

**A Study of Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County:
Finding a Definition, Best Practices, and Position**

By
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Preface

Most League studies are about issues with clear pros and cons. Usually, there is a history within the League and outside the League concerning these issues. Most of the time a plethora of existing data and research is available at the local, state, and/or national levels. While there is a clear precedent and protocol for studies centering on processes that no longer work or appear in need of change, e.g. redistricting, a formal Study of Civil Discourse in local Government presented many new and unique challenges because there was no clear precedent. Yet, who better to study a communication process so key to the deliberation process than the League of Women Voters, who has championed making Democracy work better by first securing the right to vote for all women and by continuing to champion the right to vote for all qualified citizens regardless of race or gender? Who better to study “Civil Discourse” than the League of Women Voters, who has modeled both Civility and Civil Discourse in all their own processes and procedures as exemplified publicly in their “candidate forums” and “pros and cons forums?” This is why our Study Committee unanimously chose to follow the protocol outlined in the LWVC resource, financed by the LWVEF, entitled, “How to Direct a Local Study.” This was our primary organizational resource for conducting our yearlong Study of Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County.

There were many legitimate concerns expressed by both our Civil Discourse Steering Committee and our Civil Discourse Study Committee when we began our Civil Discourse Study. From the beginning, we wanted to make sure that we were NOT perceived as seeking a Position on Civil Discourse so we could take action against elected officials who had moments of incivility or lapses in uncivil discourse. We especially wanted to avoid any misperceptions by citizens that we were out to regulate, control, or impede their first amendment right to free speech. The League of Women Voters has been an active champion of openness in government throughout our history. The League’s principles include the requisite that “government bodies protect the citizen’s right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.” Over the years, the League has supported various federal legislative initiatives to expand open government requirements, and has fought against proposals aimed at limiting access to public information. We also knew that we needed to understand the legislated, adopted, and legal constraints that affected both elected officials and citizens as they tried to come together in public meetings to deliberate and find solutions to critical issues affecting the cities and county of San Luis Obispo, California.

Once our Study was complete and we had a Position on Civil Discourse, we wanted to make sure that both elected officials and citizens still understood that we were not going to punish or call out elected officials who failed to model the best practices of Civility and Civil Discourse. We would NOT be the Civil Discourse police. We would not be pulled into partisan politics or name calling in the name of incivility or uncivil discourse. While the League of Women Voters is always nonpartisan – never for or against any party or party candidate – citizens have the right to vote for or against elected officials who they feel impede, block, and/or derail the deliberation process by their repeated pattern of incivility or uncivil discourse. There is a reason for a balance of power, open government, and citizen participation within our government structure. In the state of California, elected officials must be cautious as they balance both the constraints of the First Amendment of the US Constitution, provisions in the California Constitution, Court precedents, and California’s Brown Act which all deal with requirements regulating open government meetings, citizens’ rights, and public comment time. Elected officials’ prospects of being reelected depend on how effective they can be while balancing these constraints and pressures from their party, constituents, and the general welfare of their city, district, and/or county.

This is why the content and tone of our Letter to Elected Officials about the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County's purpose for the Civil Discourse Study was so important. Words matter and words make a difference in how people respond. We asked the 39 elected officials in San Luis Obispo County for their help in our pursuit of a definition and best practices of Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo. One of the many unexpected benefits of the Civil Discourse Study was a 15 % increase in membership and a 21% increase in membership from men. While we know that this increase was not solely due to the yearlong Civil Discourse Study, we had many anecdotal accounts from new members and existing members who renewed their membership that they were excited about becoming involved in the Civil Discourse Task Force as they took action in San Luis Obispo County to make Democracy work better through Civil Discourse. We were pleasantly surprised by the positive countywide response to our Civil Discourse Study and even more surprised in our second year by the requests for our Civil Discourse presentations and presence at government meetings held in public across our County. Civil Discourse has become a term heard much more frequently now in the Community of San Luis Obispo and it is rewarding to know that both elected officials and citizens appreciate our positive effort to raise the consciousness and build support for Civil Discourse one elected official, one staff member, and one citizen at a time.

In an effort to remain nonpartisan in our final report on our Study of Civil Discourse, we chose to speak in general terms regarding quotes or observations made by both elected officials and citizens. We collected volumes of information from our research, observations, and unit meetings that were held in all parts of our County. We were pleased by how engaged our Community is now and always has been when it comes to showing up and speaking at important government meetings held in public. In 2010, San Luis Obispo was the only city in the US to have an entire chapter in National Geographic's book entitled, **Thrive: Finding Happiness the Blue Zones Way** by Dan Buettner. We were mentioned because our elected officials and citizens came together to create special places for our community, businesses, and visitors to thrive. We want to continue to "thrive" and we feel that embracing the "best practices" of Civil Discourse is the way to ensure real happiness on our lovely Central Coast of California. The results of our Study of Civil Discourse Study revealed that we are not quite as "happy" as we once were in the realm of local government, but we still have a very dedicated group of elected officials and engaged citizens who strive to keep the Central Coast of California and the County of San Luis Obispo a place where citizens and elected officials work together to solve every critical problem that faces us now and in the future.

Acknowledgements to Participants in 2013-2014 Civil Discourse Study

As Chair of the Civil Discourse Study, I would like to thank our outstanding Civil Discourse Steering Committee Members comprised of the following Officers and Members: President, Marilee Hyman; Sharon Whitney, Past President, Director of Government; and Vera Wallen, 2nd Vice President and Director of Voter Services. I would also like to thank the following members who joined our CD Steering Committee to form our Civil Discourse Study Committee: Elinor Kogan, Past Membership Chair; and Emily Penfield, Past President. We would also like to thank the 5-Member Board of Supervisors, 7-City Mayors, 28-City Council Members, citizens of the Community of San Luis Obispo, and members of the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County for participating in interviews, meetings, and inquiries from our Letters of Inquiry.

Background on San Luis Obispo County and Government

“San Luis Obispo County, one of California’s 58 counties, is located on the Pacific coast, midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It covers 3,316 square miles and includes 100 miles of coastline. The center of County government is located in the city of San Luis Obispo. With a population of 273,231, the County ranks 23rd in population among California’s 58 counties. It is divided into 5 supervisory districts. San Luis Obispo, with a population of 44,705, is the largest city in the County. County programs and services are administered by elected and appointed officials, boards, and commissions, and are carried out by their staffs. In 2010, the County employed 2,403 people in 22 Departments. County officials are elected for four-year terms. Most Board of Supervisors’ activities center around services to the public that are provided in its capacity as the legislative body of the County. Members of the Board of Supervisors represent the people residing within their supervisorial district, while also working for the general welfare of the entire County. The Board of Supervisors oversees Special Districts, Boards, Commissions, and Committees. The 5 supervisory districts of San Luis Obispo County encompass the following cities (in bold type) and communities:” *

- District 1: Adelaida, Cholame, Lake Nacimiento, Oak Shores, **Paso Robles**, San Miguel, Shandon, Templeton, and Whitley Gardens.
- District 2: Baywood Park, California Men’s Colony, Cal Poly (portion), Cambria, Cayucos, Cuesta-by-the-Sea, Harmony, Los Osos, **Morro Bay**, **San Luis Obispo** (portion), San Simeon.
- District 3: **Arroyo Grande** (portion), Avila Beach, Country Club, Edna-Los Ranchos, **Grover Beach**, **Pismo Beach**, Rolling Hills Estate, **San Luis Obispo** (portion), Shell Beach, Squire Canyon, Sunset Palisades.
- District 4: **Arroyo Grande** (portion), Black Lake Canyon, Callendar-Garrett, Edna Valley, Halcyon, Huasna-Lopez, Nipomo, Nipomo-Mesa, Oceano, Palo Mesa.
- District 5: **Atascadero**, Cal Poly (portion), California Valley, Creston, Cuyama, Garden Farms, Pozo, **San Luis Obispo** (portion), Santa Margarita.

