



## 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. He is currently in his nineteenth year serving as a state legislator and tenth year as President Pro Tempore, the highest-ranking member of the Idaho State Senate.

## **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. Breakout Session (1.5 hours): Strategies to Connect Across the Divide**

Do you ever wish you could have a private conversation with folks 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 legislative colleagues sitting down for an off-the-record conversation about engaging differences constructively.

During this facilitated breakout session, small workgroups of 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**

Do you ever wish you could have a private conversation with folks 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 legislative colleagues sitting down for an off-the-record conversation about engaging differences constructively.

During this workshop, legislators begin with a meal to honor fellowship, learn about the foundation and critical role of civility to our nation's Founders, 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 Program (1 or 1.5 hours): The Case for Civil Discourse**

### **Topic One: Leading with Civility - A Practical Approach**

Have you ever wondered what makes a great leader—one that can motivate and inspire others to achieve extraordinary results? Drawing on his legislative experience leading a state senate, Brent Hill, Director of our Next Generation Program, explores the vital role civility played in the founding of America and its continued importance in today's political environment.

Whether a freshman legislator or seasoned lawmaker, each participant will discover practical civil discourse best practices as they relate to leadership skills: Engaging Differences Constructively, Listening for Understanding, Empathy, Humility, Conscience, Principled Advocacy, and Common Ground.

### **Topic Two: 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 Three: 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.

## **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.