National Institute for Civil Discourse
Research Convening Summary

October 9-11, 2014

Creating a National Network of Scholars to Study the Nature, Causes, and Consequences of Incivility and Political Dysfunction and What Can be Done About Them

Westward Look Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona
“Problems cannot be solved at the same level of thinking/consciousness that created them.”

-Albert Einstein

Convening Overview

Over the course of three days together at the Westward Look Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa in Tucson, Arizona, National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) staff convened scholars from multiple disciplines and institutions across the country to consider the current state of incivility and political dysfunction in America today and to begin to discover areas of cutting-edge research that can ultimately lead to breakthroughs for practice.

Participants made significant progress on each of our three goals, including laying the groundwork for a Research Coordinating Network (RCN) grant from the National Science Foundation and beginning to build creative collaborations beyond the scope of the RCN that we will seek funding for. Most importantly, as one participant remarked, we “gave birth” to a national network of outstanding scholars that together we have committed to expanding and sustaining.

During the two and a half day convening, Executive Director Carolyn Lukensmeyer facilitated discussions among an interdisciplinary group of scholars who, across their respective fields, care deeply about the causes and consequences of incivility and political dysfunction and what we can do together to address them. She and NICD Research Director Robin Stryker led participants, including 16 external researchers, four University of Arizona researchers, and four foundation representatives, through interactive sessions designed to define the field, theme and potential questions for a successful RCN proposal, examine what makes networks most effective, and consider standardized indicators of incivility and political dysfunction. Participants then committed to individual and group actions to build this diverse and robust network going forward.
NICD Research Director Stryker is leading the task of drafting the RCN proposal, which is due January 15, 2015. This includes putting together a steering committee reflective of the diversity of communities within our network. Tim Shaffer has joined the NICD community to help manage the application process. He is also setting up an online discussion space, a listserv, and an online repository to share information within the network. We are reaching out to members of the network who were unable to attend the October convening to ensure their inclusion. The convening was strongly supported by Program Director Shane Christensen and Development Assistant Johanna Lundy.

NICD was founded with the express intent of integrating research and practice. Each of our programs, whether with elected officials, the media, and/or the public, is informed by our research. By feeding scholarly research into the worlds of policy and practice more broadly, we are committed to promoting the transformation of scholarly findings into effective interventions that improve the quality of American democracy.

**Convening Schedule**

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<td>Thursday, October 9, 2014</td>
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| Friday, October 10, 2014 |
| 7:45 a.m. | Continental Breakfast |
| 8:15 a.m. | Research Convening Network (RCN) Parameters |
| 9:15 a.m. | Defining the Field, Theme & Potential Questions |
| 12:30 p.m. | Lunch (Mesa Room) |
| 1:30 p.m. | Effective Networks |
| 2:30 p.m. | Standardized Indicators of Incivility and Political Dysfunction |
| 3:50 p.m. | Breakout Sessions (Mesa, Desert, and Canyon Rooms) |
| | • Training/Education |
| | • Network Recruitment and Growth; Mentoring and Field Development |
| | • Communications Technologies |
| 5:30 p.m. | Summary of the Day |
| 6:30 p.m. | Dinner at Tavolino (2890 E. Skyline Drive) |

| Saturday, October 11, 2014 |
| 8 a.m. | Continental Breakfast (Canyon Terrace) |
| 8:30 a.m. | The Way Forward |
| 10:30 a.m. | Commitments |
| 12:30 p.m. | Box Lunches and Closing (Canyon Terrace) |
The first day of the convening began with a welcome and an introduction by John Paul (J. P.) Jones III, Professor of Geography and Development and Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Arizona. Jones spoke about the January 8, 2011, Tucson shooting of former Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford’s, a tragic event in which six of her constituents were killed. He highlighted one of the victims: Christina Taylor Green, a 9-year-old with great enthusiasm for civic participation. Jones described the event as a “firecracker” or “match” that led those at The University of Arizona and beyond to realize that there was an issue with the present state of our political discourse. He also noted President Barack Obama’s challenge to the country “to adopt a more civil discourse.” To adopt this discourse, Jones mentioned the need for a research element and he referred to NICD Research Director Robin Stryker’s energy as being instrumental in bringing this about.

"Framing the Convening: Toward our Better Angels"

NICD Executive Director Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer stated that the purpose of the convening was to bring together a unique group of scholars who care deeply about the state of incivility and political dysfunction in America today so that they collectively could identify areas of foundational research that could create breakthroughs for practice. In many ways, she framed the work of the convening as the 30,000-foot perspective on the complex issues that comprise incivility and political dysfunction. The NICD was founded with the express intent of integrating interdisciplinary research and practice. Each of its programs, whether with elected officials, the media, and/or the public, is informed by research. This event could not be more timely or more central to the NICD’s mission.

Lukensmeyer presented three specific goals for the convening:

- Successfully win a Research Coordination Network (RCN) grant from the National Science Foundation
- Create and sustain an effective national network of scholars
- Build creative collaborations beyond the scope of the RCN
The network will be working on the first and second goals and generate ideas that develop the third goal. Foundational research is a good way to challenge existing ways of thinking. Lukensmeyer noted that this is the most degraded era in American politics characterized by institutional dysfunction that she has seen over her lifetime. People behave based on the symbols and structures available in their environment—the time in which we live tends to push us toward our baser instincts. The work done here today is conducted with the intent of pushing toward our “better angels of our nature.”

**Framing the Convening:**

**“The whole is more than the sum of the parts.”**

Developing the role of research for NICD, Robin Stryker, Professor of Sociology and Research Director of NICD, stated that political incivility is but one part of a broader set of political dysfunctions. The researchers assembled from a wide range of disciplines bring their own theoretical and methodological perspectives and their own topical foci to bear on the interlinked parts of this dynamic system. A research network in which “the whole is more than the sum of the parts” is needed to tackle a system in which the overarching problems likewise are more than the sum of their parts.