According to a combination of 2013 County statistics, the County’s population is 67.5% white, 2.2% African-American, 1.4% American Indian-Alaska Native, 3.7% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian-Other Pacific Islander, 3.3% two or more races, and 21.7% Hispanic-Latino. **

***Source:** Know Your County: A Guide to Government of San Luis Obispo County. Compiled and Published by the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County, 2009).

****Source:** U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Data derived from Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census Population and Housing, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits: Last Revised, Thursday, 28-May-2015.

Brief History: Open Government, the Brown Act, and Civility in Government

The United States system of government is based on the premise that government is created by the people, and is accountable to them. Yet the precise rights of the public in terms of access to government information and decision-making were not spelled out until the 1960's and '70's. It was not until President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Freedom of Information Act into law on July 4th, 1966 that the federal government codified what the public has a right to know, and how they can exercise that right to obtain government held information. Following this landmark 1966 legislation, the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 and the Sunshine Act of 1976 focused on public access to government meetings. As usual, California preceded the federal government in championing more transparency in government. California's first "open meeting acts" were enacted in 1953. The Brown Act, originally a 686-word statute, authored by Assembly member Ralph M. Brown, came in response to mounting public concerns over informal, undisclosed meetings held by local elected officials.

The Brown Act, also known as the "Open Meeting Law," has grown over time with many additions. The Brown Act requires that every agenda for regular meetings must provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the legislative body on any item of interest to the public, and which is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body, before or during consideration of the item (Government Code Section 54954.3). Similar rules apply to special meetings. In addition, the legislative body is not permitted to enact regulations prohibiting public criticism of the policies, procedures, programs, or service of the agency, or of the acts or omissions of the legislative body {Government Code Section 54954.3(c)}. In 2008, the following new provisions were added with the intention of creating more transparency and preventing elected officials from reaching concurrency on decisions pending on the Agenda prior to public deliberation in meetings open to the public with "public comment time."

"A majority of the members of a legislative body shall not, outside of a meeting authorized by this chapter, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body."

The legislation also added that this new language "shall not be construed as preventing an employee or official of a local agency, from engaging in separate conversations or communications outside of a meeting authorized by this chapter with members of a legislative body in order to answer questions or provide information regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency, if that person does not communicate to members of the legislative body the comments or position of any other member or members of the legislative body." How these new provisions and the interpretations of these new provisions affected the deliberation process among elected officials, their staff, and citizens will be addressed both in our findings and in our post study comparison with the June 2015, findings published by the Little Hoover Commission.

Before we talked to elected officials, staff, and citizens, we needed to know and understand the constraints they were under by not only the Brown Act but by other laws, codes, or guidelines. After reading the provision that referred to citizens and their rights, we better understood why legislative bodies could indeed expect some level of hostility, abuse, and criticism, all of which would be protected not only by the First Amendment, but also by the Brown Act. We needed to understand these

parameters as we conducted our Study of Civil Discourse because we, too, needed to know how these parameters might affect our definition, best practices, Position, and future actions with regard to civil discourse in the context of San Luis Obispo County government as carried out by elected officials, their staff, and citizens. In the state of California, it is not the US Constitution but the provisions of the Brown Act that provide citizens with the right to speak during “public comment time.” We found that most citizens respect these freedoms and privileges and use “public comment time” to present information, evidence, and opinions that enhance the deliberation process and move the decision-making process forward; unfortunately, there always seems to be a few citizens intent on pushing their freedoms and privileges to the limit.

Citizens who are intent on disrupting the deliberative process for the sake of disruption and not as a symbolic gesture relating to an item on the Agenda present a real challenge to both elected officials and other citizens who are there to speak about items on the Agenda. Fear of lawsuits allows most disruptive behavior by a few citizens to play out during the time limits placed on “public comment time.” The June 2015 Little Hoover Commission Report findings on the unintended consequences of the 2008 Amendments to California’s Brown Act, which were intended to increase transparency and participation in open government by citizens, reflect the same anecdotal results we found in our 2013-2014 Civil Discourse Study.

While the legislators of the state of California provide transparency laws to assure “clean open government” and balance the public’s right to observe and participate in government with officials’ need to effectively administer it, we discovered through our Civil Discourse Study that these rights, privileges, and constraints -- while allowing powerful access to government and strong rights to watch and weigh in on deliberations that shape decisions and policy -- often were misinterpreted and not practiced in the spirit in which they were intended, resulting in a less than ideal process. Many elected officials and their attorneys were so fearful of violating the Brown Act that they were afraid to participate in any informational discussions with other elected officials outside of public meetings. Some officials who engaged in discussions with one other official were reluctant to discuss the issue with any other official because it could be perceived as a “serial meeting” – especially when 3 officials added up to a majority of the legislative body.

Even attending important workshops or forums can present dilemmas for elected officials under the provisions of the Brown Act. If a majority of members of a legislative body attend a workshop or forum on an important issue, then, they could be construed as having a “public meeting” and, again, be in violation of the Brown Act – even though there was no intention to reach consensus or a decision on Agenda topics during or after the workshop or forum. There are citizens who repeatedly abuse their rights and privileges under the First Amendment and Brown Act, which sometimes results in other citizens becoming frustrated and disengaged. In observing and hearing about these issues and challenges, we saw a gap that the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County might be able to fill by raising the consciousness and building support for the best practices of Civil Discourse with both elected officials and citizens within the framework of the provisions of both the US Constitution and the Brown Act when we finally had a Position on Civil Discourse.

Outline of Civil Discourse Study

First Priorities:

- Find resource for League protocol on “How to Direct A Local Study.”
- Establish Steering Committee.
- Recruit Study Committee.
- Achieve consensus on Strategic Plan for research.
- Establish Scope for Study.
- Develop methodology for grass roots research.

Unit I:

Agenda for Arriving at a Definition of Civil Discourse in Local Government:

- I. Brainstorm and research “Civil Discourse” in the context of local government.
- II. Organize notebook with research results for Definitions of Civil Discourse.
- III. Develop definition of Civil Discourse by participants based on brainstorming exercises.
- IV. Compare research results with Committee’s findings, and matrix results from Unit Meetings.
- V. Adopt the Final Definition of Civil Discourse by Consensus.
- VI. Get approval by a quorum of the membership at the June Annual Meeting.
- VII. Include definition of **Civil Discourse**, under Government either as a new or updated Position.

Unit II:

Agenda for Arriving at the Best Practices of Civil Discourse in Local Government:

- I. Brainstorm and research the Best Practices of Civil Discourse.
- II. Organize notebook with research results for Best Practices of Civil Discourse.
- III. Explore Local Government bodies’ concept of Civil Discourse.
- IV. Explore current practices of local government bodies to ensure an atmosphere conducive to the practice of Civil Discourse.
- V. Develop a plan to promote, raise the consciousness, and build support for Civil Discourse as well as a method to monitor the level of Civil Discourse.
- VI. Adopt by consensus the Best Practices of Civil Discourse and submit for approval.

