

Civic Engagement Handbook

Bard Center for Civic Engagement



How to Start a Project – Civic Engagement Handbook

Introduction

Student-led civic engagement projects can be rewarding and impactful, positively impacting tens, hundreds and even thousands of people. At Bard College Annandale (BCA), student-led projects which emerged from the Trustee Leader Scholar (TLS) Program transformed into the Bard Prison Initiative, the Bard Early College in New Orleans, and *La Voz*, the largest Spanish language publication in the Hudson Valley. Many of the TLS projects have been going on for a decade or more. Projects of students at BCA, Bard College Berlin, Al-Quds Bard College of Arts and Sciences, American University of Central Asia, European Humanities University and Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences at St. Petersburg State University (Smolny College) have focused on a range of subjects, from providing English language lessons to underprivileged youth in Kyrgyzstan to teaching debate in local schools and running an accessible debate tournament in New York, from creating a discussion club in Palestine, to a recycling program in St. Petersburg, from a program for autistic children in Belarus to an Arabic language library in Berlin. Many of the programs feature an educational component that draws on the liberal arts experience, including the Language and Thinking program.

The best projects are inspired by a combination of idealism, curiosity, knowledge and commitment. Leaders are focused, but learn and adapt. They are driven, but inclusive, and plan for a time when they may pass the torch to others. Most of all they listen, to mentors, to fellow students, and to those in the community which their projects may impact.

Students often have creative and innovative ideas to address a community issue or concern but lack organizing experience. The following is a concise overview of the steps needed for project development.

Eleven Steps to a Successful Project

1. Have an Idea

All projects begin with an idea. The idea may be narrow or broad, a unique opportunity or a solution to a long-term problem. As you brainstorm new project ideas it is important to be ambitious and think big. At the same time, it is necessary to be realistic. The project's success is dependent upon your capacity to launch it, and then scale it in achievable and measurable ways.

Questions to consider:

- What is the issue you intend to address?
- What are your goals or desired outcomes?
- How do you plan to achieve them?
- What about your idea is distinct for the community which it will impact?
- How will you know when you have successfully achieved your outcome?

2. Research your Project

You may think you know a lot about issues surrounding your idea, but there is almost always more information that you can find that will help you develop a plan of action or build a justification for potential supporters. While you may think that you are the first to address an issue, it is often the case that others have been doing so for some time, and joining them, or learning from their experience, is often the best approach. It is important in this phase to collect as much information as possible. We often make assumptions that communities are not working on an issue or we make uninformed opinions about how a community or organization is addressing an issue. Researching a project and understanding the community landscape can help you identify allies, financial resources and key stakeholders. It can also inform you about previous successes and failures.

Questions to consider:

- What does research tell you about the nature and scope of the problem or the challenge you are addressing?
- What previous attempts have been made by others to address this or similar issues?
- What organizations or community members are working to address the issue that concerns you or are working on a similar issue that might inform your next steps?
- How can you assess the success of the efforts and the challenges to those steps?

3. Consult Stakeholders and People with Experience

Enthusiasm and ambition are important, but so is direct knowledge and experience. Talk to stakeholders, those who may be engaged with or impacted by your project. Do not assume that you know more than others about the issues that you seek to address: this is particularly important if you are considering a project in a community that is not your own or an international project where you are defining the project as “helping” others.

It is at this stage that you must assess whether it is best to simply join with others to support a project already underway. In a landscape where many organizations are competing for limited resources, it is vital to not reinvent the wheel and set up a project that competes with one that is already successful. You need not lead a project or create your own organization: if you want to address a problem it may be best to join with others. At this phase it is key to reflect on your own motives.

Questions to consider:

- In what community do you want to work? Are you a member of the community?
- Do you know that if the community wants the type of project you are proposing?
- Do you offer a unique perspective, talent or resource that is key to addressing an issue?
- Are you making assumptions about the community you want to help?

- What stereotypes might be at play when thinking through your project. Are you assuming that because you come from somewhere that you automatically possess useful knowledge or “know best”?
- Have you spoken to people with experience and community knowledge to learn more of what has worked and what has not?

4. Determine Feasibility and Sustainability of your Project

Based on your research, revert back to the original questions: What is the issue you intend to address? What are your goals or desired outcomes? How do you plan to achieve them?

