

Strategy: Scaling to the Magnitude of the Problem

In 2019, we've taken a long, hard look at our overall strategy and made adjustments to tackle one of our core challenges: scale. In NICD's work to date, we've engaged more than 45,000 Americans and 1,000 state legislators in programs that have consistently created the desire and built the skills to engage each other as human beings, not as stereotypes of competing political positions. As impressive as that reach is, it's simply not enough in a diverse population of over 300 million.

Our new strategy draws on our previous success to scale our work to the magnitude of the problem. This scaling strategy deploys two powerful levers: digital tools and collaboration with powerful partners.

Digital Tools

Technology has reshaped our democratic spaces in ways that were unimaginable only ten years ago. To this point in the digital age, the forces of division have far more effectively deployed digital tools than the forces of inclusion.

It doesn't have to be this way. NICD is committed to leading the effort to effectively deploy digital tools in the service of bridging, not deepening, our divides. Digital strategies are crucial to scaling to levels sufficient to move the needle in this big, boisterous country.

Collaboration with Powerful Partners

As the crisis of polarization and bitter discourse has deepened, more organizations have made addressing the problem a priority. Our strategy focuses on working collaboratively with organizations that bring distinctive competencies in ways that make our collective impact greater than the sum of the parts.

Programs

Our strategy to scale our work through digital tools and powerful partnerships is executed through our programs. We're proud of what we've accomplished in 2019.

CommonSense American



In 2019, we launched [CommonSense American](#) (CSA) to find and champion federal policy solutions wise enough to attract broad, grassroots support beyond the base of one party. Our more than 9,000 members take four steps together to realize the promise of government that is truly by and for the people:

1. Members identify policy proposals with the greatest bipartisan promise.

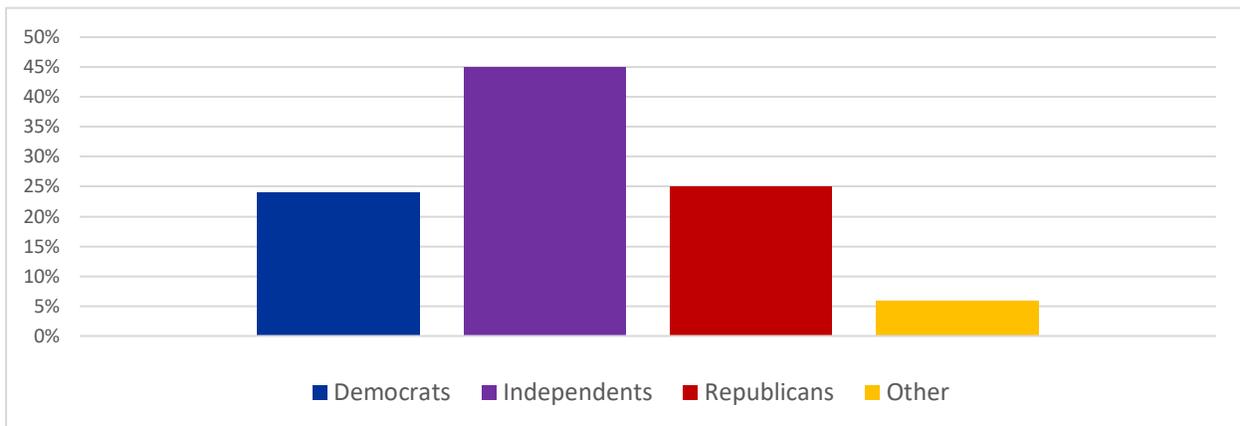
2. Staff develop thorough policy briefs, capturing the strongest case for each competing perspective on those proposals.
3. Each member spends at least 90 minutes per year reviewing the brief to which they're randomly assigned and weighing in.
4. Members champion in the Congress the solutions that gain two-thirds consensus among our members.

CSA is based on a successful pilot at the state level.

