

# The Civility Caucus

*A collection of ideas from Civility Caucus activities.*

Prepared for the Minnesota Legislature's Civility Caucus by



# Civility Caucus

Following the National Institute for Civil Discourse Building Trust through Civil Discourse workshop at the One Minnesota conference in January 2017, legislative leadership created the Civility Caucus. Membership is voluntary and made up of participating legislators.

Since that time, the Civility Caucus has hosted a wide variety of relationship building and professional development activities. The information in this document is based on those activities and was developed to answer the question:

## How Do We Put What We Have Learned Into Practice?

It draws on the ideas of Minnesota legislators as well as Civility Caucus trainings and presentations from:

- Mitchell Hamline School of Law Dispute Resolution Institute
- Better Angels
- Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution at the Department of Administration

The Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution (OCDR) at the Department of Administration uses collaborative processes and the science of human relations to help government and stakeholders improve relationships, build trust, and develop wise and durable solutions to seemingly intractable issues. For more information about the Civility Caucus or OCDR visit <http://www.mn.gov/admin/ocdr> or contact Dave Bartholomay at [Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us](mailto:Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us) or 651-539-1402.

# Talking Across the Political Divide

Credit: [Braver Angels](#)

## Tone Setting Skills

### 1. Letting the other person know that you want to understand other perspectives better.

“I’m finding myself curious...”

### 2. Asking permission to pose questions.

- “Can I ask you something about...”
- “Can I ask you what people in your part of the country are saying about...”

### 3. Acknowledging your political stance

“As you probably know, I’m a (democrat/republican, liberal/conservative)

### 4. Offering something critical of your own side and crediting something positive about the other side.

BLUE: “I think Democrats have been out of touch with...”

RED: “I think conservatives sometimes come across like...”

## Listening Skills

### Paraphrasing

Make sure you understand, and that the other person feels heard. DO NOT suggest implications beyond their statement or offer your critique of what they have said.

### Ask Questions

Ask real and honest questions of understanding vs. loaded “gotcha” questions. It can help to ask how the other person came to their view on an issue. Stories help humanize us.

### Acknowledge Values

Listen for underlying values and aspirations and acknowledge them.

### Speaking Skills

- Use “I” Statements
- Use “I’m concerned/ worried/ troubled” statements
- Mention an area of similarity or agreement
- Before disagreeing, use some version of “I hear you” followed by an intentional pause to transition to your viewpoint.
- Go back and forth between acknowledging the other’s viewpoint and stating your own.
- Say something about what life experiences have led you to be passionate about a viewpoint.
- Soften flat-out disagreements by signaling first that your perspective is very different.

# Negotiation Top Ten Tips

Credit: [Dispute Resolution Institute](#), Mitchell Hamline School of Law

## Disagree with Respect

As negotiators, we are much more likely to make agreements with someone we like than someone we dislike. To the extent that you can maintain a respectful attitude and not be “un-likable,” you are more likely to achieve your goals.

## Seek to Understand Before Trying to Persuade

If you want to persuade someone to accept your point of view (or position), you must first seek to understand the other person’s perspective. Further, it is not sufficient for you merely to understand, the other person needs to believe that you do. Consider times when you have been in a disagreement with someone and s/he continues to repeat the same argument over and over. It is likely that the person does not feel heard. An easy way to overcome this situation, is to reflect back what you believe you have heard from the person.

## Strive to Be Both Assertive, Cooperative, and Empathetic

Assertiveness refers to your attention to achieving your goals and interests. Cooperativeness/ empathy refers to your attention to the other person’s goals and interests. As negotiators, you need to consider more than just the one negotiation. You will work with the same people over many months or years. Paying attention to both your needs and interests and the other person’s needs and interests, results in collaborative outcomes – ones where it may be possible for both of you to succeed.

## Prepare Before You Negotiate – Identify Interests

Take a few minutes to think carefully about what you are trying to accomplish – not just your position (what you want) but your interests (why you want it). Knowing the core reasons why you want what you want and why the other person wants what they want can help to identify creative solutions for you both to find successful resolutions. Remember though, be sure to verify your understanding of their interests before trying to persuade. See # 2 above.

## Prepare Before You Negotiate – Identify Your BATNA

Your BATNA (Best Alternative To Negotiated Agreement) means: what happens if you do not reach an agreement at a negotiation, what will you do? When considering your BATNA, it is important to think through how much it will cost you to achieve that other outcome in terms of time, money and relationship issues. As with interests, it is helpful to consider the other person’s options as well. The person with the best BATNA has the most leverage in a negotiation. If it possible to improve your BATNA before a negotiation, do so.

## Consider A Pilot

It is human nature to default to the status quo. It is easiest to continue to do what has always been done. When you are seeking to shake up the system and introduce a new process or procedure it will, by definition, upset the status quo. If you hit resistance, sometimes a pilot may be a good option. It allows for everyone to try it out and perhaps even evaluate if the outcomes are what you hope. Perhaps even more importantly, it overcomes the status quo bias and once the pilot is in place, it becomes the status quo and it is easier to keep doing it than to stop and do something else.