As you consider this next step your thinking should remain flexible. It is possible that your idea is not feasible, is already in place or needs additional resources that are not currently available. However, if it seems that moving forward with the project is feasible, then you can outline next steps.

Subsequently, if your project is successful, you will need to begin developing strategies to continue the program beyond your tenure as an undergraduate. College students graduate and young professionals move on to new opportunities, but the projects they initiate may last for a long time. For example, more than a third of Bard College’s Trustee Leadership Scholar Program projects are more than a decade old, and another third are more than five years old.

Questions to consider:

- What human and financial resources will be necessary to achieve your desired outcomes? Is it realistic to believe that you can obtain such resources?
- Are there barriers—logistical, legal, ethical—that might pose challenges?
- Are you in a better position than others to address the issues that you raise?
- Are there partners whose assistance can assist you?
- How will you begin and how will you gain community buy in?

Planning is vital. This comes in a few key areas.

- **People:** make sure that there are successors in line as leaders, particularly charismatic founders, move on.
- **Partners:** if you have a succession plan it is vital that you introduce people taking over the project to your partners, allies, and funders.
- **Financial sustainability:** be careful growing your project beyond the scope of what can be realistic in terms of funding options.

5. Write a Project Description

Prepare a concise description of your project that answers the above questions, and in particular addresses the nature of the challenge/opportunity that you intend to address and how you will achieve your desired outcomes. The description

should provide some data, where possible, to illustrate the issue and some evidence that you are likely to be able to succeed in addressing it. Try to keep the description brief, no more than two pages. You can always develop further as opportunities arise.

Have a friend or colleague proofread the document and offer comments on substance. Share with a mentor to make sure it is clear and represents your vision as effectively as possible.

Share your description with stakeholders, including potential partners and allies, and those you have previously identified as having experience in your area. Seek feedback and revise your document. Share again if you believe that your proposal has changed significantly.

The format of the proposal can include variations of the following:

- a. **Summarizing:** in three to five sentences summarize the project explaining the aims, outcomes, significance and benefits.
- b. **Defining:** a formally written declaration of the project and its idea and context to explain the goals and objectives to be reached, the need and problem to be addressed.
- c. **Justifying:** proving that the project meets community needs with evidence based information.
- d. **Evaluating:** identifying the benefits to be gained upon successful completion of the project and how success will be determined.
- e. **Approaching:** selecting, approving and describing a method for implementing the goals and objectives of the project with the community.
- f. **Scheduling:** performing a preliminary estimation of time needed for the project. You'll need to develop a timeline that shows the total estimated time for the project that includes the limits, demands, needs, and other parameters.
- g. **Financing:** costs, proposed resources and potential funding sources to be used.

6. Prepare a Preliminary Budget

Prepare a budget for your project. You should start with a slim budget of absolute necessities, then you build out from there. The budget should be done on a spreadsheet using Excel or similar program using formulas as you build the budget so that you can easily make changes when needed.

To get an idea of how much to budget in various cost categories, talk to organizations, campus staff or local organizations. Consider logistical costs like room rental, transportation, office supplies, project supplies, food, promotional

materials, and training costs. Think about how to scale up the budget by anticipating costs for year one into year two.

The budget (and proposal) will be modified as you identify different funders and their interests, but having a general guide helps organizers prioritize services and project goals.

7. Develop a Proposal and Budget for Funders

Fundraising proposals depend greatly on your needs and the nature and expectations of the funder. Some funders only require a brief project description, while others demand a long proposal with detailed outcomes, means of assessment, sustainability plan and a detailed budget that is consistent with the funders' guidelines and budget justification. More importantly, you will need to understand clearly the expectations of your funders, the types of activities that they support and do not support. You will need to craft your proposal to ensure that it addresses the funders' priorities. This does not mean making things up, it means stressing those elements of your project that most directly meet the priorities of the potential funder.

As you move from Project development to implementation:

8. Recruiting Volunteers and Participants

Community based projects typically require trained people power to support project goals. Developing a workable infrastructure with other leaders to help with tasks, recruit and train volunteers and maintaining and cultivating important community relationships takes multiple resources. Recruiting volunteers who can provide direct service is likely key to the project's success.

Questions to consider (infrastructure):

- What additional expertise is required to ensure success?
- How can tasks associated with the project be distributed among a group of dedicated organizers?
- How can you recruit for specific needs of the project (volunteer management, social media, content development, etc.)?