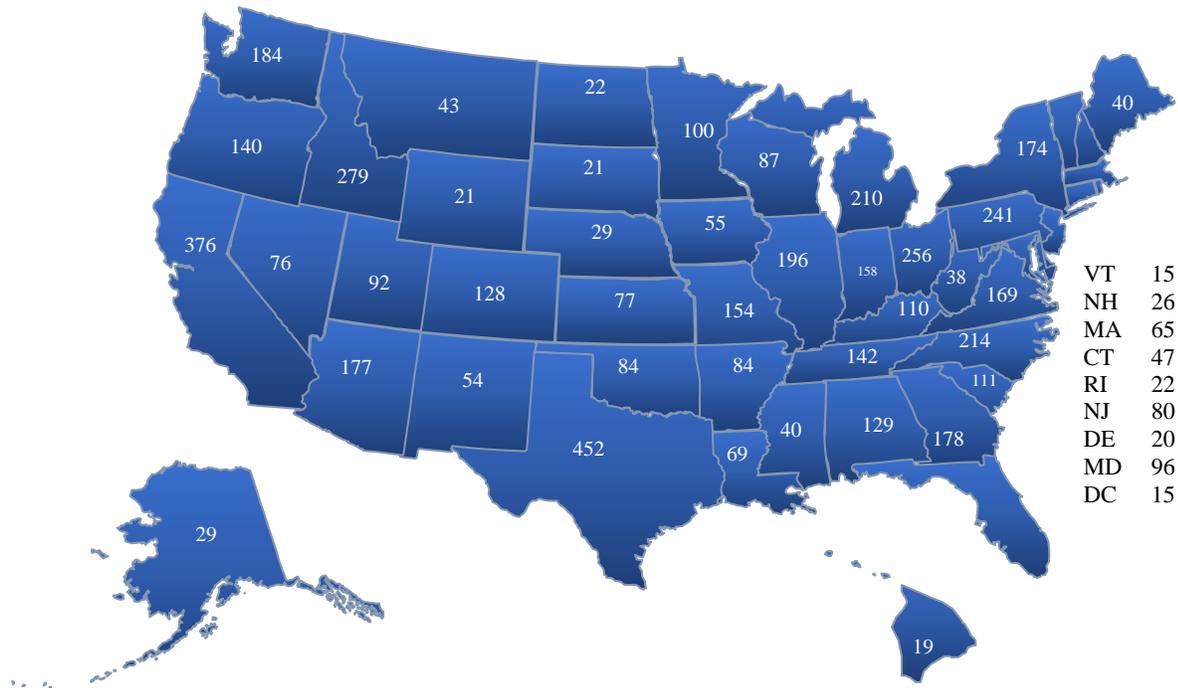
We launched the federal version on January 12, 2019 by inviting Americans from across the country and political spectrum to join. Our recruitment methods, like our deliberation model, has emphasized the tools of the digital age, especially social media marketing. The results have shattered our expectations and made clear that Americans hunger for more constructive politics is deeper than we knew. Eleven months after we started, we count over 9,000 Americans as members.

The membership is not only large and growing fast. It also reflects the nation both politically and geographically.

Balanced Politically



Balanced Geographically



CSA also leverages powerful partnerships. We work with respected think tanks from across the political spectrum in developing our briefs, organizations like the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#) and the [Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget](#) in creating high quality, informative briefs. Other partners in the bridging space like the [National Conversation Project](#) have agreed to get our message out to recruit other Americans interested in bridging our divides.

Although we’ve only just launched CSA, Congress is paying attention. Our members selected congressional reform as one of three topics to work on this year, leading to interest from the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. We’re collaborating with the Committee to identify meaningful institutional reforms that can foster civility and constructive bipartisan relations. The Select Committee asked NICD Executive Director Keith Allred to help organize a [hearing on the topic](#) and be the anchor witness. At the September 26th hearing, Keith shared our Top 12 list of institutional reforms in the rank order of the average ratings by more than a dozen experts, including members of our board, NICD convened.

Prescription drug prices and surprise medical billing is another topic selected by CSA members this year. The 26 Democrats and 26 Republicans who comprise the Problem Solvers Caucus have also chosen this topic as their next priority area. Keith Allred and NICD Board members Christine Todd Whitman and Dan Glickman will meet with the full Problem Solvers Caucus in November to discuss early feedback from our members.