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“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

- Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address

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**Putting on an Identity: The Citizens’ Hat Discussion**

Following introductions and framing for the convening, the discussion shifted to what was referred to as the “Citizens’ Hat Discussion.” Carolyn Lukensmeyer stated that the identity of “citizen” has become too narrow and that we need to dig a little deeper into this identity to approach the question of incivility and political dysfunction. Participants were asked to think about themselves as “citizens”—rather than purely or exclusively as
scholars— and to work in small groups to share their views in response to two central questions.

- What most concerns you about the current state of incivility and political dysfunction?
- What leverage points do you see to do something about it?

After the table discussions, each group reported back to the broader group and discussion ensued. Below is a summary of key concerns, leverage points, and emergent themes.

**Concerns**
The concerns of participants included the lack of respect for values that many people hold dear. These include the tradition of being engaged citizens in our communities and the recognition that “we” are in this together. Concerns were expressed that our political dysfunction has led to collective incapacity to solve pressing problems.

Multiple participants expressed concern that we are “in trouble” in a way never felt before. The government can’t govern and it can’t pass laws. With major issues like healthcare and budgets taking years to address and topics like immigration and education repeatedly pushed off the agenda for discussion. Citizens—young and old alike—find it difficult to believe that elected officials are working on their behalf. For this reason, it is hard not to get cynical. Our political system seems unable to address very real and very serious problems. When each side presumes the world will end if the other side wins an election, it is difficult to make progress in a collaborative and/or bipartisan way. For others, there is really a lack of meaningful options in the current two party political system. There is no real dialogue, especially because so many politicians are in permanent campaign model in which they are constantly posturing for attention and votes in their home districts or at the national level. Some expressed the additional concern that our current two party system does not provide enough in the way of meaningful options.

People keep a distance from politics and they avoid it “like the plague,” one communications scholar noted. We have a huge perceptual problem that young people do not want to get involved in partisan politics, although many young people are engaging through other means (such as volunteering at non-profit organizations). People are unhappy about the breakdown in discourse and people, especially women, are dropping out of politics altogether. Some regard moving out of formal politics as a badge of honor. A political scientist expressed the view that young people see politics as being solely about self-interest. To the extent that youth absorb the prevailing political narratives they begin to see politics as a fight between two sides and there is no sense of the complexity of politics.

The tendency for people to see issues without nuance is intensifying. We are moving beyond having differences to demonizing the other. This shift is taking place across the
board with respect to how we interact with others, and people increasingly are choosing to live and work in communities and institutions that are segregated in terms of political views. In response, we need to work hard to encounter others with opposing views. We also need to be more self-critical to understand that our own positions are not perfect and there is something to learn from diversity of thought. Being able to speak with one another in a fruitful way is critical to overcoming the seeming state of paralysis that is playing out at national, state, and local levels.

Research Director Stryker said that she shared many of the sentiments being expressed. From her perspective as a sociologist who studies inequality, political dysfunction and incivility are both cause and consequence of an ever-increasing cycle of inequality which denies people motivations and opportunities, especially the opportunity to establish a sense of self that would allow communication between groups and the trust to be able to do so.

The theme of social inequality struck a chord with many participants. Increasing numbers of people who are marginalized are disengaging from politics. This is due, in part, to efforts to limit voting rights and access. Increasing inequality led some to fear further paralysis, an increase in unmet needs, squandered potential and even the possibility of violence. Because elected officials have failed to demonstrate a different course, people are cynical and think there is little our politicians can do.

A scholar working in the area of online media commented about the absence of what she referred to as a “high profile model for compromise and deliberation.” We can have important civil discourse online, but not if we insist on trolling and anonymity. However, while some are unhappy with the anonymity of online discussion boards and comment sections, one participant said that we need to guarantee there is space for democracy to be practiced. We must be inclusive of those who hold extreme positions or who choose to hide behind anonymity.

One of the final concerns expressed during this session was the importance of national narratives, whether we are talking about how media frame that narrative or how we do it ourselves. “We begin to do a drumbeat in the United Stated that we are overwhelmingly polarized, when that is not necessarily true,” said one participant. “In a country where

“We are losing the capacity to come together in critical moments. What would we do if 9/11 happened again? There were some positive aspects of the event that highlighted our togetherness. However, now we might not have the necessary trust to do this now.” - Kevin Coe
there are people who are hungry and are not getting educated, we are spending millions of dollars for elections.” There is a major disconnect between the political process and electioneering and the realities that Americans are facing very difficult situations, day in and day out.

“There are very separate worlds we’ve created within society.”
- Jennifer Earl

Leverage Points
In response to the sentiments expressed, participants identified leverage points for change. A communications scholar noted that many systems currently in place could tackle the issues named above. However, institutions such as media outlets would need to change how they bring guests together or select pundits. Airing the complexity of problems requires more outlets and media—whether TV, online, radio, etc.—need to move beyond “talking heads” and sound bites. In educational settings, the ways classroom discussion address issues of incivility can be rethought to engage in more meaningful and constructive discussion about political incivility and political dysfunction.

One participant present pointed to the important work of teaching young people how to talk about highly controversial and complex political issues. Creating deliberative and educational spaces does not eradicate polarization or opposition.

Another participant expressed a similar sentiment in that we need to encourage people to confront the other side in a very civil way and to have conversations with people who have opposing viewpoints. But as a communications scholar noted, “We need to teach people how to talk and how to attack ideas and not individuals.” The opportunities to bring diverse people together (along racial, economic, or political lines) is increasingly difficult, especially in educational settings since we are becoming re-segregated along all these lines of difference.

One way to engage people differently is to rethink our political system. Multiple participants suggested that we needed a fundamental restructuring of government. One scholar suggested the adoption of a parliamentary system that allows more choices and more clearly articulated political positions. Another

“We want people to have an opportunity, capacity, and desire to engage with people with opposing viewpoints. What advantages do we get from polarization? One of the advantages is that it allows the parties to be differentiated from one another. We don’t want to throw the baby out with the bath water; positive things are coming out of polarization.”
- Diana Hess
commented that we need to look seriously at numerous rule changes in multiple spheres including campaign finance, electoral rules, and social norms. The desire to change government can’t—and shouldn’t—be framed only or primarily at the national level. We need greater focus on local and municipal level actions and interactions and the ability to make change at those levels. But this can’t be described only as a move to achieve greater transparency. We must have a larger sense of reform so that political officials and citizens are involved in meaningful political engagement rather than only the opening of records.