Questions to consider (volunteers):

- What is the function of volunteers and what tasks are volunteers suited to?
- What skills and experience do volunteers need?
- How will you go about finding volunteers?
- What type of training is needed to ensure the success of volunteers?
- Do the community partners have volunteer management and policies?

9. Publicize your Project

Supporters, allies and donors should be aware of your progress and be notified regularly of program achievements and progress. Invite them to events that

represent your success, particularly to meet individuals whom they might be supporting. Send special communications to your supporters and make sure to thank them for their support.

Second, publicize your activities and other achievements, where appropriate, more broadly. Create social media accounts, prepare press releases and one page information sheets about your project. Make sure that you are respecting the privacy of program participants.

Project managers can feel pressure to scale up a project to meet the needs of those not currently within the scope of the project. For instance, a successful mentor project leader might be approached by another community partner to add a second site. It is vital to understand expectations before growing a program. Projects can fail if they grow too big too fast.

10. Project Reporting

Donors, funders and foundations typically require some reporting that includes analytics and data analysis to determine the project's impacts. Some funders ask for informal narratives while others require detailed financial reports, justifications of expenditures and data to prove the project's success.

It is key when applying for funding, to understand reporting requirements and your capacity to meet those requirements. It is best to request support from campus staff prior to taking funding especially when it comes to reporting requirements, to be sure you can meet funder expectations.

11. Identify/Quantify Impacts

As your project develops, you are going to have to consider how you can quantify the project's impacts. Obviously, in some cases this might take some advanced social science techniques, but in the short run you should carefully keep track of the number of participants in your events, provide short surveys to participants seeking feedback about the activities, and tracking the impact, where appropriate, of people who have participated in your project. For example, a project in high school may examine project impacts on academic performance/grades, likelihood of graduation, or college attendance. The larger the project, the more carefully you will need to consult with people to develop proper metrics. However, even basic information, like numbers of participants and evaluations of participants are a good start.

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SAMPLE BUDGET: Model UN Tournament

ITEM	TIME	QUANTITY	AMOUNT (USD) PRICE/UNIT	TOTAL
Lunches	1	80	\$3.00	\$240
Coffee Breaks	1	80	\$1.50	\$120
Badges	1	80	\$0.50	\$40
Pens with Printed Logo	1	80	\$0.50	\$40
Banner	1	1	\$60.00	\$60
Certificates	1	80	\$0.50	\$40
T-shirts for Volunteers	1	10	\$6.00	\$60
Awards	1	4	\$20.00	\$80
TOTAL				\$680



Baynatna. The Arabic Library in Berlin

Muhannad Qaiconie

Our Challenge:

For Arabic speaking newcomers it is very difficult to find a library in Germany, even Berlin, to lend books and to meet for an exchange.

There are university libraries and some public houses with small Arabic sections; yet, many newcomers are not students and/or interested in contemporary literature and poetry. Thus *Baynatna* tries to fill in this vacuum with the expertise of intellectuals in exile in Berlin. Further, it creates a space that is self-organized by newcomers. It is crucial to create a cultural salon that has nothing to do with charity but offers lectures and concerts and starts a dialogue with the cultural scene(s) in Berlin.



Goal:

We want to break the stereotype about "The Arabs" or "The Refugees." For that, we build platforms to show the diversity of Arabic-speaking culture beyond nationalism. We want to be one of the cultural players in Berlin adding new artists and discussion to the vibrant cultural life. We want to offer a warm place where no one feels "foreign."

Target Group:

We offer books and events for international people interested in Arabic speaking culture and its fusion with Berlin cultures. We target all ages, yet offer diverse programs to meet special interests.

- We host lectures for those who are well informed about poetry and literature while inviting Berliners to learn and discover new authors and texts.
- We consider graphic novels as an important part of contemporary literature and regularly display new publications - in Arabic, German and its fusions.
- We offer several reading workshops for children ages 4-13 to improve their Arabic and German and become fluently bilingual.
- We combine lectures with concerts where, again, Arabic traditions meet contemporary culture. We start a dialogue with new trends in Berlin, and here we connect with a younger audience familiar with the subculture.

