Information Sheet: Bridging the Divides

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What is Bridging the Divides?

Bridging the Divides is a program funded by a 1.2-million-dollar Mellon grant that was awarded to CENTRO, The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College-CUNY, to support the establishment of collaborative, interdisciplinary study groups composed of artists, scholars, and journalists from across Puerto Rico and its diasporas.

The first year’s group, which focused on the theme of decolonization, was hosted by CENTRO and led by Dr. Yarimar Bonilla (then CENTRO Director) and Dr. Efrén Rivera from the University of Puerto Rico law school. The second group, which focuses on the theme of Post-Disaster Futures, is now hosted at Princeton University and led by current Princeton Professor Dr. Yarimar Bonilla and Dr. Deepak Lamba-Nieves, who is the Research Director and Churchill G. Carey, Jr. Chair in Economic Development Research at the Puerto Rican think tank, Center for a New Economy. Deepak is also an adjunct faculty member at the University of Puerto Rico’s Graduate School of Planning.

Where does the concept of “Bridging the Divides” come from? How does it reflect the project’s desired impact on Puerto Rico and its Diaspora?

The concept of “bridging divides” signals the need to overcome long-standing divisions that have served as roadblocks to the development of Puerto Rican Studies and to the exploration of new solutions to Puerto Rico’s pressing problems. These divides include language, geography, ideology, and methodology, and the lack of a shared vocabulary and policy agenda for the future.

Recent experiences like Hurricane Maria and the Covid crisis have reinforced that there is not one singular Puerto Rican experience, but rather a multiplicity of realities, visions, and desires.
In addition, although Puerto Rican Studies constitutes an intellectual field, it does not yet have a discrete set of methods, approaches, or standards of evidence. Most scholars come to the study of Puerto Rico through training in other fields—many of which are still weighed down by eurocentric conceptual frameworks, outdated canons, and not-yet-decolonized methods. Indeed, even the basic terminology for describing Puerto Rico is subject to conceptual debate: is it a colony, a territory, or a nation?

A foundational goal for the study groups is thus developing a new vocabulary and conceptual pathways for theorizing and reimagining Puerto Rico and its future. To this end, the co-conveners seek to convene a core group of researchers working in different modes: scholarly, journalistic, and artistic. The goal is to spur not only multimodal research leading to the production of academic texts, public scholarship, and journalistic writing, but to also foster the production of artistic products and processes in a way that can help bridge disciplinary silos and plant new seeds for reimagining and re-envisioning a more just and sustainable Puerto Rican future.

**How does Bridging the Divides support researchers, creators, artists, and scholars?**

During the fellowship year, each group member will work on an individual project and on the development of a final series of collective products that will include a white paper, print publication, and multimodal digital platform. All the materials produced through these collaborative and interdisciplinary research groups (including books, a media hub, multimedia products, etc.) will be produced in both English and Spanish.

Through grants of $20,000 (for scholars and creators with institutional affiliations) and grants of $30,000 (for independent artists, cultural workers, journalists, and independent scholars), Bridging the Divides supports the development and/or completion of individual projects each fellow is undergoing. Aside from financial support, the study group and its discussions will also provide intellectual support for each fellow.