Related to the local level, a leverage point could be mass participation in local governance. Importantly, as one participant noted, we may have driven people away from politics because “we got too ‘serious’ about politics.” She continued, “We moved away from social events and parades and such.” Connected to that theme, the role of political protest is important because people have the ability to act without needing elected officials to sign off on action. Similarly, the availability and significance of venues for people to come together is crucial, whatever those spaces might look like.

Technology was named as a leverage point for getting those who are disengaged involved. The use of efforts such as Text, Talk, Act points to one possible approach—a platform that resulted in a discussion on mental health. There are numerous new media platforms that can encourage action.

Finally, it was pointed out that scholars in higher education usefully could rethink both what they research and how they communicate with and/or engage non-academic audiences. There has long been an internal conversation within the academy and scholars have not been very good about engaging the broader public. The reward system in place in higher education has not always rewarded public-oriented scholarship. Scholarly research could and should provide a leverage point to address issues such as incivility and political dysfunction.

Additional Themes
A major theme that emerged was money is politics. The role of money in politics must be diminished if democracy is to be healthy. Numerous participants agreed that money is too influential in politics and skews political discussion and government policies. One scholar of social movements noted that money buys the ears of politicians in power. One participant indicated that a leverage point would be embarrassment through more exposure of funding sources. Another expressed skepticism about our capacity to restrict the role of money in politics, but noted that there are things that can be done to encourage better people to run for office. He also stated that we need a narrative about the harmful effects of money in politics from the perspective of those on the political right as well as from those on the political left.
Dinner Discussion

As the convening shifted from general introductions and the Citizens’ Hat Discussion to dinner, participants were asked to keep in mind the previous discussion. NICD showed video clips from shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. These clips, used in prior focus group research conducted by NICD researchers satirized the current state of uncivil political discourse and political dysfunction. With the videos as inspiration, participants were asked what kinds of foundational research they believed could inform practitioners who seek to move civil discourse and political engagement in positive directions. Responses are listed below.

- There should be a focus on reform options—what are they?
- What can be expressive substitutes for uncivil discursive conflict? With what do we replace uncivil discourse?
- How do we humanize the “other”?
- What are perceptions about the current state affairs versus the realities?
- What can be done to see not just our differences but our commonalities?
- How do we “undo demonization” at a variety of levels and within various communities? Does created commonality help undo demonization? Does increasing awareness of all views reduce demonization?
- There are many incentives to demonize the “other.”
- Changes to electoral rules are necessary.
- Why do people vote or not vote?
- What are issues that are less pre-framed in partisan fashion so that it is possible to get more discussion rather than an immediate left/right framing and stand-off?
- How are politics racialized and how do we change that?
- What forms of research are closest to practice already? Education research stands out as an example.
- We should look internationally and comparatively for examples of media platforms and actors that facilitate or carry out civil discourse.
- We should look at municipal level for examples of civil discourse.
- We should try to bring together hardcore ideologues with opposing viewpoints to work on legislation. Can they do this?
- What are new spaces that can be used as test beds for civil discourse? Who are appropriate partners? What works and what does not?
- How much can be accomplished by creating pressure from the ground? How much can be accomplished by focusing at the people on the top? How do we bring “ground up” and “top down” together?
- How does the public define incivility?
• Levels of knowledge are important. Getting new knowledge often does not have the impact we might have thought. In fact, people typically assimilate new data in ways that confirm their existing biases.
• With respect to partisan niche media, how fixed are practices at, for example, MSNBC and Fox News? How open are they to changing formats/models to serve purposes beyond market share?
• How does incivility change the political process? How does it change how legislators work together? Who are the key actors? These obviously include:
  o Legislators
  o Journalists/media
  o Citizens
• What are the legislative outcomes of groups like No Labels, through which people “cross the aisle” and work together on shared concerns?
• Do citizens perceive that media shape their discourse and narratives?
• Are there situations in which incivility is functional, acceptable and perhaps even necessary?
• Does an emphasis on civility further marginalize certain groups?
• How do we mitigate incivility?
• How do we study cognitive and emotional processes related to incivility?

As the first day of the convening came to a close, participants were asked to continue thinking about these issues and sharing their views.

Friday, October 10
Parameters of the RCN Grant Proposal
At the beginning of the convening’s second day, Robin Stryker spoke about the parameters for NSF Research Coordination Network grant proposals. The goal of such grants is, “to advance a field or create new directions in research or education by supporting groups of investigators to communicate and coordinate their research, training and educational activities across disciplinary, organizational, geographic and international boundaries.”

RCN grants foster new, interdisciplinary collaborations and they support information sharing, research coordination and synthesis, and the development of community standards. Proposals must focus on a theme to give coherence to the collaboration. A theme could be a broad research question or it could involve particular technologies or approaches.

Network members raised concerns about paucity of funding ($500,000 maximum can be awarded) relative to the five-year duration time of an RCN grant. Acknowledging that the amount of money available to fund RCN proposals was limited, NICD staffers noted that
the central benefit of an RCN grant would be enhanced legitimacy for the Research Network and its priorities. RCN funding would be used to foster collaborative work leading to primary research proposals that could be submitted to the NSF and elsewhere. As one network member who has received NSF funding put it, “While NSF RCN grants do not provide an enormous amount of funding, they do allow the NSF to do what it loves: to fund research projects that grow out of other NSF-funded initiatives. There is tremendous value if the RCN effort can be leveraged in that way.”

Another network member asked whether NICD researchers had looked at the Soros Institute for New Economic Thinking. Stryker’s response was, “that’s why we’re here.” We need to find out what other organizations and/or funding sources align with the efforts and interests of those of us who want to form this research network. Participants recognized that they had been brought together because scholarship on incivility and/or political dysfunction was at least tangentially what they already had interest in.