Resources:

All people working for *Baynatna* are volunteers. The first year we received no funding and depended on donations of books and artists performed for free. In 2018, we will become a registered association and can apply for public funding. The Central State Library of Berlin started to support us with space and infrastructure in February 2018.

Partnerships and Cooperation:

Baynatna is hosted by the Central State Library of Berlin in the heart of the capital. Advising the State-Library on their Arabic-speaking book sections. Working with the German-Arabic Art magazine "FANN", House of Literature Berlin, the NGO e.V. (www.wirmachendas.jetzt), the online portal for authors from regions in crises "Weiter Schreiben" (To write on, www.weiterschreiben.jetzt) and the city founded NGO for diversity Mondiale Berlin.

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THE DEBATE COACHING PROGRAM IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Dhalia Alayassa

ABOUT:

The Debate Coaching Program seeds the debate culture in Palestinian high schools. It works to empower female students by teaching them the art of speech, leadership skills, critical thinking and self-confidence by exposing them to new ideas that cannot be explored in a traditional classroom. Thus making them creative, productive and effective in society.

OUR VISION:

The debate coaching program aims for equality. We envision a society where males and females have equal opportunities. We challenge class and social barriers to education and strive to breakdown the obstacles that interfere with access to opportunity. Through debate, the program empowers female students to become future leaders. Students gain the knowledge and skills they need to open up their future.

GOALS:

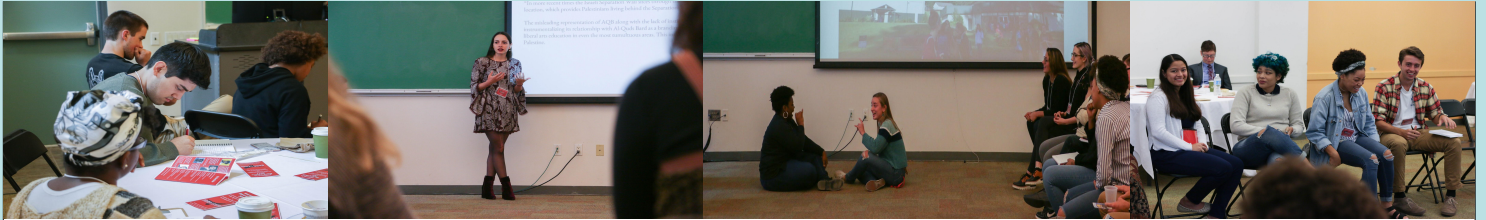
- Expand to other high schools in palestine.
- Participate in local and international debate tournaments.
- Improve students english language level and expand its usage outside of a typical classroom

HELP US:

Any small conurbation can make a big difference! If you do debates or public speaking and you want to see the debate culture expand and impact more people, our students would love to learn from you! You can join us through Skype to Co-Coach a class, or give us a motivational speech about how you became a debater! or what about gathering your debate fellows and having an online debate with our students? We welcome and appreciate your initiatives.

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Bard Leads

About

Bard Leads is a leadership workshop and conference, where students present their leadership roles, projects, and perspectives to other students. The conference is organized around a specific theme. This year's theme is *Leadership and Community Building*.

Impact

Many first-years from the conference move on to develop either their own projects or work with a project presented at the conference. Presenters create a network of leaders from various backgrounds, and often collaborate to provide intersectional events.

Challenges

- ☐ Promoting attendance
- ☐ Getting students interested in newer projects
- ☐ Publicity and social media presence

Contact

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Mission

Bard Leads aims to promote a space where student leaders may share their leadership ideas, roles, and projects as a means to spark collaborative experiences and further civic engagement. Bard Leads works to provide the transparency of who some of Bard's most engaged leaders are and how they are getting engaged. Ultimately, Bard students are provided with a platform to create a much larger coalition, so that collaborative efforts may be sustained throughout.



Outcome

- Bard Leads has now grown to have three student leaders: two conference chairs and a conference coordinator.
- Compared to the 2016 conference, more than twice the number of presenters and attendees have applied.
- Attendance numbers for the conference have increased.
- Bard Leads has built a name for itself around the campus and more students recognize the Bard Leads conference as a new unique aspect of the Bard experience.