Unit III:

Agenda for Arriving at a New or Updated Position on Civil Discourse:

- I. Brainstorm and reach consensus on whether we are adding a new Position or updating an existing Position under Government.
- II. Reach consensus on an Action Plan to advocate the Best Practices of Civil Discourse to local government bodies.
- III. Submit final results of Civil Discourse Study and final recommendations for the Definition, Best Practices, and updated Position on Government to a quorum of the LWV of SLOCO Membership at the Annual June Meeting.

Summary of Research and Methodology Strategies

First, we identified and selected the LWVC/EF resource entitled, “How to Direct A Local Study,” authored by Ellen Taylor, financed by the National LWV Education Fund, as our primary guide for the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo’s Study of Civil Discourse. After completion of the primary preliminary administrative procedures, we delved into extensive research online, with League resources, in books, in articles, in workshops, and videos, followed by in-depth brainstorming sessions and deliberations held over a 12-month period from 2013-2014, totaling 35 meetings: the January Program Meeting; 29 Study Committee Meetings; 4 countywide brainstorming meetings open to the community; 4 Consensus meetings for League members only; and the June Annual Meeting where the Civil Discourse Study results were presented for approval by a quorum of the membership.

The central core of our CD Study focused on the primary San Luis Obispo County legislative bodies and leaders: our 5 Board of Supervisors; 7 City Mayors; and 28 City Council Members. We started by making an appointment with the Chair of the Board of Supervisors and asking his advice about the best way to engage local county elected officials, staff, and citizens in our pursuit of both Defining and identifying the Best Practices of Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County. He suggested that we start by making appointments to talk with each Supervisor, by attending Board of Supervisor Meetings and City Council Meetings, checking out their web sites, and observing televised meetings or meetings that were being streamed live.

The Chair of the Board of Supervisors’ advice became our grass roots strategy. We conducted in-depth interviews with each of the 5 members of the Board of Supervisors. We attended public meetings and observed elected officials, staff, and citizens as they interacted in discussions and deliberations over various county issues. Study Committee members continued to observe meetings on the public network or streamed live. We also collaborated on a Letter of Notification signed by our current President to let elected officials know about our CD Study and to ask them for their help. An email notification was sent to each elected official before the letters were mailed. A sample of our Letter to Elected Officials can be found in Appendix A. We mailed 39 letters to elected officials (There was 1 unfilled City Council vacancy at the time we mailed our letters). We had a 100% response from elected officials who sent us information and suggestions for our CD Study. Responses were both positive and encouraging.

Prior to holding our Brainstorming Unit Meetings that were open to the Community, we compiled a notebook with resources that we had gathered regarding a Definition and Best Practices of Civil Discourse in the context of local government. We did not want to influence participants’ thinking, but we did want to be prepared to answer any questions or inquiries they might have and provide some background about the process as a starting point for discussions. Because of the complexity involved in arriving at both a Definition and Best Practices, we found it necessary to design a matrix for identifying words, phrases, and sentences that participants found to be the most appropriate. We compiled all the Definitions and Best Practices from the 4 Brainstorming Meetings and ask League Members who participated in the Consensus Unit Meetings to narrow down our findings to a “Top 10” Best Definitions and Practices. We used the matrix we designed to compile results and used the most frequently identified words, phrases, sentences, and Best Practices to arrive at the Final Definition and Best Practices that we submitted to our members at the June 14, 2014 Annual Meeting. After the Civil Discourse Study was approved by both the Board of Directors and a quorum of the Membership of the San Luis Obispo League of Women Voters, we decided that we really needed to also identify “observable” characteristics of Civil Discourse if we were to advocate, promote, raise the consciousness, and build support for Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County.

The Process: Key Dates, Timeline, and Path for LWV of San Luis Obispo County's Local Study on Civil Discourse

Annual Program Planning Meeting: January 12, 2013:

At the Saturday, January 12, 2013 three-hour Annual Program Planning Meeting of the LWV of SLOCO moderated by President Marilee Hyman with GlennaDeane Dovey as Historian and Parliamentarian and Emily Penfield as Recorder; **twenty-eight members of the LWV of SLOCO** **"Highly recommended" a local Study of Civil Discourse.**

LWV of SLOCO Board Approves Recommended Local Study of Civil Discourse:

At the May 3rd, 2013 Board Meeting, members of the LWV of SLOCO Board reviewed the Minutes and Recommendations by members for the 2013-2014 Program in order to finalize the Recommended Program for inclusion in the Kit for the Annual June Meeting. **The Board approved the Study of Civil Discourse as one of the "recommended" Programs for inclusion in the Annual Kit sent to members.**

Membership Approves Recommended Local Study of Civil Discourse:

At the June 8th, 2013 Annual Meeting of the LWV of SLOCO – after a robust, frank discussion of all recommended Program items – **a quorum of members present chose Civil Discourse as the recommended Program for Local Study in 2013-2014.** (The vote was unanimous with no one abstaining and no one voting against the local Study of Civil Discourse.)

Chair Approved by Board for Local Study of Civil Discourse:

At the July 5th, 2013 Board of Directors Meeting, Sharon E. Kimball, 1st Vice President, Director of Program and Development, was approved to Chair the local Study on Civil Discourse.

Newly Formed Civil Discourse Steering Committee Holds 1st Meeting:

The 1st meeting of the Civil Discourse Steering Committee was held on July 29, 2013. In addition to Sharon E. Kimball, Chair and 1st Vice President, the following Steering Committee Members were in attendance: Marilee Hyman, President; Sharon Whitney, Past President and Director of Government; and Vera Wallen, 2nd Vice President and Director of Voter Services.

Chair Submits Civil Discourse Update Article to The Voter:

On August 15th, 2013, the Chair of the Civil Discourse Study Committee authored and submitted the first in a series of monthly updates on the local Study of Civil Discourse for publication in **The Voter** and for publication on the LWV of SLOCO web site www.lwvslo.org. The first in a monthly series of Civil Discourse Update articles appeared in the September 2013, Volume 54, Edition #1 of **The Voter**.

Newly Formed Civil Discourse Study Committee Holds First Meeting:

The 1st meeting of the Civil Discourse Study Committee was held on Wednesday, **September 4th, 2013**. In addition to Sharon E. Kimball, Chair and 1st Vice President, the following members of the newly formed Civil Discourse Study Committee were in attendance: Elinor Kogan, Past Membership Chair; Emily Penfield, Past President; Vera Wallen, 2nd Vice President and Director of Voter Services; and Sharon Whitney, Past President and Director of Government.

Board Approves Scope for Civil Discourse Study:

On October 4th, 2013, the Civil Discourse Study Committee submitted two motions for approval by the LWV of SLOCO Board of Directors. First, we submitted the motion to approve our statement on the Scope of the Civil Discourse Study. The motion passed unanimously after a word change to the original Motion. **Final Motion #1:** "The Civil Discourse Study Committee recommends that the Study of Civil Discourse be an expansion of our Government Position to include a definition and emphasis on Civil Discourse and that the Board approves the following Scope for the local Civil Discourse Study: 1.) Develop a definition of the term, Civil Discourse, as it applies to local government. 2.) Explore current adopted methods employed by the County Board of Supervisors and the seven City Councils in their pursuit of sustaining Civil Discourse. 3.) Develop "Best Practices" to ensure that Civil Discourse as defined is practiced by such bodies. **Final Motion #2:** "The Civil Discourse Study further recommends that President, Marilee Hyman, send a letter to elected officials and/or their Administrative Assistants to notify and inform them about our local Civil Discourse Study and ask their help by providing the LWV of SLOCO with any rules, guidelines, and/or protocols they currently use to promote Civil Discourse in their regular meetings among elected officials, staff, and citizens." This motion also passed unanimously.