Stryker then asked participants to consider to what extent we will build on our existing bodies of work and to what extent we will move forward with new research. We will all need to consider how our existing research factors into what we do together through the Research Network.

Stryker indicated that she had used the participants’ executive summaries shared prior to the convening to look for synergies of which they – and we more generally—might not have been aware. The major idea behind the research network and the RCN grant is to more effectively exchange information on who does what and how others’ research pertains to one’s own work. Such broader understanding can improve the scholarship of individuals and can enhance what we are able to do collectively.

One type of synergy involves positive feedback to work one is already doing. The other kind involves putting our heads together to identify problems and research questions for which satisfactory answers and the identification of leverage points require cross-topic and cross-disciplinary research. Interacting often across disciplines and topic areas through a Research Network should lead to new ways of thinking that have ramifications for how all of us conduct our research.

What is our Theme? Think Big then Narrow Down and Zero In
Carolyn Lukensmeyer shifted the conversation to thinking about what could be an appropriate overarching theme around which an RCN could organize. She suggested participants “think big first” and then narrow down and identify a series of themes or research questions that would help us figure out what the heart of the RCN should be. We need to be thinking about:

“I love the idea of networks and collaboration.”
- Dannagal Goldthwaite Young
• Foundational questions relevant to defining the RCN.
• Questions that RCN affiliated researchers could tackle with additional grant funding outside of a possible RCN grant.

Lukensmeyer asked participants to try and put aside for the moment how their own individual research interests might fit into the network and concentrate discussion on what could be a useful collective enterprise. At this point, a participant asked to hear more about definition of the interdisciplinary field.

Stryker responded by suggesting that participants think about how different disciplines, theoretical and methodological approaches, and work at macro and micro levels could make contributions. Defining the interdisciplinary field and its key research questions would happen over time. At this point, those present were asked to look for potential linkages and causal mechanisms that have not been fleshed out because they are not squarely encompassed within any one discipline or current research topic.

Lukensmeyer suggested that “interdisciplinary” extends beyond disciplines working together. Rather, we need to connect different areas of study that are related but where the linkages have not been explored previously. Most of our scholarly work is siloed in particular areas of study, but a healthy democracy requires that we consider links among citizens, the media, and elected officials. The Research Network provides scholars an opportunity to create a space in which they approach their own research with far greater awareness of others who have shared, overlapping, or complementary interests.

**Defining the Field, Theme & Potential Questions**

Participants divided into four groups. In these smaller groups, they discussed the definition of an appropriate interdisciplinary field, theme, and potential research questions for the RCN. After spending approximately three hours discussing these issues—all critical to development of a competitive RCN grant proposal—the small groups reported out to the entire group as follows.

**Group 1**

This group defined the interdisciplinary field in terms of working to understand how civil discourse shapes effective governance and how strategies to mitigate incivility could improve the functioning of representative democracy. This requires a network of scholars that achieve disciplinary
and inter-disciplinary depth rather than just superficial representation from multiple disciplines. Needed disciplines include, but are not limited to, communication, sociology, psychology, political science, law, education, history, economics, philosophy, and anthropology. Depth as well as breadth is needed to:

1. Publicize the research and put theory into practice
2. Address complexity
3. Access the broad range of datasets already available
4. Develop cutting edge research agendas
5. Sharpen pressing research questions

By approaching an interdisciplinary field in this way, there is the opportunity to develop depth within disciplines. Without such depth, Network researchers will lack credibility with peers in their home disciplines.

Group 1 also highlighted possible research questions/topics including:

1. Representation and levels of participation
2. How to move beyond gridlock and achieve effective governance
3. Deliberative versus representative decision making
4. How to encourage willingness to hear opinions that differ from one’s own.
5. How to encourage those who are more civil to participate in politics.
6. The role of money in politics
7. Polarization
8. Cognitive bias
9. Different actors and levels of analysis (media, interest group coalitions, etc.)

Group 2
This group defined the interdisciplinary field as one that is shaped by different questions, methods, approaches, and audiences depending on the discipline. Big issues require broad thinking and interdisciplinary approaches. Similarly, solutions for big problems require diverse approaches.

Group two labeled its preferred overarching theme Productive Political Engagement (PPE). PPE can overcome or mitigate political dysfunction shaped by ideological extremism, lack of diversity in political discussion, and media bias. PPE is defined by a number of elements. These include:

- Generative
- Tolerant
- Inclusive
- Pragmatic
• Evidence-based
• Efficacious
• Responsive
• Participatory
• Respectful

Stemming from the concept of PPE, some potential foundational research questions are:
• What are the cause/effect relationships between PPE and its absence and various political functions/dysfunctions?
• What impedes productive political engagement?
• When does incivility contribute to productive political engagement?
• When does incivility harm/strengthen productive political engagement?
• How can we improve the practice of American democracy?
• What does the lack of civility mean? Should we be studying civility or incivility or both? Where do protests fit?
• Is defense of civility necessarily contextual?
• Where is deliberative democracy in this conversation because it is not synonymous with PPE?

Group 3
This group approached the task from the point of view of an NSF panel. They tried to consider what an NSF review panel would be looking for and what it would want to know to establish that it would get a good return on its investment in an RCN. From there, participants defined the interdisciplinary field as a response to the reality that no single discipline has mapped the larger space, issues, and questions related to incivility, demonization and political dysfunction. Group 3 felt that it was not possible to understand system dynamics if the constitutive elements of the system were only studied and understood in a compartmentalized way. The terrain to be mapped then is a system of (in)civility and political (dys)function.
Potential foundational research questions for the Research Network offered by Group 3 include:

- What are the cause/effect relationships between civil or uncivil discourse and democratic functions or dysfunctions? How will we measure civil/uncivil discourse and various democratic functions/dysfunctions? What are the causal mechanisms linking the various parts of the system?
- When is incivility productive, important, and necessary? What are the scope conditions on the need for or desirability of civil discourse? These are empirical questions, not questions to be resolved a priori.
- Polarization should be a key area of focus and we should build on scholarship linking civility/incivility to elite and mass political polarization.
- Although we need to include issues of political civility/incivility within a broader research agenda, civil discourse should remain a key concept for the Research Network. What are the interventions that improve the quality of democratic discourse and engagement?