## Trust and Distrust Are Not Opposite – They Can Operate Simultaneously

Trust is the willingness to become vulnerable to another based on confident positive expectation of the other's conduct. Distrust is the confident negative expectation of the other's conduct. In most relationships, there are elements of both trust and distrust. You may trust your neighbor with a key to your house to be used in an emergency, but not a key to your safe. The dilemma of trust is that if you trust too much, you will be vulnerable. However, if you trust too little, you waste time and energy trying to verify the other's claims. When negotiating, you want to consider your level of trust in order to be efficient and not be taken advantage of.

## Increase Calculus-Based Trust

Calculus-based trust is premised on the idea that the other will do what s/he says because 1) s/he will be rewarded for keeping his/her word and preserving the relationship and 2) because s/he fears the consequences of not doing so. You can increase "calculus-based" trust by developing a good reputation and credibility; showing concern for "the other;" establishing consistency and predictability; being clear about what you can do and then doing it.

## Increase Identification-Based Trust (Relationship-Based)

Identification-based trust is grounded in perceived compatibility of closely held values, similar goals and/or a positive emotional attachment. You can increase this type of trust by actively discussing commonalities; developing similar interests, goals and objectives; identify common principles and values. Attending events held by the civility caucus can help build this type of trust as can intentionally sitting next to someone from another party during committee meetings.

## Consider the Day After

Even if you have the ability to completely "crush" the other side, pause and consider the day after. Relationships matter in the legislature and in most of our personal and professional lives. Consider if there are ways to achieve your interests while still allowing the other person a sense of dignity and perhaps some achievement of his/her interests. Remember that today, you might be the party in power but what will happen after the next election?

# Problem Solving Skills

## Listening

- The power and effectiveness of good listening can't be overstated.
- Commit to really listening hard by going beyond the words to the heart of the message.
- Try to understand how the other person's story makes as much sense to them as yours does to you.
- Remember that being able to see someone else's perspective doesn't mean that they are right or that you agree with them.
- When people feel heard, they tend to develop solutions to their own problems.
- Listen to Learn, not to Respond.

## Speaking

### Purpose

- Reduce defensiveness and blame.
- Respond in a way that de-escalates the conflict.
- Help resolve and prevent future conflict.

### How

- Talk more about yourself – your experience, feelings, needs, contribution to the problem and goals – than the other person.
- Focus on the problem, not the person.
- Ask questions about things you are making assumptions about.
- Use neutral language when describing behavior.

## Problem Solving

- Every position is driven by an underlying interest. A position is a fixed solution. An interest is the why behind the position. Interests can be things like safety, security, fairness, equity, belonging, and freedom.
- First identify the interests of each side.
- There are many more ways to address interests than positions. Generate a long list of options that address some of the interests of everyone involved.
- Strive to develop an integrative solution – a solution that integrates the most important interests of everyone involved.

# Putting it Into Practice

*Ideas from Legislators that could be put into action!*

- TEAM-BUILDING During new member orientations and workshops throughout the year
- Question policy stances, not motivations.
- Increase social interaction with:
  - Small dinner gatherings of both sides
  - Bus trips around the state
  - Retreats that include family participation
- BUILD RELATIONSHIPS!
- Create non-public common space at the Capitol, State Office Building and Senate Building.
- Dialogue is the best way to solve problems
- District Exchange Spend a day in a member's district from the other party
- Have new members pick a mentor from each side of the aisle.
- Blended offices on the floors of the S.O.B & Senate Building
- Hold "joint caucuses" or study sessions together on major legislation
- Have coffee with someone you don't really know to build understanding of him or her as person.
- Mixed seating on the floor of each chamber.
- Joint Town Halls if your district includes members from both parties.
- Challenge yourself to make sure you understand why a legislator you disagree with holds their perspective and to generate options that address both of your concerns.
- Attend the annual One Minnesota Conference at the Humphrey School.
- Join the Minnesota Legislative Society for former and currently serving legislators.
- Attend a Braver Angels Workshop.
- Give others the Benefit of the Doubt.
- Assume positive intention.

# Civility Caucus Legislator Activities

The Civility Caucus members worked together to develop do-it-yourself activities that promote bi-partisanship and civility among their colleagues. All Legislators are encouraged to initiate these activities!

## The Legislator Exchange Program

The program is designed to give legislators an opportunity to connect with each other in a fun, relaxed environment, and to learn more about our great state. Legislators travel to each other's district to see first-hand the people and places that their colleague represents.

## The Legislative Dinner for Six Program

Co-host legislators connect to meet colleagues (both Republicans and Democrats) for dinner where they can learn more about the districts of their colleagues and get to know one another outside of the legislative chambers.

## Support

If you have any questions or concerns or need any support in organizing one of these activities, feel free to reach out to OCDR as they are happy to help. Please also let them know if you participate in an exchange so that they can keep track of the program. Contact Dave Bartholomay at [Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us](mailto:Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us) or 651-539-1402.

# Legislator Exchange Program

## What is it?

Legislator Exchange Program is an offering of the Civility Caucus. The program is designed to give legislators an opportunity to 1) connect with each other in a fun, relaxed environment, and 2) learn more about our great state.