Civil Discourse Study Committee Sets Tentative Meeting Schedule:

After approval of the Scope for the Civil Discourse Study on October 4th, 2013, the Civil Discourse Study Committee held electronic meetings to determine the best dates for members to meet on a regular basis either weekly, monthly, and/or bi-monthly depending on the workload and goals that need to be met based on League protocol outlined in "Timeline" and "The Path of a Local League Study" and provided by the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund's on "How to Direct a Local Study."

Civil Discourse Subcommittee Meets:

The Civil Discourse Subcommittee comprised of Chair Sharon Kimball and CD Committee Member, Vera Wallen, met to identify and organize the official mailing and email addresses for the 39 elected local officials*** selected to receive the LWV of SLO County's official "Letter of Inquiry" notifying local County elected officials about the LWV of SLO County's intention to Study Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County and asking each elected official what they are currently doing to promote Civil Discourse with other elected officials, their staff, and citizens.

Civil Discourse Chair Mails 39 Letters to Local Elected Officials:***

On Thursday, October 24th, 2013, thirty-nine letters authored by the Civil Discourse Study Committee, approved by the Board of Directors, and signed by the President, Marilee Hyman, were mailed to the 5-Board of Supervisors, 7-City Mayors, and 27-City Council Members of San Luis Obispo County. On the same day, emails were also sent notifying elected officials that they would receive these letters; so, they could look for them. We wanted to increase the chances that the primary addressee, the elected official for whom they were intended, would be the one to provide feedback and reply to our request. We had a 100% return rate.

***Letters of Inquiry were sent to the 5 Board of Supervisors, the 7 City Mayors, and the 27 City Council Members (1 City Council seat was vacant due to a Council Member's death and awaiting Governor Brown's decision on appointing someone to temporarily fill the vacancy.) Normally, there are 28 City Council Members.

Civil Discourse Study Committee Examines Responses- Government Web Sites:

During November 2013, members of the Civil Discourse Study Committee examined information on local government web sites for the seven cities and the County of San Luis Obispo and downloaded documents that contained guidelines, codes, rules for Civil Discourse and/or content related to Civil Discourse, and observed or attended public meetings while they waited for responses from the 39 letters they mailed to elected officials in October. Here is a brief summary of some of the best practices that were observed or downloaded. Some government bodies ...

- Emphasized the importance of the Presiding Official **“thanking” each speaker.**
- Provided **training for elected officials on how to conduct meetings and interact with the public, including the use of electronic technology.**
- Emphasized respectful listening, the use of facts, careful use of non-verbal reactions, and adopted a strict **Code of Ethics with Enforcement Procedures.**
- Adopted several **Resolutions regarding Policy and Procedures for Meetings and Methods for Enforcement.**
- Published a **Handbook: Policies and Procedures for Conduct and Decorum at Council Meetings.**
- Adopted **Rules of Procedure** agreed upon by Council and Commissioners that incorporated the 2011 U.S. Conference of Mayors best practices that focused on respect, understanding, careful word choice, truth seeking, humility, and service.
- Adopted an **Elected Officials’ Civility Accord** that emphasized openness, responsibility, professionalism, and the aim of debate as betterment, not destruction.
- Adopted **Council Norms and Procedures.**
- Approved a strategic plan to **Pursue More Connection Between the City Council and the Community.**
- Provided an **Advisory Body Handbook of Application.**
- Encouraged **Neighborhood Meetings** between citizens and developers to work out differences before projects came to a public council meeting.

While it was evident from our field research that local officials were already striving to promote Civil Discourse with each other, their staff, and citizens, they told us they would welcome suggestions from the LWV of SLO County on ways to improve Civil Discourse in local government. One Mayor invited us to make a presentation to the **Meeting of the Mayors** when it was held in his city. This was just one of many positive responses we received from our Letters to Elected Officials that both energized and motivated our Civil Discourse Study Team to continue their grassroots effort to complete the study, find a Position, and start advocating on behalf of Civil Discourse in local government. Here are a few more of the positive responses we received from elected officials:

- “Your request comes at an appropriate time for our city. I would love to speak with you in more detail.”
- “One of our City Council’s priorities this year has been to pursue more connection between the City Council and the Community.”
- “Our city encourages neighborhood meetings on local issues.”
- “Thank you for tackling this important issue of civil discourse.”
- “I believe that as elected leaders we have a responsibility to model best practice and pursue the best interest of our citizens.”
- “We are in need of creative ways to encourage more civil discourse in our city.”

Civil Discourse Study Committee Observes Local Government Meetings:

We saw the challenges elected officials face when conducting the business of San Luis Obispo County Government in public. We observed the complications that evolve when party differences and/or special interests conflict with and/or supersede the overall general interest and benefit to the County and its constituents. We saw how differences in leadership styles not only set the tone but influenced outcomes, decorum, and attendance. In our observation and research, we found two trends in leadership. There were Leaders who were either afraid or reluctant to enforce the Guidelines, Rules of Conduct, and/or Roberts Rules of Order resulting in frustration by other elected officials and attending citizens. Then, there were Leaders who went overboard on enforcing every rule and guideline, expanding ordinances, and bringing in law enforcement officials resulting in an atmosphere of intimidation which caused citizens to become either outraged and/or disengaged. There were Leaders who vacillated between the two extremes, resulting in confusion because of the inconsistencies that may or may not have been the result of not truly understanding when and how to use the very Guidelines and Rules that could have helped them.

Both trends were definitely affected by the knowledge of and/or lack of knowledge of how the constraints set forth by the First Amendment in the US Constitution and the guidelines and stipulations set forth in California's Brown Act both apply to their conduct as elected officials as well as the conduct of citizens during "public comment" time. When passions run high on contentious issues and large numbers of citizens show up at government meetings, both citizens and elected officials face tough choices in making Democracy work. There is a reason government bodies have Legal Counsel present at all meetings held in public. Elected officials face a balancing act far more difficult than any Circus high wire performer while trying to conduct business in public and find solutions to complex issues affecting their electorate. On the one hand, they are juggling their party's interest and investment and, on the other hand, they are juggling their constituent's special interests while still trying to consider the interest of the entire city, district, board, or county where they are exercising their elective duties and responsibilities. While the original purpose and intent for holding government meetings in public and allowing "public comment" time has laudable merits for Democracy – promoting transparency in government and providing opportunities for citizens to engage in the government process -- unfortunately, there are always a few elected officials and citizens that test the boundaries of the US Constitution, the California Constitution, and the Brown Act.