Group 4

Group 4 began with a map of the political and media “eco-system” shaping polarization. Political polarization emerged because of a number of factors including: political party realignment and purification from the middle to end of the 20th century; mass sorting of liberal and conservative citizens based on where they live and with whom they interact; media fractionation; the role of money in politics; immigration and racial diversity.

For Group 4, the appropriate central concept is “affective polarization” in which ideological difference has become transformed into mutual demonization. The increase in affective polarization is most dramatic in recent election cycles.

A Research Network focused on reducing affective partisan polarization would:

- Examine multiple nested systems, with feedback loops,
- Need to be interdisciplinary because no single field can influence enough of the system to reduce affective polarization and increase constructive politics,
- Need to have ideological diversity. Social science scholars often are more liberal/progressive and there must be a degree of balance with many more conservative and/or Republican scholars.

Potential research questions/foci would include:

- Conceptualizations of civility; what are the causes and effects of each type of incivility?
- Examining the question cross-nationally; what has happened in other Western democracies and why with respect to trust in government and changes in the media, for example?
• What “natural experiments” are taking place internationally and what can we learn from them? What interventions are feasible, both politically and economically?
• How do we measure the effectiveness of interventions to reduce affective political polarization?
• What are the causal relationships among affect, cognition, and behavior? Important variables would include the feeling thermometer (as a measure of affective polarization), argument repertoires, and perceived distance from the other side.

_Beyond the Groups to Broader Discussion_

After the group presentations, there was follow up conversation among all participants. Concerns were raised about political as well as intellectual diversity. Without a contingent of conservative scholars, could a Research Network have legitimacy within and beyond the academy? Some participants also noted that we needed to take care to distinguish between perceived polarization and real polarization. Both have consequences.

The follow up conversation also identified additional questions and concerns that needed to be address as our networking process moves forward. These include the following.

• Are civility and incivility the best targets for research and intervention?
• How do disagreements turn into dismissal? We seem to be dealing with contempt and hatred not just incivility.
• Must the RCN focus on one central concept or can there be multiple central concepts?
• There is concern about losing economic inequality as driving concept.
• Achieving political diversity within the network may be a major challenge.
• There are multiple arenas/institutions and institutional levels for which questions must be asked. The relationship among micro, meso, and macro levels is important.
• There should be a scholarly network studying civility/incivility because it is important and things are bad enough so that we need this. Civility/incivility can work as a key concept for the network as long as the Network emphasizes it is not civility/incivility alone but in relationship to political function/dysfunction.
• There terrain we are trying to occupy may be too big.
• How committed are we to addressing macro and micro dynamics and mechanisms at the same time?
• Thinking about complexity multiple actors highlights that, although we want to drill down into certain topics/themes/areas, there are other elements on the periphery to which we must attend.
• What agreements will or will not be in place to encourage the research of individual scholars to align with a common goal or theme? How will each individual contribute to the larger effort?
• It may be taking on too much to add new lines of research. It would be better to create and cultivate network collaborations around things network members already are doing.
• What must we do to get the NSF RCN grant? What should a network look like and how might it work to leverage considerable research funding beyond the RCN grant itself?

Networks
The Research Network created with NICD as its hub will be comprised of social networks, organizational networks, and communities of complementary practice. There are three crucial characteristics of the last: the domain of interest, the relationships that enable network members to learn from one another, and a shared repertoire of resources. Participants were asked to use their own prior experience to identify characteristics of the most effective and least effective networks in which they had participated.
### Characteristics of “Most Effective” Networks

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<th>Personal and professional development</th>
<th>High degree of trust that evolved over time</th>
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<td>Shared affinities, goals, interests</td>
<td>Mentoring relationships between senior and junior members</td>
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<td>Clear formal organizational structure</td>
<td>Mutual respect, equal levels of commitment across members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small number of people all of whom have a stake</td>
<td>Strong leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear rewards, appropriate to career stage</td>
<td>Time commitment consistent with meeting goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy for others in group</td>
<td>Opportunity to step out of normal routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of collaboration</td>
<td>Opportunities to work and play together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very clear, common, simple goals</td>
<td>Regular reflection and self-monitoring of productivity, effectiveness in meeting goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear shared vision</td>
<td>Understanding of long-term vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate staff and the incorporation of what people are already doing rather than creating entirely new tasks for people to do</td>
<td>Sharing of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Characteristics of “Most Effective” Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continued participation through selective incentives (e.g., honoraria for participating in convenings)</th>
<th>Tasks should not be too different from what people already do, but should not be so specialized that members do not feel they are contributing to the whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of community</td>
<td>A formal and funded structure. It is helpful and perhaps essential to have someone whose job it is to maintain the network and who is paid to do this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Characteristics of “Least Effective” Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Different standards, unclear criteria for success and abandonment, too many other commitments to prioritize</th>
<th>Not enough inquiry, lot of expertise that is not being taken advantage of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clear mission</td>
<td>Cliquishness and animosity between subgroups and within leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate funding to bring individuals together</td>
<td>“Founder syndrome” where the chair stepped down and the network collapsed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of familiarity with one another</td>
<td>Very little commitment, non-existent leadership, and no obvious rewards for participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little formal structure</td>
<td>Diverse goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective leadership</td>
<td>Little social value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary: Recommendations for an Effective Network

1. Regular interaction/network activities at conferences, meetings, etc.
2. Specific rewards to be an active member of the network.
3. Common goal for the group.
4. Make sure we use what people are already doing rather than starting from scratch.
5. Making sure selective incentives include the opportunity to pitch for collaborators on our own primary research projects.
6. Honoraria.
7. Build in fun time/play.
9. Frequent interaction with purpose (don’t meet just for the sake of meeting).