Divided We Fall



We have developed this television documentary series in partnership with New Voice Strategies to scale the kind of programs we've done face-to-face with over 40,000 Americans through a method known as proxy dialogue. Scholarly work has demonstrated the power of witnessing someone with whom you identify make the journey from engaging those with different views as bitter rivals to respected fellow Americans. In each episode, one or more groups of twelve Americans face a series of topics and exercises over a weekend on set. They engage on what it means to be an American, the challenges facing our country, and their ideas for achieving a "more perfect union." The participants include an equal number of men and women and an equal number who strongly approve and disapprove of President Trump. Two different casts have been filmed so far – Caucasian Gen Xers from Boston, and Millennials of different races from Chicago.

In 2019, Divided We Fall has gained immediate interest. NPR featured Divided We Fall and NICD in a [segment that ran in April 2019](#) and the Boston Globe ran an article titled ["Can a documentary restore America's civility?"](#)

Now, the two original casts constitute the pilot episode for PBS. Rocky Mountain Public Television in Denver has agreed to be the presenting station. American Public Television has agreed to offer the pilot to all other public television stations in the country. The pilot will air in January 2020. If enough stations beyond Rocky Mountain Public Television air the pilot and demonstrate interest in additional episodes, then American Public Television has agreed to partner with NICD and New Voice Strategies to produce six more episodes to be aired on public television stations across the country. The PBS platform for Divided We Fall promises to scale our proxy dialogue method for helping Americans discover the human beings behind the stereotypes of political rivals to hundreds-of-thousands of Americans.

The only way to appreciate the full power of this program is to watch the cast in conversation in [this short trailer](#) narrated by Dan Rather and to watch how cast members' lives changed through this [5-minute film](#): "How Amanda...saved America."

Engaging Differences



In 2019, NICD has developed a new online video program. [EngagingDifferences.org](https://www.EngagingDifferences.org) rekindles Americans' conviction that engaging our differences constructively is essential to fulfilling the promise of our nation. The program also provides practical skills on how to do that more effectively.



Keith Allred, Executive Director, and Katie Couric, Board Member

The online modules are brief, interactive, and timely. Hosted by NICD Board member Katie Couric, the segments also feature Board members, Tom Daschle and Christine Todd Whitman as well as everyday Americans. Modules will cover topics such as Communicating Across our Differences, Understanding Another with Empathy, and Fostering Civility on Social Media.

Connect and Respect



We have created [ConnectAndRespect.org](https://www.ConnectAndRespect.org), a one-stop online hub of curated resources for bridging our divides that combines both digital and partnership scaling strategies in powerful ways. It is a collaboration between NICD, Allsides, Living Room Conversations, and National Conversation Project in collectively building this digital platform with the capacity to mobilize millions of Americans to engage our differences with civility and respect.

Youth Engagement



In 2019, NICD entered into a partnership with the [International Society for Technology in Education](https://www.iste.org/) (ISTE). Together, we plan to reach millions of young Americans by tailoring our online civility and respect tools specifically to the needs of 200,000 ISTE member teachers for use in classrooms around the country.

Next Generation



Our Next Generation program works to increase bipartisanship in state government while inspiring future congressional leaders. We work with state legislators to improve discourse and collaboration in statehouses across the country. NICD begins its work with the

Building Trust through Civil Discourse workshop created by, led by, and tailored for state legislators.

Over 1,000 legislators from 16 states have participated in Next Generation workshops.

In 2019, Next Generation conducted workshops in three states: Delaware, Maine, and Oregon, engaging roughly 115 legislators.



Next Generation added Nadine Wise to the team. Nadine is the Assistant to the Director of State Programs and contributes to a number of important elements of the Next Generation program including communications, marketing, strategic planning, and program development.

Next Generation facilitators joined the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLLF) at their Spring Leadership Summit in Boston, Massachusetts where they led a portion of the training for 30 legislative leaders from around the country. Next Generation also presented at the Council of State Government's (CSG) Annual BILLD Leadership Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



SLLF Leadership Summit in Boston in May 2019- Makayla Meachem, Idaho Sen. Chuck Winder, Nadine Wise, Ted Celeste, Keith Allred, Idaho Rep. Melissa Wintrow, Maine Senator Matt Pouliot

Next Generation held its National Network Summit in Nashville, Tennessee and exhibited at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). During the Summit Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose shared about the task force he has formed with Jocelyn Benson, the Secretary of State of Michigan, to work with Secretaries of State nationwide to restore civility in politics and

confidence in our elections. Minnesota Representative Susan Allen, Kansas Senator Elaine Bowers, Tennessee Minority Leader Karen Camper, and Ohio Senator Tina Maharath participated in a panel covering the diverse paths of elected women in state legislatures.