There is a reason for Roberts Rules of Order. Government meetings held in public are long, and extenuating circumstances and unexpected interruptions and/or distractions can make them even longer. Government bodies have important business to conduct – even though these meetings are held in public – a fact that citizens need to remember and respect. Some government meetings are held from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Other government meetings begin at 5:00 pm, 6:00 pm, or 6:30 pm and may not end until 10:30 pm. Yes, elected officials put in long days and nights and it is a challenge to remain civil and use civil discourse when citizens are using "public comment" time for personal attacks against elected officials instead of providing useful information, opinions, facts, or evidence that might help officials in their pursuit of finding solutions to issues on that day's Agenda. It is equally frustrating to citizens who are speaking during "public comment" time when the body language, tone of voice, and words of elected officials show disrespect toward them. When negativity increases on both sides of the Dais, we see bad things happen. The decision-making process becomes flawed. Decisions are stalled, put on hold, or drawn out over unnecessarily long periods of time. Trends show that when increasing negativity frustrates seasoned elected officials, they sometimes choose early retirement. When increasing negativity frustrates citizens, they stop showing up at "public comment" time and disengage from the democratic process.

Civil Discourse Study Committee Conducts In-Depth Interviews:

After attending government meetings held in public and observing the conduct of both elected officials and citizens, we conducted in-depth interviews with all 5 Board of Supervisors, starting with the Chair of the Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors is the primary legislative government body that oversees all business in the County of San Luis Obispo, which is divided into 5 Supervisorial Districts. First, we asked each Supervisor about the level of civility and civil discourse they were seeing and experiencing with other elected officials, staff, and citizens. Next, we asked them what resources or techniques they personally used to improve civil discourse. Then, we asked them how the League of Women Voters might help them once we completed our Study of Civil Discourse. Last but not least, we ask them to rate themselves on their on level of civility and civil discourse.

All 5 Supervisors admitted that there was room for improvement on their part. They also unanimously agreed that it is very frustrating when a minority of the same citizens show up repeatedly with the intent to malign, disrupt, or distract elected officials instead of helping further the Democratic process by offering facts, opinions, and evidence that could be used to move the decision process forward for issues that are on that day's Agenda. One Supervisor observed that the physical layout of the meeting room is not the most friendly or democratic because elected officials are on an elevated dais with a fair distance between them and citizens who are on a lower level when speaking during "Public Comment Time".

Some Supervisors admitted their frustration with words like "negotiate," "compromise," "common ground," and "consensus" that are now seen as dirty words and signs of weakness – making the decision process and finding solutions extremely difficult. Other Supervisors admitted that they had no intention of compromising their own party's agenda: they were not going to go along just to get along. Collegiality was not going to be a word in their vocabulary. All Supervisors were very aware of not only the constraints of the First Amendment of the US Constitution but the constraints of California's Brown Act as well. They warned that newly elected officials would need to develop a "thick skin" if they were to survive. If they wanted to remain healthy, they would have to learn to shed the negativity that would surely come their way by words, actions, emails, and phone calls. The more we learned about the challenges facing our elected officials, the more we wondered why they chose to stay in this profession. We also wondered if this increased negativity would deter millennials to run for office in our County.

Chair Identifies Online and Hard Copy Resources for Civil Discourse Study:

Before Sharon Kimball was approved as Chair of the Civil Discourse Study, she was already identifying online resources, books, and references about Civil Discourse in various media. Sharon's ongoing interest in Civil Discourse peaked in 2009 as the economic downturn elevated divisiveness across the country, but she has always been interested in methods to improve communication – especially in the political arena. As Chair of the Civil Discourse Study, Sharon searched for League chapters in California and across the US who might be engaged in conversations about Civility and/or Civil Discourse. She wondered if other local governments in California were promoting Civil Discourse. What were city, county, and state governments in other states doing to promote Civil Discourse? Were other organizations and institutions equally concerned about Civil Discourse? The Civil Discourse Chair identified 50 different online research questions for discovering resources helpful in finding Definitions of and Best Practices for Civil Discourse.

CD-Study Committee Begins Preparation of Workbook-Kit:

During the month of December, the Civil Discourse Study Committee continued to examine field research results as well as ongoing online evidence and examples of Civil Discourse in local government meetings and in local media. The Civil Discourse Chair made copies of key field research results, key online resources, and key hard copy resources so members of the Civil Discourse Study Committee could help determine what resources would be most effective to share in upcoming Unit Meetings. Between regular meetings, members posed questions and held discussions electronically pertaining to materials that might contribute to a Definition and Best Practices of Civil Discourse. As our collective knowledge increased, the Chair asked each member to compose a Definition and Best Practices for Civil Discourse.

In January, the Chair of Civil Discourse and the Civil Discourse Study Committee members collaborated, shared, organized, and prioritized all research and resources that might contribute to a Definition and Best Practices of Civil Discourse in addition to deciding on the primary questions that might be asked in February when Unit Meetings would begin: 1.) Reviewed what other Leagues were saying about Civil Discourse 2.) Examined how other local governments were promoting Civil Discourse 3.) Resourced what other non-profit organizations and professional organizations modeled or set as standards, best practices, and guidelines for the best practices of Civil Discourse. After an extensive review and discussion of all grassroots research results, online resources, and hard copy resources, the Chair and Civil Discourse Study Committee decided that before Consensus Unit Meetings could take place, we needed to schedule several Unit Meetings during the month of February for the purpose of “brainstorming” with members to find out their own perception of Civil Discourse within the scope of local government between elected officials, their staff, and citizens.

Chair Asks Board for Help on Number and Locations of Unit Meetings

At the **Friday, January 3rd, 2014** Board of Directors Meeting, the Chair, Sharon Kimball, asked the Board of Directors to help her and her Committee in determining how many meetings and locations would best maximize opportunities for members to participate in Brainstorming Unit Meetings in February and Consensus Unit Meetings in March. Because our LWV of SLOCO membership is so spread out across San Luis Obispo County, the Board recommended that we have 4 Unit Meetings in February and 4 Unit Meetings in March, in 4 different locations so members living in different sections of SLO County would be able to find a location convenient to them.

Chair Schedules February and March Unit Meetings

Following the January 3rd, 2014 Board Meeting, Chair Sharon Kimball scheduled the dates, times, and locations for 4 February “Brainstorming” Unit Meetings and 4 March Consensus Unit Meetings. Through electronic meetings, the Chair and members of the Civil Discourse Study Committee collaborated on the schedule and assignments for the Civil Discourse Unit Meeting Team comprised of a Discussion Leader, Resource Person, and Recorder. Prior to the February “Brainstorming” Unit Meetings, the Chair called a meeting to discuss the Unit Meeting Workbook-Kit and determine which resources should not only be made available for the February Unit Meetings but whether or not the core resources were too overwhelming and should be modified and/or narrowed down prior to the Consensus Meetings. The CD Committee also discussed how to tabulate consensus results and design a consensus sheet or matrix for such tabulations.

Four “Brainstorming” Unit Meetings Held in February

In February, Brainstorming Consensus Unit Meetings were scheduled and held on Wednesday, February 5, 2014 at Atascadero City Hall, from 1:30 to 3:30 pm; Saturday, February 8th, 2014 at Morro Bay, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm, in Dorn’s Gallery Room; Tuesday, February 11th, 2014 in San Luis Obispo, from 1:30 to 3:30 pm in the home of member Elinor Kogan on 1034 Yarrow Court; and on Thursday, February 13, 2014 at the P.G. & E. Energy Education Center’s Conference Room in south San Luis Obispo. A team of Discussion Leaders, Resource people, and Recorders were on hand to conduct and record the results of each of the 4 Brainstorming Unit Meetings.

