



Civil Discourse: From Confrontation to Dialogue

“Civil discourse is the forgotten difference between dialogue and confrontation.” – Steve Fehl, Saybrook University

“Civility in our democracy is not about squelching assertiveness, protest, civil disobedience, or rigorous discussion of the issues. Civil discourse and deliberation is a set of attitudes, behaviors, and skills that support thoughtful, fact and values-based discussions when citizens and public officials do come to the table to talk.” – LWV Washington’s Civility in Our Democracy Program

LWVOR Civil Discourse Concurrence Position (from LWV San Luis Obispo, California):

“Promote civil discourse through action and education for all government bodies, staff, and citizens for the purpose of improved public policy decisions and processes. Civil discourse means, at a minimum, mutually respectful, courteous, constructive, and orderly communication.”

Discussion Questions

1. How did the level of incivility in the 2016 Election affect you personally?
2. What factors play a role in creating incivility?
3. How does incivility and extreme partisanship affect our society?
4. What ideas do you have for fostering civil discourse on divisive issues in your community?
5. What role might the League play in encouraging civil discourse?

Education/Advocacy Suggestions for Local Leagues

1. Review of Oregon’s Open Meetings Law and the rights/responsibilities of citizens when interacting with government.
2. Prepare op-ed articles and social media messages on civil discourse.
3. Prepare a brochure/document and presentation materials to explain guidelines for civility in government with respectful dialogue strategies.
4. Monitor the level of civil discourse in local government through Observer Corps and/or follow-up communication. (See LWV Publication: Observing Your Government in Action)
5. Meet with county commissioners, mayors, city councilors, etc., to ask about existing meeting rules, get buy-in for a civil discourse resolution and/or standards of conduct
6. Create a civil discourse project involving youth in your community: incorporate civil discourse strategies in the Mock Election curriculum, hold an essay contest on why civil discourse is important, conduct school presentations in conjunction with anti-bullying efforts.
7. Partner with diverse stakeholders to hold forums or conversations on an issue important to your community, using the best practices of civil discourse.

LWV Civil Discourse Studies and Resources

- LWV San Luis Obispo - Civil Discourse Study, 2014, comprehensive one-year study, brochure, checklist, presentation guide, etc. (see pp. 5-8)
- LWV San Diego – “Putting Civility into Action,” 2011-12, League interest group and community presentations
- LWV Washington – “Civility in Our Democracy Program,” 2012-2013
- LWV California, Suggestions for Engaging and Empowering

Oregon Civil Discourse Projects

- Healthy Democracy Projects: Citizens’ Initiative Review, Democracy Salon (in collaboration with Deliberative Democracy Consortium), Democracy Talks, Community Oregon, Revive Civility and Respect Month Program (in collaboration with the National Institute for Civil Discourse)
- Oregon Humanities’ Conversation Project
- The Sisters Country Civility Project – Sisters, Oregon, 2015
- LWV Umpqua Valley’s Listening Project (Anna Willman, Focusing International)
- Oregon Solutions, PSU College of Urban and Public Affairs
- Oregon Consensus, PSU Hatfield School of Government
- Willamette Partnership – collaborative solutions to conservation problems

Civil Discourse Organizations/Resources

- National Institute for Civil Discourse – a nonpartisan center for research, advocacy, and policy, established in 2011 after the Tucson shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords
Standards of Conduct for candidates, citizens, and media
Standards of Conduct for Debates
- On Being’s Civil Conversations Project, “Better Conversations, A Starter Guide”
- Everyday Democracy, “Practicing Civic Courage in Our Time”
- The Co-Intelligence Institute, “The 3D Wise Democracy Model”
- Arizona Humanities Council -- LWV is part of an alliance of community groups on "Project Civil Discourse"
- factcheck.org -- A non-partisan, nonprofit website that describes itself as a 'consumer advocate' for voters that aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics.
- Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, Kansas State University
- Institute for Civility in Government, Houston, TX
- National Conflict Resolution Center-San Diego
- Peace First - AmeriCorps program promoting conflict resolution and civic engagement in grade & middle schools
- Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance curriculum
- Diane Rehm Show, Panel discussion audiofile on civility from October 2016