We Invest in Education We Believe in Equality We Empower Females The Debate Coaching Program in High Schools



Project outline
9th and 10th grade
students aged between
14-16.
Every Thursday from
11:00-2:00

Location
The Good Shepherd's
Swedish school
Bethlehem, Palestine

Contact: Dhalia Alayassa,
Al-Quds Bard College,
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Description

The Debate Coaching Program helps seed the debate culture in Palestinian high schools. It is a unique experience for students to be involved in a learning process that leads to intellectual benefits and rewards academic skills. It aims to empower female students by teaching them the art of speech and leadership skills, and exposing them to new ideas that cannot be explored in a traditional classroom.

Palestinian Village Camps (PVC)

Breaking Down Walls to Build Bridges

Mission: Palestinian Village Camps aims to help young adults who have less access to education in rural areas. We work to develop the students' English language. In addition, we work to break the cultural norm of separating males and females to foster better communication in society.

Description: We host week-long English language classes in different Palestinian villages. So far, we have launched our first successful pilot in Burqin (Jenin) and plan to expand to more villages -- each having a camp during the winter and summer intersession.

Collaboration: Our current partnership is between Al Quds Bard College and the Municipality of Burqin. As our initiative expands, we will include the municipality of each village involved.

Goals: First, we want to make an impact on our students; specifically, widening their English language skills through Language and Thinking techniques. Second, we want to instill confidence and erase the idea that language is the obstacle for our students. Lastly, we hope to create a comfortable relationship between males and females while still respecting the boundaries set in the villages.

Challenges: We have experienced difficulty gaining trust and respect from the local community due to our age. As college students entering a village, we have had to prove ourselves and the skills we are able to offer during our sessions. Also, many of the student organizers come from cities around Palestine and have different cultural practices; thus, acceptance of new or unfamiliar customs on both sides exists. Lastly, securing funding, commitment and organizing accommodations ahead of time is a significant challenge.

Afnan Abbasi - Al-Quds Bard College



Proposal: Youth Empowerment and Development Project

Project Summary: Youth Empowerment and Development (YED) is a Summer school project that helps students from orphanages and schools in the Talas region of Kyrgyzstan. This project aims to improve students literacy, enhance their English, Math, and IT skills, and help students to apply for scholarship programs like Flex, NGA, US-CAEF. YED uses interactive and creative approaches to teaching, including thematic group work and conversations with native English speakers from Peace Corps. Thus, working with younger students, the project opens a door for opportunities and helps become outstanding leaders.

Need: The problem addressed by this project is related to the poor system of education at orphanage and village schools in Talas Region. There are no enough resources to support English language self-learners. Schools lack English language, math, and IT teachers; libraries lack properly written books on English learning; and most students do not have access to the internet. There is widespread discrimination of school and orphanage students according to their social status.

Goal: Youth Empowerment and Development is a summer school project that aims to improve the literacy of youth in small regions of Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of the project is to help students from orphanages and low-income families with academic and non-academic achievements. This project aims to encourage students, to continue their excitement for learning by creating a free summer school in the Talas region.

Objectives:

1. A minimum of 20 students will participate in YED, including 10 from orphanages and 10 from different schools.
2. Students will improve their English, Math, IT skills,
3. 10 volunteers will be recruited and help students apply for scholarship programs like Flex, NGA, US-CAEF.

Methods: YED uses interactive and creative approaches to teaching, including thematic group work, and a talking club with native English speakers from Peace Corps in Bishkek. Through open and accessible lessons, each individual contributes to an exchange of learning. Gathering a group of school students with orphan students expands the community and breaks discriminations and conflicts by engaging in civic activities.

YED will be held in August 2017 in Besh-Tash district of Talas. For YED summer school 9th-10th grade students will be recruited from 4 regional schools and orphanages of Talas city. Working with the mentors and alumnus of NGA and AUCA, we will recruit 10 volunteers to prepare and help students for TOEFL and other exams and work to create an environment where students can exchange their ideas, cultures, and skills. We will partner with the following organizations: American Council in Talas, Peace Corps, AIESEC Global Volunteer Exchange Program, FLEX Alumni, and New Generation Academy Alumni & Volunteers. Professional orientation days will familiarize students with the system of summer school and interact with other students in order to adopt challenges. The best mentors and volunteers of the project will lead three major lessons such as English, Math and IT. The most important point is that professional mentors and English native speakers will intensively teach students English grammar, comprehensive reading, listening and speaking, as well as essay writing. The second, students can improve their Math, and its parts such as solving problems, geometry, algebra and trigonometric functions. The third is to improve students basic IT skills, for instance how to work with Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel, etc. Through open and accessible lessons, each individual contributes to an exchange of learning new things and can quickly become involved in the global network community and enhance educational opportunities.