Toward Standardized Indicators of Incivility and Political Dysfunction

Robin Stryker, Kate Kenski, and Sarah Sobieraj provided a background presentation focused on the benefits of standardized indicators for research vs. the time, labor, and difficulties inherent in achieving such standardized indicators. The three provided numerous examples of current measures used in surveys, for content analyses and to create manipulations for laboratory experiments. They emphasized that although it is relatively easy to obtain good measures of perceived types of incivility through survey data collection, it is very difficult to achieve inter-rater reliability in measures of political incivility for content analysis. For content analyses, a well-developed, thorough and precise codebook is necessary, coders must be trained and it may take many iterations of codebook and training to achieve inter-rater reliability.

The presentation and subsequent group discussion was not intended to decide upon indicators. Rather, it was intended to provide a forum for discussing if, pursuant to an RCN grant, the Research Network would want to work to map all the indicators used in extant research, consider the advantages and disadvantages of each and then work toward a core set of indicators that all researchers doing the same time of research would use while also retaining flexibility to add additional indicators.

“A standardized set of core indicators would allow systematic comparison of types and levels of incivility across different settings and over time.”

- Robin Stryker
types of democratic political function and dysfunction. Because there already are well established standardized indicators of many aspects of political function/dysfunction, e.g., polarization, the session focused especially on measuring political incivility. However, it was repeatedly emphasized that key indicators for the Research Network would not just pertain to civil or uncivil political discourse but to all aspects of functioning or dysfunctional democratic process and governance.

A communication scholar noted that she had done content analyses and felt that there is a case to be made for researcher-designated standardized indicators for that purpose. However, there also are audience/beholder perception measures that are very useful and that can be tracked systematically over time. A political scientist noted that there had been interesting experiments in which participants coded the same discursive exchange based solely on text vs. audio/video. These manipulations generated different perceptions and consequently different codes.

One current controversy in conceptualizing political incivility is about whether incivility equates with rudeness or not. Some have conceptualized and measured it in this way while others emphatically disagree. There are multiple potential research programs in this area because we are interested both in public perceptions of incivility and in the real state of discourse across institutions and diverse media platforms. We can track both “perceptions” and “realities” over time and we can expect that both have important causes and consequences. We also need to attend to differences in how civil and uncivil discourse has been defined by key actors over time.

Carolyn Lukensmeyer noted that NICD was not trying to decide by fiat on any particular indicators. Rather, the intent was to explore whether it would be valuable to come up with a core set of indicators with the recognition that there are some concepts that may not require shared indicators. She suggested that that the group spend some time discussing what would be the most effective strategies to arrive at these core indicators assuming the group decided it did want to arrive at conceptual core indicators.

One participant responded by reminding the group that it isn’t possible to come up with indicators until you have a clear sense of what is the conceptual terrain. The Research Network could leap too quickly to measure incivility and then let those measures drive
our research without having done the hard conceptual work. It isn’t possible to come up with good measures without attaching them to a clear conceptual framework. In turn, that conceptual framework is likely to be tied to a normative vision. For this reason, involving scholars from a discipline such as philosophy, which, by definition is normative, can be effective for the purposes of conceptual clarification. Another participants expressed the view that, “If we keep hanging our hat on civility/incivility, it will become a multidimensional concept. Things will get teased out empirically, but we have to have a clear conceptual groundwork.”

Shifting the conversation slightly, another participant suggested the Research Network ask itself: “What is dangerous in terms of political outcomes? We have to get in touch at a gut level, as citizens and as scholars, with what we see as dangerous.” Responses given to this question by various participants included violence, seeing the other side as the enemy, revolution, dehumanization, incivility in the media, the creation of separate realities, inequality, and the inability to collaborate on global threats to humanity.

No consensus was reached on whether the Research Network should aim for a core of standardized indicators. However, all agreed that conceptual clarification was essential.

**Breakout Sessions**

The final substantive sessions held on Friday were smaller group breakout sessions. One of these focused on training and education while the second focused on communication technologies. John Gastil facilitated the education and training group and Jennifer Earl facilitated the communication technologies group. Originally, there was to be a third group focusing on network recruitment and growth. However, participants felt that enough conversation had focused on the topic of networks, while the other content areas required attention. Participants chose between these two sessions. Each group reported out some key recommendations.

**Training and Education**

RCN-related educational and training programs are often complemented by additional university-provided funding to ensure their students can take advantage of such opportunities. The group expressed enthusiasm about creating a variety of educational and training opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students. These include:

- Providing workshops to help professors and graduate students design curricula and syllabi for undergraduate courses in political discourse and democratic governance.
- Creating opportunities for graduate student immersion in scholarly research about incivility and political dysfunction. These could be modeled on something like the Summer Institute for Civic Studies at Tufts University.
- Providing junior scholars with mentoring by senior scholars outside their home institutions.
• Providing graduate students with opportunities to do research with scholars with whom they would not be able to work at their home institutions.

The group also expressed enthusiasm about partnering for education and training with other scholarly groups and organizations that may already be out there, assuming we can identify a clear value-added to our own Research Network.

Finally, the education and training group suggested establishing “cross-mentoring” between appropriate researchers and practitioners, so that each could see the world through the other’s eyes and scholarship and practice could be mutually informative.

**Communication Technologies**

This group considered such questions as how diverse types of technology might help in communication within and outside the Research Network and how technology might aid in network recruitment and in evaluating network growth and effectiveness. As well, it considered how technology might be used to advance participants’ research. In considering the question of technology, it became important to address such other questions as how big the Research Network should be, and exactly whom the Network would be recruiting. Ideas and concerns raised included:

• Identification of additional network members, and ways that we could use available information and design algorithms to help identify potential new members and grow.

• Many potential tools for identifying and recruiting appropriate members exist.

• There are concerns that scraping might involve potential violations of intellectual property rights; we can design algorithms that scrape public web sites for particular types of content, including scholarship relevant to the Research Network without violating intellectual property rights.

• The utility of connecting with nonprofits doing work in civic politics.

• The utility of doing a more systematic network mapping both of relevant scholars and of extant practitioner organizations.

• The need to use technology to help us stay connected and interact between Network workshops, retreats and conferences.

• The utility of creating a public website with fun facts and graphics.