## How does it work?

An interested legislator takes the initiative to invite a legislator of the other party to participate in an exchange. The two of you will schedule a convenient time to visit each other's district. How you do so is completely up to the two of you. Each legislator should expect to spend a full to a half day in another's district. Though some circumstances might require a shorter stay, while others might allow for a longer visit; either way, take advantage of the time you have! Get creative!

Hosts: remember there is no "correct" or "proper" schedule. This is your chance to show off the highlights of your district. Show your guest around downtown, bring them to the local "hotspot", or a scenic park or landmark. Or invite them to attend a community event you helped organize or school board meeting you are a part of. This is your chance, show them the essence of your home.

Guests: your purpose is to come with an open mind and to observe and to learn. Come with a willingness to participate and do your best to engage in your host's plan.

However, you organize your visits, the goal is to foster meaningful conversation that enables legislators to get to know each other on a more personal level than is ordinarily possible.

## Support

If you have any questions or concerns or need any support in organizing your visit, please let OCDR know as they are happy to help. Please also let them know if you participate in an exchange so that they can keep track of the program. Contact Dave Bartholomay at [Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us](mailto:Dave.Bartholomay@state.mn.us) or 651-539-1402.

# Legislative Dinner for Six

## What do we hope to accomplish?

With so many legislators, each with a unique story to tell, representing diverse districts, the “Dinner for Six” will give us an opportunity to reconnect with each other and meet with others for the first time in a fun, relaxed environment, have interesting discussions and truly get to know each other - not discuss policy! The purpose is not to change to anyone’s mind about anything but rather to build the relationships that at the heart of getting anything – including and maybe especially passing legislation – done.

## Who organizes the groups?

One Republican and one Democrat team up to be co-hosts. The co-hosts are responsible for organizing the dinner. Co-hosts are responsible for recruiting approximately 2 democrats and 2 republicans to join them for a meal. However, co-hosts can choose to have a smaller or larger gathering.

## Does it have to be a dinner?

No. Co-hosts determine whether they want to organize a dinner, brunch, cocktail hour, etc.

## When will the gatherings happen?

Gatherings will take during the legislative session. The co-hosts will coordinate with participants to determine the exact date and time of each gathering.

## How much will this cost?

If the gathering is held in a restaurant, then co-hosts should strive to find a restaurant where all participants can pay for the meal, a beverage and tip for no more than \$20. If the gathering is held at a host's home, the host will indicate if he/she would like the participants to either split the cost of preparing the meal or bring a dish/drink.

## If I am a host, do I need to host the gathering at my home and cook for everyone?

No. The beauty of “Dinner for Six” is that the hosts decide what kind of gathering it will be. If participants will meet for a meal, or just drinks. Will it be at a restaurant or a host’s home? If in a home, feel free to ask everyone to contribute to the meal. We call this “potluck style.”

## How do you decide on a time/date for gathering?

It is the co-hosts' responsibility to identify a time for the gathering that works for all members of the group.

## Can partners and/or kids come?

The concept of Dinner for Six is that with six people there are few enough people to be able to get to know one another. In addition, sometimes there are factors such as space limitations. Co-hosts do have the option to include partners or families.

## Etiquette

"Dinner for Six" participants are expected to use "Chatham House Rules," meaning that, the individual views shared during the "Dinner for Six" are not to be attributed to the individual after the meal. This will ensure open dialogue.

## Resources

**Braver Angels** is a citizens' organization uniting red and blue Americans in a working alliance to depolarize America. It is a national organization with Minnesota roots. Braver Angels has presented at Civility Caucus luncheons and held workshops in the Capitol and across Minnesota. For more information contact Bill Doherty at [bill@braverangels.org](mailto:bill@braverangels.org) Website: [www.braverangels.org](http://www.braverangels.org)

The **Bridge Alliance** is a coalition of 100 organizations working together as active stewards of our democratic republic. None of the many organizations in the field or their talented leaders have the solution or "silver bullet" to fix America. Rather, they each represent a crucial thread for repairing the fabric of society. It is the intent of the Bridge Alliance to weave these threads together into a tapestry (i.e. cohesive movement) that will reinvigorate our democratic institutions. Website: [www.bridgealliance.us](http://www.bridgealliance.us)

The **Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline Law School** is recognized as one of the top five dispute resolution programs in the nation. The Institute has provided popular courses on Negotiation & Collaboration and other topics for the Civility Caucus. Website: [www.mitchellhamline.edu/dispute-resolution-institute/](http://www.mitchellhamline.edu/dispute-resolution-institute/)

The **National Institute for Civil Discourse** is a non-partisan institute based at the University of Arizona's School of Social and Behavioral Sciences dedicated to addressing incivility and political dysfunction in American democracy by promoting structural and behavioral change. Informed by research, NICD's programs are designed to create opportunities for elected officials, the media, and the public to engage different voices respectfully and take responsibility for the quality of our public discourse and effectiveness of our democratic institutions. Website: [www.nicd.arizona.edu/](http://www.nicd.arizona.edu/)

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