in receiving funding from BridgeUSA must fill out the [Funding Sign Up form](#). The [Chapter Funding Handbook](#) outlines the steps to get started on Bill,



# How to Request Funding: Bill

Bill is the funding service that BridgeUSA uses for chapters to use their allotted budgets. All transactions you make through BridgeUSA will be completed through Bill.

The steps to use Bill are straightforward: a member of the chapter will use the application to request funds from a budget allotted for the academic year, and once a funding request has been approved by the chapter's respective Chapter Development Consultant (CDC), the chapter will be able to spend the money using a physical or virtual Bill card.

To get started using Bill, please follow the four "Getting Started" steps outlined in the Chapter Funding Handbook.

The steps to requesting funds in Bill are simple:



*\*Requests less than \$100 may take up to 24 hours for approval. Requests of \$100 or greater may take up to 72 hours for approval.*

Generally speaking, any expense less than \$100 must be requested at least 24 hours in advance of approval from the CDC. Any expense greater, or equal, to \$100 must be requested at least 72 hours in advance of approval from the CDC.

There are things that cannot be funded through BridgeUSA, including but not limited to: alcohol, illicit drugs, unnecessary expensive food or beverages, or personal items.

For more information about the chapter funding process, please visit the Chapter Funding Handbook.



Finances

**DEEP DIVE**



# Conclusion



You've made it to the end of the Building the Foundation Handbook! Remember what we said at the start of this handbook:

*BridgeUSA was built by young people for young people. You are fully capable of making your BridgeUSA chapter the home for dialogue on your campus! Never underestimate what you can achieve. When the going gets tough, you have a community of young people ready to help.*

If you have any questions or concerns, reach out to your CDC or to Ross Irwin. If something isn't covered, we've likely encountered it before and might have materials related to the situation, so don't hesitate to reach out if you can't find something.

Now it's time for you to start building on these best practices and expanding your chapter. Remember that the end goal of a BridgeUSA chapter is to create a shift in campus culture to embrace viewpoint diversity, constructive engagement and a solution-oriented politics. Throughout your time in BridgeUSA, you should constantly be expanding your chapter's operations and advocate for a political future that is built on empathy, dignity, and solutions.



