



BUILDING TRUST THROUGH CIVIL DISCOURSE

NEXT
generation

 NATIONAL INSTITUTE
for CIVIL DISCOURSE

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A WORKSHOP **FOR** STATE LEGISLATORS **BY** STATE LEGISLATORS

A bipartisan group of current and former state legislators, trained to facilitate workshops nationwide

The main mission of the workshop is to provide legislators with an opportunity to explore the benefits of improving civil discourse in their state's legislature and to work more effectively across the aisle. "Building Trust through Civil Discourse" is an energizing, legislator-led program that aims to support a culture where engaging differences constructively leads to better public policy development.

Brent Hill serves as the Program Director for Next Generation at the National Institute for Civil Discourse. After serving 19 years in the Idaho State Senate, Brent retired in November 2020. For the past 10 years, Brent served as President Pro Tempore, the highest-ranking member of the Idaho State Senate. He is the longest-serving pro tempore in Idaho history.

PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Next Generation offers customizable breakout sessions, workshops, and virtual presentations. Breakout sessions and workshops are always led by a bipartisan team of Facilitators – current or former legislators from a nearby state. All options offer an engaging, bipartisan discussion that opens doors to finding common ground and moves your state toward a more perfect union: Empathy instead of Vitriol; Listening for Understanding instead of Hearing to Overpower; Humility instead of All-knowing. Next Generation looks forward to working with your state legislature to create the best option.

1. Virtual Breakout Session (1.5 hours): Strategies to Connect Across the Divide

Do you ever wish you could have a private conversation with legislators from across the aisle about things you might agree on or have in common? No press. No constituents. No social media. Just you and your fellow colleagues sitting down for an off-the-record conversation about engaging differences constructively.

During this facilitated breakout session, small workgroups of no more than 12 Democrats and Republicans from both chambers will share personal journeys, define the current state of civility in their state, identify barriers and opportunities to leverage change, and create an action plan.

2. Workshop (4.5 hours): Building Trust Through Civil Discourse

After we've met your legislators virtually, we can schedule a full workshop when it's safe (at no cost to you). During this workshop, legislators begin with a social gathering or meal to honor fellowship, learn about the foundation and critical role of civility to our Founding Fathers, and watch examples of unlikely friendships. Then, a bipartisan team of Next Generation facilitators move the large group into breakout rooms for small group work: no more than 25 Democrats and Republicans from both chambers will share personal journeys, define the current state of civility, identify barriers and opportunities to leverage change, and create an action plan. During the last hour of the workshop, all legislators return together to report action plans and vote on priorities.

3. Virtual Session (1 hour each): The Case for Civil Discourse

Topic One: Founding Fathers

The nation's capacity to work across our differences respectfully and with civility has reached record lows. Analyses of the more than 13 million roll call votes cast since 1789 reveal that the Congress is now the most polarized ever. The American Founders recognized that differences escalating into dysfunctional partisan animosity was the chief reason every previous republic had failed. Building a republic robust to partisan animosity was the chief problem the Founders aimed to solve in framing the U.S. Constitution. The main reason the American system takes separation of powers further than any other is to prevent parties from imposing their will on everyone else.

Keith Allred, Executive Director the National Institute for Civil Discourse, leads a discussion of the Founders' thinking about partisan animosity and their conclusion that engaging each other with civility and respect across partisan lines is crucial to the success of the American republic.

Topic Two: The Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis

This session draws on the field of group decision making. Keith Allred, Executive Director the National Institute for Civil Discourse, makes the case for why we need to restore this capacity and how we can do it. The conversation starts with a discussion of the Kennedy Administration's decision to support an invasion of Castro's Cuba and the monumental blunder that it turned out to be. Just 18 months later, the same group confronted a daunting challenge in the Cuban Missile Crisis. This time, when the stakes could hardly have been higher, Kennedy managed differences within his administration completely differently with vastly superior results.

Participants review how Kennedy did it by viewing excerpts from the riveting 2001 movie *Thirteen Days*. Before Nixon's infamous secret taping system, Kennedy had one installed. *Thirteen Days* is based on the transcripts from Kennedy's tapes of his administration's deliberations during those critical days in October 1962.

4. Virtual Session (1.5 hours): From the Founding Fathers to the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis: The Case for Civil Discourse

This session combines two of our most popular topic offerings: 'Founding Fathers' and 'Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis'. Participants explore the applicable ways to engage differences constructively via the Founders' view and learn lessons about commonsense leadership from the Bay of Pigs disaster to the Cuban Missile Crisis triumph.

Participants then discuss civil discourse best practices as they relate to leadership skills: Engaging Differences Constructively, Listening for Understanding, Empathy, Humility, Conscience, Principled Advocacy, and Common Ground.

WORKSHOP IMPACTS

Institutionalization

Several states are in the process of incorporating the "Building Trust through Civil Discourse" workshop into their new member orientation and training for newly elected officials.

Increased Bipartisan Interaction

Increased Bipartisan Interaction - from district visits and small talk to friendships and co-sponsorship of legislation.

Legislation

Multiple states have seen legislation result from interactions that took place in the workshop. Others have seen bipartisan legislators come together to amend bills before they reached the floor for a vote.

Legislative Process Improvements

Some states have seen improvements in their committees and sessions following the workshop, from better committee chair and member relations to the ability to get bills heard, introduced, and passed unanimously.

The National Network of State Legislators

Led by a bipartisan team of national co-chairs, the National Network of State Legislators Committed to Civil Governance includes over 1,000 state lawmakers who participated in a workshop. The bipartisan Network meets online periodically and in-person for an annual Summit.