Four Consensus Unit Meetings Held in March

In March, Consensus Unit Meetings were scheduled and held on Wednesday, March 5th, 2014 at Atascadero City Hall from 1:30 to 3:30 pm; on Tuesday, March 11th, 2014 at Dorn’s Restaurant in Morro Bay from 1:00 to 3:00 pm; on Thursday, March 13th, 2014 in the Conference Room of the P.G. & E. Energy Education Center from 1:30 to 3:30 pm in south San Luis Obispo; and on Saturday, March 22, 2014 at the home of Elinor Kogan on 1034 Yarrow Court in San Luis Obispo from 1:30 to 3:30 pm.

CD Study Committee Discusses Consensus in Electronic Context

In the context of League precedent, Consensus Unit Meetings have always been held face-to-face for the purpose of a meaningful exchange of ideas among participants, so the League can arrive at an informed and meaningful agreement on the issue or process under discussion. In the course of holding the Unit Meetings, members who would not be able to attend Unit Meetings wanted to know if they could participate online or access core information by mail, including the Consensus Sheets used to tabulate the final outcome for determining a final Definition and Best Practices of Civil Discourse. Because of League protocol and the emphasis on person-to-person debate, discussion, and dialogue, the Civil Discourse Study determined that only members who participated in person could be counted in the final tabulation for Consensus, although we would be happy to share our core content with them and would continue to provide both core content and tabulation results in **The Voter** and online at the LWV of SLOCO web site. We did not think electronic consensus would fit the League standard or model for determining consensus.

CD Committee Meets to Discuss and Tabulate Consensus Results

On Tuesday, March 24, 2014, the Civil Discourse Study Committee met to discuss the results of the 8 Unit Meetings, examine the tabulated results from the 4 recent March Consensus Unit Meetings, and determine a final Definition and Best Practices for Civil Discourse. The Committee also worked on the final wording for an update to the Position on Government as recommended by the members and supported and encouraged by participants in all 8 meetings. Dottie Conner, one of our 10 fifty year members, offered her wisdom and expertise as to the proper location for any updates.

CD Committee Finalizes Recommendations for Update to Government Position

On Friday, April 4th, 2014, the Civil Discourse Study Committee recommended and received approval from the Board of Directors to add the words **Civil Discourse** in the 1st sentence of the opening statement in the 1st paragraph of the Position Statement on Government after the word **promote** to read as follows ...

“The League supports policies and actions that achieve a responsible and representative government, **promote Civil Discourse**, increased citizen understanding of finances and greater involvement of the public and staff in budget making and long range financial planning and provides for the periodic evaluation of locally levied taxes, licenses, and fees.”

The Civil Discourse Study Committee further recommended and received approval from the Board of Directors **to add a 5th Strategic Goal about Civil Discourse** under our existing Position on Government to read as follows:

5. Promotes Civil Discourse, which is mutually respectful, courteous, constructive, and orderly Communication, through action and education available to all governmental bodies, staff, and citizens for the purpose of improving the public policy making decision process.

On May 2nd, 2014, Sharon Kimball, Chair of the Civil Discourse Study submitted her Final Report on The Civil Discourse Study for inclusion in the Annual Kit, so members could review the Board recommended update to the Government Position prior to the Annual June Meeting.

On Saturday, June 14, 2014, during the Annual Meeting, a quorum of the LWV of SLOCO Membership approved the updated Government Position.

CD Study Committee's Recommendations for Action

At the June 6th Board Meeting, pending approval of the update to our Government Position by a quorum of the membership, the Civil Discourse Study Committee recommended the following future actions to promote Civil Discourse based on results from the 8 Unit Meetings held in February and March of 2014:

1. Establish a Civil Discourse Action Team.
2. Produce a brochure on Civil Discourse outlining the Best Practices of Civil Discourse within the context of local government that could be distributed and utilized by local elected officials, their staff, and citizens.
3. Design a Civil Discourse Workshop.
4. Reestablish an Observer Corps to observe and report on Civil Discourse.
5. Develop a Civil Discourse Curriculum.
6. Incorporate “Civil Discourse” as a tagline on all official LWV of SLOCO stationery.

In Conclusion

In our Study of Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County, we were in search of a Definition, Best Practices, and Position on Civil Discourse. We incorporated our definition in Goal #5 of our updated Government Position. We incorporated our “Best Practices” of Civil Discourse in the middle panel of our published brochure on Civil Discourse. Our consensus on a Position resulted in an update to our existing Position on Government as opposed to a new Position. The participants in our Unit and Consensus meetings agreed that in the context of local government, specifically meetings held in public, it is the person in the Leadership position who has the best opportunity to promote Civil Discourse as the preferred communication process used by other elected officials, staff, and citizens (in public comment time), with the benefit of moving the decision-making process forward on that day’s Agenda. So, our top 10 “Best Practices” of Civil Discourse provide suggestions to the “Presiding Chair” who sets the tone of meetings held in public.

10 Best Practices of Chair of Meetings:

1. Leads by example and encourages others to do the same. Shows respect to all in actions, body language, and speech.
2. Encourages open spirited debates on all facts by contending parties.
3. Provides adequate time for public comment.
4. Actively listens. Thanks speakers and, where appropriate, acknowledges public input.
5. Speaks truthfully without distortion.
6. Never comments on the motivation of a speaker.
7. Limits discussion to merits of issues. Explains the rationale and evidence to support opinions and conclusions.
8. Promotes rules of Civil Discourse publicly. Gives a brief reminder before meetings.
9. Encourages respectful speech as the most effective form of communication: e.g., “Please consider carefully before making potentially slanderous, profane, or personal remarks.”
10. Regularly reviews and updates rules; city and county codes; codes of ethics; Robert’s Rules of Order; California’s Brown Act; and pledges.

Actions for League to Support Civil Discourse:

Our League members and Study Committee reached consensus on the following actions to raise awareness and build support for our campaign to increase Civil Discourse in San Luis Obispo County Government: Voter Service activities (candidate forums and pros and cons forums); Civil Discourse Brochures; Civil Discourse Buttons; Civil Discourse Stickers; Civil Discourse bumper stickers; Civil Discourse presentations; attending government meetings (Observer Corps-Ambassador Corps); Civil Discourse Workshops; education (Civil Discourse Curriculum in schools); Civil Discourse Badges (Girl and Boy Scouts); Civil Discourse Training Sessions open to elected officials and citizens; and adding a tagline to LWV of SLOCO stationery that includes “civil discourse.” Our League has established a Civil Discourse Task Force with 18 members and growing, as well as a Board Position with Director of Civil Discourse as the Portfolio. We are currently in the process of partnering with the National Institute for Civil Discourse and Ted Celeste to offer a future ½ day Regional Training Workshop for elected officials in the 25 communities on our lovely Central Coast of California. We look forward to making Democracy work through Civil Discourse, one elected official, one staff member, and one citizen at a time.