How to Start and Maintain a Successful Project -
Reflections on Clowning by Veronika Risnovska

CLOWNING

Case Study

Intro – What is Clowning:

Clowning project aims to provide its participants with skills of empathy that they can later use in work with kids as well as in their everyday life. It teaches people how to find creative solution and approaches at any given situation and most importantly teaches them how to come out of their comfort zones and jump into everything new and scary that comes boldly.

How it all started:

It was not only easy way to keep this project and its existence, but let's start from the beginning. □

To be honest, I did not find clowning myself, it was more that clowning found me five years ago in the middle of the Balkan's in one beautiful city called Mostar. I was studying physical theatre but was also very passionate about social sciences, community service, and social engagement. I was thinking about how to bring these fields together, and then I changed schools. In my new program I was expected to do social services, and the school was already offering clowning as a club in social service activities, so I took part in it. Even though the clowning we did back then was more performative than social, I directly found myself in it. Then I slowly started taking the club over, turning it into a more theatrical but also social-service oriented club. Then I met a person that really helped me to dive deep into the whole magic of medical clowning, an amazing Danish girl who's been clowning for three years that came to give us a workshop. So everything happened very naturally, organically. But after I had finished at that school, I didn't think about continuing clowning much. But then I was taking some time off and everytime I would get bored or feel as if I was starting to lose control over my life, I would go and clown for different organizations, NGOs, or just simply give workshops to people. It was only last year that I realised clowning is something that goes

with me everywhere I go. That silent, almost invisible presence of a red nose in my pocket has been there for every minute of my days in the last five years.

When I came to Bard College in Berlin and heard about the Civic Engagement Fellowship opportunity it was clear to me that this is the perfect platform to bring clowning to Berlin.

One thing I learned from this process of getting to clowning is that you never know when in life you stumble upon something that will develop into greater and long-lasting project. Sometimes you do not plan for things, because you don't even know about their existence but they await for you in somewhere on your way. The only thing you need to do is to simply say yes to anything you might encounter.



Target Group:

In the beginning, actually for almost first three years , I thought clowning is mainly reaching to help the kids from marginalized groups to have autonomy in decision making and attention they deserve. But more and more I personally started to focus on teaching than working with kids, I realised clowning is not only about the kids, but also about the participants that undergo the training. And perhaps, the way I structured the project at BCB is more targeting

the clowns than the kids although the actual benefit of kids from clowns' visits cannot be denied. There are many studies showing how social clowns help the kids, but no one ever made a study about how clowning affects clowns themselves, which is something I have started to focus on more and more as I founded this project in Berlin. So sometimes it is ok to shift your targeted group a little, or perhaps add a new one. In each project you should leave some room for flexibility and change.

How Clowning Helps:

On its initial basis clowning brings autonomy to kids whose lives are often structured by institutions they live in. They do not have much room for making their own decisions about their daily schedules. The first rule of every clown is that a clown never says no. This way a clown completely submits to a kid and give the child a freedom to gain power over someone in their lives, power to make decisions, not only for himself/herself but also for someone else. For participants it is also this rule that brings them to leave their comfort zones and boldly jump into new situations, find creative solutions. This rule also teaches clowns the art of active listening to really understand what a child wants from them. The skill of active listening is then the main base for existence and deepening of empathy, which clowns can later use in their personal lives too.

How I developed My Teaching Methods:

From years and years of experience, since the point in time where I had to take over clowning without really knowing what it was. My own format of teaching the art of clowning has been developing for a long time. It has been developing with every volunteer I meet, every organization I work with, every kid I meet, every moment. And yes, I use present perfect because it is still a process that is not done yet. I am a teacher but also a learner, and I learn a

lot from all my clowns — from their needs, their struggles, from the new countries I bring the clowning project to, from every single interaction, from my artistic projects outside of clowning.