• That we should examine advances in the facilitation of virtual “face-to-face” meetings to be more effective. Paul Murray demonstrated one platform developed and currently used at the University of Illinois-Chicago Electronic Visualization Laboratory. This platform allows real-time collaborative work on the same document.

• Considering whether there were databases that a large number of network members might want to use that, while not affordable by individuals, could be affordable by the Network as a whole. Involvement in the network might then bring the reward of access to a given database.
• The utility of having the Network produce various kinds of data.
• That since we will want to share data and materials with one another and collaborate on projects, we will have to address the issue of data sharing across institutions and communities.

Saturday, October 11

Summary
The day began with a recapitulation of goals outlined for the convening and of the results of prior discussion. Below is a brief bullet-point summary.

Three Organizing Principles
1. Productive political engagements
2. Affective political polarization
3. (In)civility and political (dys)function

Characteristics of the Interdisciplinary Field
• Requires a network of scholars from multiple disciplines
  o Networks need depth, not superficial representation
• Depth necessary because it could:
  o Publicize the research to put theory into practice
  o Address complexity
  o Access a broad range of datasets already available
  o Develop cutting edge research agendas
  o Sharpen pressing research questions
  o Develop depth within disciplines; needed to gain credibility for network researchers among their disciplinary peers.

Research Questions
• What are the cause-effect relationships between Productive Political Engagement and political function and dysfunction?
• What impedes productive political engagement?
• How do civility and incivility relate to productive engagement?
• When does incivility harms vs. strengthen productive engagement?
• How can we improve the practice of American democracy?
• What is the relationship between civil/uncivil discourse and political function/dysfunction?
• When is incivility actually productive, important, and necessary?
• What are the causes and effects of polarization, including affective polarization?
• Civility and incivility matter. How do we repair incivility? We may wish to create a comprehensive map of the infrastructure of civility and incivility.
• Conceptualizations of civility; what are the causes and effects of each kind?
• International comparisons: what has happened in other Western democracies, and why?
  We need to examine such issues as trust in government and media; and changes in media structures and content
• We should be on the lookout for natural experiments, especially internationally (Canada and Australia are similar to us in many ways and yet we can leverage key differences)
• What interventions are feasible – politically and economically?
• How do we measure the effectiveness of interventions?
• What are the causal mechanisms that relate affect to cognition and behavior? Important variables might include the feeling thermometer, argument repertoire, and perceived distance between opposing sides

Recommendations for establishing an Effective Network
• Common goal for the group
• Regular interaction with purpose/network activities at conferences, meetings, etc.
• Specific rewards for being an active member of the network; honoraria
• Make sure we use what people are already doing rather than starting from scratch
• Build in fun time/play
• Formal structure/organization/network manager/leadership

Recommendations on Standardized Indicators
• We need to map the conceptual field (i.e. how do the various key concepts relate to each other?) and then return to the question of measurement.
• We need to study perceptions of incivility as well as the “realities” of incivility.

Recommendations: Training and Education
• Train young faculty/grad students how to have difficult discussions in the classroom
• Train grad students how to research civil discourse
• Increase interaction between faculty and grad students who are not at the same university
• Create interaction between undergrads at different institutions to increase diversity of discussion (including online)
• Collaboration and feedback between practice and research in field of education
• Possible methods to achieve this: summer camp for graduate or undergraduate students; partnerships with existing camps
• Potential goals: research training, teaching graduate students how to create a class about civil discourse
• Online workshops—alternate option, lower cost
• Online resource repository

Recommendations: Communications Technology
• Establish how technology can be used to answer research questions
• Establish how technology can be used to facilitate network recruitment and growth
• Establish how technology can be used to facilitate collaboration
• Establish how technology can be used to evaluate network effectiveness

The Way Forward
The goals outlined for the convening were to:
• Successfully win a Research Coordination Network (RCN) grant from the National Science Foundation
• Create and sustain an effective national network of scholars
• Build creative collaborations beyond the scope of the RCN and seek funding for them

Action Steps
To realize these goals, participants were asked to identify their three most important action steps to move the Research Network forward beyond the convening. After small group discussion at the tables, participants identified the top twelve (12) high priority action steps. The agreed-upon central action steps are as follows.

1. Technology—whatever form that will take
   a. Web, listserv, communication, pitching ideas
   b. ResearchGate and academia.edu
   c. Resource sharing
   d. Collaborative spaces
2. Address difficult conceptual issues that remain unresolved
   a. Difficult to move forward without clarification
   b. Unclear about (in)civility. Is that the core? More discussion about the centrality of civility/incivility. This may be a perpetual dilemma.
   c. Anxiety about choice; We need a shared concept and focus but we want to be able to accommodate diversity
   d. Without clear focus, people will not feel connected
   e. Steering committee must nail down key themes
   f. Nodes within the network
   g. People need to have a stake to stay involved
3. Decide who is leading and writing the RCN proposal.
   a. Helping Robin. Timeline is tight; what needs to happen soon?
   a. Who is already doing this work? Diverse disciplines.
   b. Non-profit, practitioner networks, funders
5. Foundation Center website (who funds what, now?)
6. Democracy map—who is in this space?
7. Who are we without the grant? What if we don’t get the grant? What does that mean?
   a. We are going to create a Research Network with or without the grant.
9. Connect with people not here—elites, journalists, conservatives, nonprofits, academic fields outside of those included (philosophy, economics, rhetoric, history, design and computer science, science and technology studies, anthropology, etc.) (Dilemma is defining boundaries of the network.)
10. Short-term and long term goals. Specific guidelines and goals. Timeline
11. Identify plan and time for next convening when network will share resources and presentations with one another.
   a. We want to share substantive research content at our next convening, especially what research we have done and are doing, and what we have found and are finding. We want to get feedback on our research from other Network members.
   b. Share among researchers, but also share with other audiences such as citizens, media, and politicians. We could design a convening that had both an intensive scholar to scholar focus but also included a more public forum in which scholars interact with non-scholars
   c. NICD Slideshow (how are we sharing with wider audiences?)
12. Diversity of background and focus of scholarship.