List of Core League and Community Members Participating in The Civil Discourse Study

1. Cindy Marie Absey
2. Rev. Charlie Archibald
3. Mary Beth Armstrong
4. Marguerite Bader
5. Alice Bunker
6. Dottie Conner
7. Pati Dale
8. Ann Havlik
9. Kathy Henderson
10. Shelly Higginbotham
11. Marilee Hyman
12. Trudy Jarratt
13. Sharon Kimball
14. Elinor Kogan
15. Janet Kourakis
16. John Lindsey
17. Marcia Lombardi
18. Susie Nash
19. Joan O'Keefe
20. Emily Penfield
21. Carrie Pardo
22. Gail Robinette
23. Jim Scoggin
24. Pat Shutt
25. Vallerie Steenson
26. Vera Wallen
27. Sharon Whitney
28. Sharon Winslow
29. Barbara Weymann
30. Ray Weymann

Note: Number of Total Participants in Civil Discourse Study: 28 members participating in January Program Meeting; 30 participating in Brainstorming-Consensus Unit Meetings; 39 Elected Officials participating in interviews and surveys; 36 members participating in Annual Meeting.

Civility in America by the numbers: (Source: Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate in partnership with KRC Research www.webershandwick.com)

INCIVILITY EXPERIENCES

- – 17.1 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility in a 7-day week, or 2.4 times per day
 - – 8.5 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility **in real life/offline** in a week
 - – 8.6 = average number of times Americans encounter incivility **online** in a week
- Of Americans surveyed...
- – 50% have ended a friendship because another person was uncivil
 - – 48% have defriended, blocked or hidden someone online because of uncivil behavior
 - – 43% expect to experience incivility in the next 24 hours
 - – 26% have quit a job because it was an uncivil workplace
 - – 24% have personally experienced cyber bullying (threefold increase since 2011)
 - – 19% of parents have transferred their child to a different school because of incivility at school

INCIVILITY PERCEPTIONS

Of Americans surveyed...

- – 95% believe we have a civility problem in America
- – 87% think it is uncivil to be on a phone while talking with someone else in person
- – 81% think uncivil behavior is leading to an increase in violence
- – 80% agree that the level of civility won't improve until our government leaders act more civilly
- – 71% believe civility is worse compared to a few years ago
- – 70% think the Internet encourages uncivil behavior
- – 70% think that incivility has risen to crisis levels
- – 34% who expect civility to worsen blame Twitter

According to Pam Jenkins, President of Powell Tate, "Incivility is turning into a national epidemic. when seven out of ten citizens report that incivility has reached crisis proportions in this country, you know that we need new solutions and greater leadership accountability. We may have reached the tipping point."

Americans assign negative tone and high levels of incivility to several groups. The government is considered the most uncivil aspect of American life (69%) followed by the American public (63%) and the media (63%). Half or more of Americans rate Congressional Republicans, the 2012 presidential election, online news article comments, schools, large American corporations, Congressional Democrats, YouTube and Facebook as uncivil. In contrast, friends, family and dinner table conversation are perceived as the most civil.

CIVILITY IN AMERICA 2013: (Source: Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate in partnership with KRC Research www.webershandwick.com)

Checklist of Observable Examples of Civil Discourse
And
Checklist of Observable Examples of Uncivil Discourse

A, Observable Examples of the Presence of Civil Discourse:

- ☐ At the beginning of all public meetings, the elected official in charge states and reviews the established Guidelines, Ethics, Rules of Conduct, Official Protocol, and/or any other Procedural Information with all participants – elected officials, staff, and citizens – prior to the official start of the meeting.
- ☐ Active listening
- ☐ Non-verbal Attentiveness
- ☐ Collaborating to find solutions
- ☐ Working to find common ground
- ☐ Negotiating
- ☐ Speaking in a respectful tone of voice
- ☐ Paraphrasing and repeating back what participants have said
- ☐ Exchange of ideas
- ☐ Courtesy
- ☐ Respectful of other participants' feelings
- ☐ Agreeing to disagree if unable to find common ground or compromise
- ☐ Establishing eye contact (Positive in the American Cultural Context)
- ☐ Talking one person at a time
- ☐ Including all stakeholders or affected parties
- ☐ Presenting all sides of the issue and/or all options or solutions
- ☐ Presenting the facts
- ☐ Presenting supporting evidence
- ☐ Reasoned, orderly debate
- ☐ Constructive debate
- ☐ Moderation – striving for the middle ground
- ☐ Refraining from monopolizing the dialogue, conversation, or debate
- ☐ Giving all participants an equal opportunity to express their views

B. Observable Examples of the Absence of Civil Discourse:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filibustering | <input type="checkbox"/> Manipulating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Monopolizing | <input type="checkbox"/> Intimidating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violence | <input type="checkbox"/> Profiling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interrupting | <input type="checkbox"/> Stereotyping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swearing | <input type="checkbox"/> Insulting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heckling | <input type="checkbox"/> Slandering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sarcasm | <input type="checkbox"/> Distortion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Argumentative | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inciting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excluding | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exaggeration | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extremes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> False Information | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespectful of others' feelings | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal inattentiveness or rudeness | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disrespectful tone of voice | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invective | |



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Mailing Address: PO Box 4210, San Luis Obispo CA 93403

TEL (805) 782-4040 EMAIL info@lwvslo.org WEBSITE www.lwvslo.org

Date:

Dear:

OFFICERS

President

Marilee Hyman

*1st Vice-President/
Program & Development*
Sharon Kimball

*2nd Vice-President/
Voter Services*
Vera Wallen

Secretary
Vallerie Steenson

Treasurer
Mary Beth Armstrong

DIRECTORS

Member Services
Pati Dale

Government Director
Sharon Whitney

Communications Director
Alice Bunker

The League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County would like to know about your best practices for achieving civil discourse. What do you do to secure civil discourse as you work with your governing body?

The LWV local position on Government encourages efforts to improve communications between the citizen and government agencies. Toward that end, we hope to elicit your help in discovering the rules, guidelines, and/or protocols that you and other elected government officials currently use to promote civil discourse in regular meetings among elected officials and with the public.

In our yearlong study on Civil Discourse, we intend to develop a definition of the term “civil discourse” as it applies to local government, explore current methods employed by the County Board of Supervisors and seven City Councils, and develop a position on “Best Practices” for ensuring Civil Discourse as practiced by these bodies. We would appreciate any information you can send that will help us.

A reply by November 15th will help facilitate our study. Enclosed is a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience.

We thank you in advance for taking time out of your busy schedule to help us on this important yearlong mission. If you have any questions regarding our study, please do not hesitate to leave a message on our League answering machine at (805) 782-4040 for the Chair of our Civil Discourse Committee or mail us at LWV of SLO County, P.O. Box 4210, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403.

We hope that San Luis Obispo County will not only be known as the “Happy Place” but as the place that also practices the best “Civil Discourse” in local government.

Warm regards,

Marilee Hyman, President

The League of Women Voters.... ninety years ago it was for women. Now it's for everybody!