I started teaching clowning as a simple pantomime format before realising how much psychological work it demands. So I went through different peer support training, martial arts



practices, and movement therapy. Then I went back to circus studies and performances, and only then did I connect all I learned and develop my own approach to spreading the beauty of circus arts to other people. The language development part is based on physical poetry, a physical theatre style that was developed in the Czech Republic only 20 years ago. The simple exercises rise from no theatre, butoh theatre, and simple body-mind practices from several martial arts that performers often use to stay present and energized on the stage. This also goes back to active listening and empathy skills. And then, of course, the puppet work, sounds, the voice, and

movement exercises are directly derived from physical theatre practices. I guess I stole a little bit everywhere and put it together.

Structuring Clowning at Bard College in Berlin:

When you have a project that travels with you, you always need to adjust it different environments and people. Starting the project at BCB I thought that it was gonna be the same as when I lead the project in Mostar and we will meet once a week for a training and after two first two months will also start visiting refugee camps, hospitals and orphanages. Only I did not realise that different places needs different structures, but luckily I found that out pretty soon. University students are generally busier than high-schoolers and it is also harder to make them motivated to do an extra activity on campus, if they have the entire city of Berlin full of possibilities on their

hands. The way I went about it, is that instead of having clowning each week, we have one longer (approx. 3 hours) session once a month. After the first semester when people I trained, we start visiting refugee camps around Berlin.

These visits happen on top of trainings and I also try to keep it as once a month events.

What I learned from this is that it is very important to know how to get over your initial ideas and dreams. You cannot be attached to things you planned big. Instead just observe your environment and see what is needed and possible. If you do that and don't try to force it things will become big on their own naturally.

So you're good looking, have a wonderful family live in a nice house and have a well paying job

But can you juggle?

Reflections:

Reflections are an important part of Clowning. After each visit of refugee camps I make my clowns reflect first as their clowns, then as themselves, collect these reflection and then share them in a group. It might be hard to see marginalized kids, and still be a clown following all rules of clowning. Because once you are with a kid it is completely different than what we train for, there are situations coming that no one and no training can prepare you for. And as much as try to prepare all the clowns for everything before they go, I also don't know what situation will rise in a concrete settings of refugee camps. I just give them skills to find creative and empathic solutions but the rest is usually at random.

That is why we have reflection circles in which we all share what was hard and how we dealt with it. We advice each other with possible solutions but also by hearing other people's struggles we learn to be empathic as well as know a little bit more about what we might encounter next time.

For me the reflection circles are also way of collecting my data, seeing how people slowly become better and better listeners and how sometimes they even reflect on how they use skills gained during clowning outside of workshops.

Running of the Project:

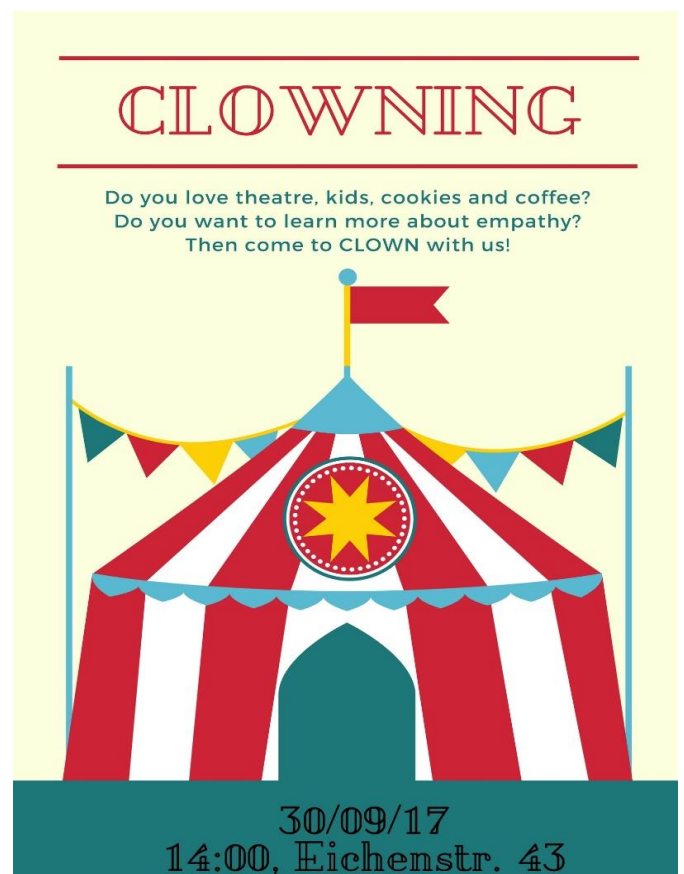
Now, Clowning is very established in its structure, but occasionally there are some additions to what we do. For instance, student life team invites to perform small skits at christmas parties, participate at De-Stress fest (biannual event organized by Pee Advisors), or family days organized by organization called Serve Your City. I am sometimes invited to give a workshop somewhere outside of campus. For me personally this is what makes the project successful. The fact that people reach to us and invite us. It does not only mean they know about the group of clowns at BCB, but also that they like and appreciate our work.