There are various dilemmas that still require substantial discussion. Carolyn Lukensmeyer emphasized that there is a difference between a problem to be solved and an ongoing dilemma that we continue to manage and navigate. The issues of defining the core and the boundaries of the Research Network will, to some extent, be perpetual dilemmas.

To address identified action steps, work needs to be done in three areas: core concepts, themes and questions, writing the grant, and establishing our technologies.

**Core**
1. We don’t have all the answers to begin; the point is to explore
2. Political dysfunction is a main topic of exploration
   a. What are the components of political dysfunction?
   b. Network can work on deciding what are the interventions and leverage points
3. Link up researchers and decision-makers
Grant
1. Sarah Sobieraj, Kate Kenski, Kevin Coe, and Robert Boatright expressed willingness to become co-PIs.
2. As PI Robin will write rough draft and get reactions from others
   a. Ideal timeline would have draft done in November
   b. There would then be ten days for review and feedback
   c. Get commitments for:
      i. Reviewing draft
      ii. Fine-tuning draft
3. In early December, select steering committee members
4. Should have interdisciplinary set of co-PIs, some from UA and some outside of UA

Technology
1. Use Dropbox as a method for sharing documents and files
2. Create simple listserv
3. Network members can stay in conversation and collaborate with one another through Hackpad

Commitments
Thinking collectively and individually, participants were asked what commitments they were ready to make at this point. They were given three choices for designating their level of commitment to the Research Network. Not all participants were able to answer this question because a number had to leave prior to this final task.

Those who indicated that at this point in time they were committed to this network:
Robin Stryker, Kevin Coe, Kathleen Hull, Robert Boatright, Danna Young, Talia Stroud, Sarah Sobieraj, Kate Kenski, Paul, Ellen Middaugh, and Claire Hill.

Those who indicated that at this point in time they were committed, but that given the dilemmas involved they might discover at some later point that this was not the network for them:
Jennifer Earl, John Gastil, Erhardt Graeff, and Diana Mutz.

There was no one who indicated that s/he already knew this was not the type of network in which s/he/he wanted to continue.

The convening ended with each participant making a statement about what s/he had especially appreciated about the convening and/or about being part of this community. Participants emphasized such things as the utility of the research summaries prepared by all participants, the

“Tocqueville would have loved this meeting. Being here at the birth of this kind of network is exciting.”
- Diana Hess
“As a funder and practitioner, it was exciting to see how NICD is working to create this thing.”
- Jean Bordewich

excitement and enthusiasm generated by meeting people in other disciplines who have similar interests and complementary skills and with whom they could collaborate on research, the number of new resources about which they were made aware, and the new framings of issues that could move them forward in their own research. Several participants appreciated the conceptual work that participants were able to do collectively and noted that this, along with the compilation of research summaries, already showed the utility of coming together as a Research Network.

Participants

Researchers

Robert Boatright, Associate Professor of Political Science, Clark University
Kevin Coe, Associate Professor of Communication, University of Utah
Jennifer Earl, Professor of Sociology, University of Arizona
John Gastil, Head of the Department of Communication Arts & Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University
Daniel Gillion, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania
Erhardt Graeff, PhD Candidate, Center for Civic Media, MIT Media Lab
Jonathan Haidt, Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership, Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York University
Claire Hill, Professor and James L. Krusemark Chair in Law, University of Minnesota
Kathleen Hull, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota
Kate Kenski, Associate Professor of Communication, University of Arizona
Ellen Middaugh, Research Director, Educating for Democracy in the Digital Age Project, Mills College
Matt Motyl, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Illinois-Chicago
Paul Murray, PhD Candidate, Department of Computer Science, University of Chicago
Diana Mutz, Samuel A. Stouffer Chair in Political Science and Communication and Director of the Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics at the Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania
Mark Ramirez, Assistant Professor of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University
Sarah Sobieraj, Associate Professor of Sociology, Tufts University
Natalie Stroud, Associate Professor of Communication, University of Texas-Austin
Robin Stryker, Professor of Sociology, affiliated Professor of Law, affiliated Professor of Government and Public Policy, and Research Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse, University of Arizona
Chris Weber, Associate Professor of Government and Public Policy, University of Arizona
Dannagal Goldthwaite Young, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, University of Delaware and Research Fellow University of Delaware Center for Political Communication

Foundation Representatives
Jean Bordewich, Program Officer, Madison Initiative, Hewlett Foundation
Joe Goldman, President, Democracy Fund
Diana Hess, Senior Vice President, Spencer Foundation
Paula McAvo, Associate Program Officer, Spencer Foundation

Staff
Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Executive Director
D. Shane Christensen, Program Director
Dr. Timothy J. Shaffer, Consultant
Johanna Lundy, Development Assistant
Kate Gunby, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona
Peter Leavitt, NICD Intern & PhD Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona
Bethany Conway, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona
J. Taylor Danielson, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona

Network Members Unable to Attend
Penny Edgell, Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota
Morris Fiorina, Wendt Family Professor of Political Science, Stanford University and Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution
Kim Fridkin, Professor of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University
Archon Fung, Ford Foundation Professor of Democracy and Citizenship and Academic Dean of John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
James Hamilton, Hearst Professor of Communication, Director of the Journalism Program, Stanford University
Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor of Communication and Leonore Annenberg Director, Annenberg Public Policy Center School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania
Joseph Kahne, Professor of Education, Mills College
Samara Klar, Assistant Professor of Government and Public Policy, University of Arizona
Taeku Lee, Professor of Political Science and Professor of Law, University of California-Berkeley

Enid Logan, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota

Markus Prior, Director of the Center for Democracy, Associate Professor of Politics and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School and Department of Politics, Princeton University

Steve Rains, Associate Professor of Communication, University of Arizona

Chris Robertson, Associate Professor, Rogers College of Law, University of Arizona

Zachary Schrank, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, Indiana University at South Bend

Boris Shor, Visiting Assistant Professor of Government, Georgetown University

Caroline Tolbert, Professor of Political Science, University of Iowa

Ethan Zuckerman, Director of the Center for Civic Media, Massachusetts Institute of Technology