



2021-22 CSG Healthy States National Task Force

Civic Health Subcommittee

Meeting Summary No. 1 - June 25, 2021

The first meeting of The Council of State Governments (CSG) Healthy States National Task Force – Civic Health Subcommittee took place virtually Friday, June 25, 2021. The Subcommittee explored issues related to **public trust in government institutions** and **civic education**.

Civic Health

“Practicing Citizenship: Strategies to Build a Healthier Democracy”

Danielle Allen (Harvard University) spoke to the subcommittee on her experience building consensus among people with conflicting priorities. The presentation also included innovations in civics that could lead to more compromise. Of them, ranked choice voting was a topic of engagement by the Subcommittee members. Additionally, the presentation emphasized the importance of municipalities creating a culture of service by investing in opportunities for both youth and justice-involved individualst. Allen identified three pillars to civic health:

- Healthy civic society
- Healthy civic culture
- Healthy civil institutions

Allen’s presentation described these three pillars as the lines forming a virtuous cycle of democracy that allows for responsive, representative institutions that in turn give people a chance to solve problems together.

[Presentation Recording](#)

Public Trust in Government Institutions

“Building Trust in Government Institutions”

Pete Peterson (Pepperdine University) discussed the importance of the history and culture of a people into policymaking decisions. The presentation touched on the traditional means through which policy proposals are debated and passed, and challenged the subcommittee to think critically about how public engagement challenges emotional intelligence. The takeaway: working on one’s emotional intelligence can make bipartisan solutions more possible. Peterson’s presentation concluded with these observations:

- “The most effective policymaker is the historian.”
- Having public leaders who understand and work on the [12 Elements of Emotional Intelligence](#) can lead to better political decision making.
- “The public needs to know that we care as much about what makes the community and our states as unique as they do...we need to make decisions for our states that align with the history and culture of our states.”

[Presentation Recording](#)

“Trust and Truth: Fundamental to Democracy”

Carolyn Lukensmeyer (Former Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse) discussed her work consulting with public and private sector organizations that needed help navigating complex intergroup tension. The presentation also discussed policy considerations that could lead to less animus within civic discourse such as nonpartisan redistricting. Lukensmeyer concluded with these observations:

- Humans respond to the context we are in, structure we are in, and signals we receive in that context and structure. Due to this, the invitation people receive, the location of the meeting, and the encouragement people get to participate is important when designing forums for civic discourse.
- To create discourse among differing groups, facilitators must first set the tone by establishing values and a vision. Ask participants: “What do we want to be true of the place where we live?”
- People participating in tense conversations must feel safe; they have to believe that their voice will be heard and they have to know that their participation made a difference.

[Presentation Recording](#)

K-12 Civic Education

“Federal and State Policy Briefing”

Shawn Healy (iCivics) discussed the need for stronger K-12 civic education due to the lack of trust in public institutions that Americans express and their lack of knowledge of how U.S. institutions work. The presentation also highlighted national and state efforts to advocate on behalf of robust civic education. During discussion, Healy urged subcommittee members to consider that good civic education both celebrates the country’s accomplishments while acknowledging the country’s difficult history, and its difficult present. A few points of particular interest:

- A 2020 poll from the Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey found that only 51% of Americans polled could name all three branches of government.
- Trust in the legislative branch fell to 33% after 2020.
- The federal government invests five cents per student for civics, but \$54 per student for STEM.
- Student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Civics is stagnant, with civic knowledge and skills spread inequitably by race/ethnicity.

[Presentation Recording](#)

Civic Health Subcommittee Focuses

The Civic Health Subcommittee discussed the ways the Task Force could focus its efforts to highlight policy data and state policy examples and consider recommendations for strengthening civics education and public trust in government institutions along the following focus areas:

- **Ranked-choice voting** – Subcommittee members were interested in the mechanics of this election process. Questions were asked regarding the technological challenges of voting this way.
- **De-incentivizing tribalism** - Subcommittee members were interested in tips and best practices on how to facilitate measured conversations on volatile topics within communities. The example given was that of the discourse on critical race theory in schools. *How do we engage in that conversation, and others like it, without inviting hostility and/or violence?*
- **Civic Education and Racism** – Subcommittee members were concerned about how educational institutions can address the nation’s inequities in a political environment as confrontational as the one that currently exists.

Resources

Speaker Links

Harvard University

- [Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics](#) (Web Resources)

American Academy of Arts and Sciences

- [Our Common Purpose](#) (Report)

Pepperdine University

- [School of Public Policy](#) (Web Resources)
- [Community Engagement Matters \(Now More Than Ever\)](#) (Article)
- [Emotional Intelligence Has 12 Elements. Which Do You Need to Work On?](#) (Article)

National Institute for Civil Discourse

- [Fair Vote](#) (Web Resources)
- [Divided We Fall](#) (Documentary)

iCivics

- [Our Proven Impact](#) (Testimonies)

Policy Examples and Resources Highlighted by Task Force Members and Partners

- **California's** judiciary has played a leading role in highlighting the importance of civic education in the state.
- In **Maine**, redistricting is handled by a 15-member commission that consists of leaders from both major political parties.
- **Maine's** [8th grade citizenship award](#) recognizes one 8th grade student from each Maine school who demonstrates the qualities of active participation in civic or community activities.
- In **Maine**, the Women's Policy Center holds an annual Girl's Day at the Statehouse where girls engage in mock hearings and then get to meet a wide variety of women in politics in different sessions.
- **Ohio's** [Youth at the Booth](#) program allows young people to serve as poll workers on election day.

Civic Health Subcommittee

- Secretary of State, Shenna Bellows, Maine (subcommittee co-chair)
- Secretary of State Frank LaRose, Ohio (subcommittee co-chair)
- Senator Jennifer Boysko, Virginia
- Assemblymember Catalina Cruz, New York
- Senator Sal DiDomenico, Massachusetts
- Senior Policy Advisor Tommy Druen, Office of the Speaker, Kentucky House of Representatives
- Chief Service Officer, Josh Fryday, California
- Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea, Rhode Island
- Justice Eva Guzman, Supreme Court, Texas
- Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson, Utah
- Senator Joan Lovely, Massachusetts
- Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, New Mexico
- Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Illinois
- Justice Alisa Kelli Wise, Supreme Court, Alabama

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