

A Program of the National Institute for Civil Discourse

The National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) is a nonpartisan organization that combines research and practice to address political dysfunction and advocate for civility in governance through three target areas: elected officials, the media, and the public. Next Generation is NICD's program that focuses specifically on state legislatures. The purpose behind this focus is the importance of engaging with elected officials before they reach the nation's capitol as nearly 50% of Congress served in their state's legislature before running for higher office. Additionally, state legislatures pass hundreds of thousands of bills and resolutions each year greatly affecting the residents of each state.

“Building Trust through Civil Discourse”

A half-day Interactive Workshop

Developed by Ted Celeste, former Ohio State Representative, and presently the Director of State Programs for The National Institute for Civil Discourse, this workshop has been co-facilitated by a Republican and Democrat legislator in sixteen states over the past four years. The main mission of the workshop is to provide legislators with an opportunity to explore the benefits of improving the level of civil discourse in their state's legislature and more effectively work across the aisle. “Building Trust through Civil Discourse” is an energizing, legislator-led program that aims to improve a culture where discourse and collaboration typify public policy development.



Co-facilitators Sam Hunt (D-WA) and Elaine Bowers (R-KS) in Minnesota

An outgrowth of the workshops has been the development of a facilitator training program that has trained 40 current and former state legislators to co-facilitate workshops around the country. These legislator facilitators guide legislators through the workshop exercises where the legislators gain a deepened appreciation for each other's commitment to public service, discuss the current level of civility in their state's legislative process and work collaboratively to determine actions that can be taken to increase the level of civility.

In a number of states, local and statewide organizations have jointly sponsored the workshops and offered to help sustain any ongoing activities that the participants have identified in their action steps. This commitment to sustainability is the key to implementing lasting results through this program.

Additionally, having now had over 750 legislators from all 50 states participate in at least one “Building Trust through Civil Discourse” workshop, NICD launched the National Network of State Legislators Committed to Civil Governance in August 2015.

*States that have held Next Generation workshops: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Washington

*States that have held secondary workshops: Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, Ohio, and Washington

***Idaho** became the first state to hold a workshop for their full legislature of 105 members on January 12, 2016.

***Maine** held a 4th workshop on December 6, 2016. Over half of Maine’s current legislature has participated in at least one, “Building Trust through Civil Discourse” workshop.

Since 2012, Next Generation has made the following impacts on Legislatures across the country:

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...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: Now having had over 750 state lawmakers participate in a “Building Trust through Civil Discourse” workshop, the National Network of State Legislators Committed to Civil Governance was formed in August 2015. The Network meets online quarterly, as well as, annually for an in-person conference and it is lead by a team of national co-chairs.