The Summit keynote featured a conversation between Bob Vander Plaats, CEO of the Family Leader of Iowa and Sumitra Red Wing, wife of the late Donna Red Wing of One Iowa. Bob and Donna are the subjects of the Unlikely Friendship video that we show during the *Building Trust through Civil Discourse* Workshop. The two friends shared about Donna and her passion for change, why civility is needed now more than ever, and how legislators can use these lessons in their own lives and work. NICD created a short video highlighting the conversation called, *Beyond the Unlikely Friendship*, you can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBxIY8XLal0>

Each year, Next Generation presents two elected officials with NICD's Award for Civility in State Governance. The 2019 recipients were Former Ohio State Representative and current Hamilton County Commissioner, Denise Driehaus and Idaho Senate Assistant Majority Leader, Chuck Winder. Commissioner Driehaus has been a Next Generation Facilitator since 2014 and serves as a National Co-Chair for the National Network of State Legislators, and Senator Winder has been a facilitator since 2015 and has facilitated workshops in Montana and Oregon, among others



Ted Celeste and Keith Allred with Former Ohio State Representative and current Hamilton County Commissioner, Denise Driehaus



Ted Celeste with Idaho Senate Assistant Majority Leader, Chuck Winder

Next Generation is planning for our 17th state workshop for the full legislature of Kansas in January 2020. We are grateful for the support of all four members of Kansas State Leadership and our sponsors, CSG Midwest, NCSL, the Sunflower Foundation, and Washburn University.

Golden Rule 2020: A Call for Dignity and Respect in Politics



GoldenRule2020.org is our program developed with communities of faith. It was born from NICD's May 2019 convening of leaders from a wide range of ideological Christian denominations and organizations, including representatives from: the National Association of Evangelicals, American Baptist Churches USA, The Episcopal Church, The

Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Presbyterian Church USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the National Council of Churches. These groups together have a reach to approximately 130 million Americans. Even a small percentage of that total can help shift a tide.

Together, we adopted a plan to engage thousands of churches from across the theological and political spectrum in making the call for greater dignity and respect in our politics. The program emphasizes the practical application of the Golden Rule to each of us as individuals and calls on us to practice the Golden Rule in our lives and imagine how politics and public discourse around the 2020 election would be different if we adhered to this principle. On Sunday, November 3, 2019, one year before the national elections, congregations around the country launched our initiative to emphasize the need to apply ethical principles to our political discourse. In hundreds of churches on that day, the message on a core faith teaching, that of how we treat others—even those who disagree with us—was shared through prayer, sermons and readings. In 2019, we also worked with national partner [StoryCorps](#) to engage the faith communities in Dallas in conversations across the political divide.

The Dallas interviews went wonderfully. We recorded 22 interviews with 44 individuals from 16 different religious denominations. The facilitators reported that the conversations were thoughtful and respectful; participants brought their best selves and really "led with their faith."

Many conversation partners exchanged contact information so they could meet for coffee on their own. In 2020 we will work with StoryCorps to create a toolkit for faith groups.



Conversation between Mark Ford and Andrew Musgrave ([watch it on YouTube](#))

Research

2019 was a very successful year for the NICD Research Network. In February 2019 Routledge Publishers release an edited volume of work by NICD researchers. The book, entitled *A Crisis of Civility*, focuses on three topics: historical perspectives on civility, civility in online and social media, and civility as it relates to the 2016 election and its consequences.

In June, NICD announced the recipients of the Institute's "Creating Research Projects across Disciplinary and Ideological Lines" program. After a competitive bidding process, NICD awarded five grants to scholars with different ideologies and from different disciplines who seek to come together to



Danielle Thomsen, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Irvine

research core concepts and institutions that are vital to American political and civic life. Upon completion of the research in the fall of 2020, the scholars will present their findings as well as reflections on their collaboration at an event in Tucson.

In September, we held our third biennial research convening. This was our largest convening yet – over fifty scholars joined us in Tucson for a three-day event featuring new research on topics such as civility in US politics, civility and social media, and new computerized techniques for analyzing speech.



Scholars at our 3rd Annual Research in Convening in September