People in Project:

Besides the participants it is pretty much just me, me and me who is the leader, the finance person, the administrator, the contact person, the teacher, which now looking back at it I am trying to change. Why? Because it simply just became too much. As the project grows you realise you are only one person and you cannot do everything on your own. So currently I am in the process of dividing these roles in between participants that have been committed to the project since the beginning. But it took me almost two years to realise that I need this. The way it came clear to me was that I was on a point of burning out as a clown, and could not figure out why I am starting to hate what I love so much – my own project. Then I realised that it just took too much from my personal, academic and artistic life and there are ways to make it easier for myself and spread the responsibility around. Be smarter than me, divide roles in your project from the beginning, so then you don't even have to experience the state I was at.

Getting People in Clowning:

I am lucky to have BCB and Civic Engagement Centre who published many things about clowning already. This was even incoming students know about the project before they come. When the club fair comes at the beginning of each semester we are there, and people already know who we are. They sign up, I send them emails, they come for trainings. As easy as that. I don't put much efforts into advertising on social



media. Sometimes I make posters that I distribute around campus, tho. The question of advertisement and getting people involved is also a question of knowing your environment. At BCB we don't need much, because it's a small school, news spread quickly and reach almost every one. E-mails work very well as news carriers. But if you are at a bigger university, perhaps I would recommend starting a facebook page and instagram for your project. Because for people to be interested, they need to know about it first.

Future of Clowning:

As I am going for an exchange next year but also starting several new projects I feel like the time has come to take a pause from Clowning a little. Therefore I am passing the project to one student at Bard College in Berlin. Currently I am organizing everything (finances, books, materials, contacts) so it is ready and in order to be received by someone else. I hope she continues to lead the project the way I did, but will also build new approaches of clowning on the base I started. She is very interested in acrobatics, which I tried to do with my participants but since I am personally not very good at it it never worked to the extent I had wanted. I think, she, being a professional acrobatics teacher will finally bring it in in upcoming years. If you ask me why I think acrobatics is important for medical clowning I realised that any form of sport, but especially creative one helps people to become more flexible with their bodies and also free their minds. Besides stress and anger releasing acrobatics is also based on trust that clowns need more than anything else. So I will be happy to see the project develop into this direction a little more and add acrobatics to the physical theatre and improv trainings I founded. I hope Clowning will establish more network with organizations I started to be in touch with but we have not had enough time to really go deep into the possibilities of cooperation. What I am learning now, is that when you pass your project on, it is definitely hard to organize and sort out everything to make it clear for the new leader, but

what is even harder is to give it freedom. See that your project can grow without you and maybe even take directions you had never seen coming before. I personally definitely want to keep continuing giving the workshops on my own, but I know it is the time to depart from leadership a little, especially after everything I had gone through this year, the moments that I almost burnt out because I simply just put too much on my shoulders. You always need to know where to stop and ask for what you need instead of just taking care of your volunteers, organizational team and project itself. I find that many leaders often forget about themselves and work beyond their limits with no breaks. And as amazing as it sound it is also dangerous. So, perhaps the most important advice I can give you, is that you too should know your limits and push them, but only a little and occasionally. You come first. That should be the rule no. 1.

The Importance of People:

One thing that I learned founding and organizing projects is that if I ever had to choose between 20 000 dollars and 20 great people who are willing to help I would always choose the people. The importance of having people who support you in a project is something I cannot stress enough and if you have them around you can really do miracles even without money. The importance of networking is undeniable. Because only if people know you and your project the project can grow and you will have more and more people to have as well as opportunities to go. So if I should tell you how to start and maintain a successful project from my own experience in a few words, I would say: go out, go to conferences, talk to people, be bold, share your ideas, do be afraid of speaking up, never say no, take care of yourself.



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