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA®

Democracy in Dialogue Workshop Presentation • May 16, 2015

Given at the LWVC Convention in San Diego, CA

Presenters: Collaborative Team of LWV Members from San Diego, North County San Diego, San Luis Obispo County and LWV State of Washington

Resource Guide • Democracy in Dialogue

Relevant Books

- ◆ ***Big Sort, The*** - Bill Bishop
- ◆ ***Bowling Alone*** - Robert D. Putnam
- ◆ ***Breaking Roberts Rule: The new way to run your meeting, build consensus and get results*** – Larry Susskind, Jeffrey Cruikshank
- ◆ ***Collaboration Soup*** – Delia Horwitz and Paula Vigneault¹
- ◆ ***Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*** – Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler
- ◆ ***Deliberative Democracy Handbook, The: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*** – Editors John Gastil and Peter Levin
- ◆ ***Ecology of Democracy, The*** – David Mathews
- ◆ ***Facilitators' Guide to Participatory Decision-Making*** – Sam Kaner
- ◆ ***Make Peace with Anyone: Breakthrough Strategies to Quickly End Any Conflict, Feud, or Estrangement*** – David J. Lieberman, PhD.
- ◆ ***Managing Public Disputes: A practical guide for government, business and citizen groups*** – Susan Carpenter, WJD Kennedy
- ◆ ***Next Form of Democracy, The*** – Matt Leighninger
- ◆ ***Public Participation Handbook, The: Making Better Decisions Through Citizen Involvement*** – James L. Creighton
- ◆ ***Reclaiming Civility in the Public Square • 10 Rules That Work*** - Cassandra Dahnke and Tomas Spath with Donna Bowling
- ◆ ***Righteous Mind, The*** – Jonathan Haidt
- ◆ ***Rude Democracy*** - Susan Herbst
- ◆ ***Second Civil War, The: How Extreme Partisanship Has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America*** – Ronald Brownstein
- ◆ ***Thank You for Arguing*** - Jay Heinrichs
- ◆ ***Third Side, The: Why we fight and how we can stop*** – William Ury
- ◆ ***Thrive: Finding Happiness the Blue Zones Way (National Geographic)*** – Dan Buettner
- ◆ ***Toward A Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*** – Sharon Crowley
- ◆ ***True Enough*** - Farhad Manjoo
- ◆ ***unSpun*** - Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (founders of FactCheck.org)
- ◆ ***World Café, The: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*** – Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community

Relevant Websites

Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning And Engagement (CIRCLE):

<http://www.civicyouth.org/>

Center for Public Deliberation: <http://www.cpd.colostate.edu/what.html#1>

Citizens University (Eric Liu's TED talk on Citizen Power):

<http://www.citizenuniversity.us/programs>

Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership (at Pepperdine University):

<http://publicpolicy.pepperdine.edu/davenport-institute/>

Deliberative Democracy Consortium: <http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/index.php>

Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, Kansas State University:

<http://icdd.k-state.edu/who-we-are>

Institute for Civility in Government: <http://www.instituteforcivility.org/>

Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy international peace-building via inclusive civic and gov-to-gov diplomacy and engagement: <http://www.imtd.org>

International Association for Public Participation: <http://iap2usa.org/>

The Kettering Foundation: <http://kettering.org>

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation: <http://ncdd.org>

National Institute for Civil Discourse: <http://nicd.arizona.edu/>

National Issues Forums: <http://www.nifi.org>

Teaching Tolerance Organization: www.tolerance.org

Workshop Resources

Civic Role

Beyond Business as Usual: Leaders of California's Civic Organizations Seek New Ways to Engage the Public in Local Governance • A report from Public Agenda by John Immerwahr, Carolin Hagelskamp, Christopher DiStasi and Jeremy Hess, 2013.

Citizens Building Communities: The ABCs of Public Dialogue • Matt Leighninger, Author, Shirley Tabata Ponomareff, Editor, Pub #2070, LWV Education Fund, 2005.

Citizens Engagement in Policymaking and the Design of Public Services • Research Paper No. 1 2011-12, Parliament of Australia*

Civil Discourse in the Classroom • Kate Shuster, Number 37, Spring 2010, Teaching Tolerance Organization.

Civility in America 2013 • An Annual Report by Weber Shandwick and Powell Tate, in partnership with KRC Research.

Civility Guidelines • Attorney Civility Task Force, State Bar of California, July 20, 2007

Civil Political Discourse In A Democracy: The Contribution of Psychology • David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, ***Peace & Conflict Journal of Peace Psychology***, 6(4), 291-317.

Civility Toolbox • The State Bar of California, San Francisco, CA, July 17, 2009

Democracy's Challenge: Reclaiming the public's role • Tony Wharton, National Issues Forums Institute, ISBN: 0-945639-35-X, 2006. To order: <https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guide/democracys-challenge>

Developing Democracy's Hubs: Building Local Capacity for Deliberative Practice through Passionate Impartiality • Martin Carcasson, ***Connections*** – The Kettering Foundation's Annual Newsletter, pages 9-11, 2010.

Doing Democracy: How a Network of Grassroots Organizations Is Strengthening Community, Building Capacity, and Shaping a New Kind of Civic Education • Scott London, A Report for The Kettering Foundation, ISBN: 978-0-923993-32-0, 2010.

Extraordinary Results in Ordinary Communities: Transforming Towns and Growing People • Vaughn L. Grisham, A Study for the Kettering Foundation, ISBN: 978-0-923993-34-4, 2010.

Five Myths about Civil Discourse, The • Hans-Herbert Koegler, Professor & Chair, UNF Department of Philosophy, The Florida Times-Union, October 26, 2012, www.jacksonville.com

Four-Legged Stool, The • John L. McKnight, A Study for the Kettering Foundation, ISBN: 978-0-923993-50-4, 2013.

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Planning for Stronger Local Democracy: A Field Guide for Local Officials • Matt Leighninger and Bonnie C. Mann, National League of Cities Center for Research & Innovation, undated.

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Resource Guide for Public Engagement • National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation, 2010.

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Framing

A Guidebook for Issue Framing • Julie Pratt, Kettering Foundation, rev. April 2009.

Beyond Debate: Impacts of Deliberative Issue Framing on Group Dialogue and Problem Solving – A Research Brief from Public Agenda • Alison Kadlec and Will Friedman, Public Agenda, Occasional Paper, No. 4, 2009.

Creating an Issue Guide graphic • Kettering Foundation, 2014-15.

Developing Materials for Public Deliberation: Draft for Discussion • Brad Rourke, The Kettering Foundation

Naming and Framing Local Issues for Public Deliberation • National Issues Forums, 2010.

Tackling Wicked Problems Through Deliberative Engagement • Martin Carcasson, Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation, from unnamed publication, October 2013.

What Kind of Talk Does Democracy Need? (brochure) • Martin Carcasson, Center for Public Deliberation, Colorado State University.

Writing for the Public • Julie Pratt, Kettering Foundation, undated.

Facilitating

Facilitator Training Workbook • Kettering Foundation's Centers for Public Training – 2014-15 Cohort, authored by Lori Britt, Director, Institute for Constructive Advocacy and Dialogue and 4C: Campus Community Civic Collaborative, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807.

Part 3: The Basics of Facilitating from CPD Student Course Handbook – Spring 2014 • Martin Carcasson, Center for Public Deliberation, Colorado State University.

Paul Ekman, researcher on micro-expressions and emotional intelligence, at:
<http://www.paulekman.com/micro-expressions/> **Note:** His book with H.H. Dalai Lama is outstanding, if you are interested in developmental psychology.

We Have to Choose: Democracy and Deliberative Politics • A Kettering Foundation Report, March 2008.

* These titles above reflect the global interest in Civil Discourse and Civic Engagement. There are many more International References – including England, Ireland, and Scotland.

- 1 From Sharon Kimball, San Luis Obispo: I invited the authors of the book entitled, **Collaboration Soup**, who were residents of San Luis Obispo County, to help me with a “Workshop on Collaboration” where we trained participants in “collaboration techniques” that they applied afterward in roundtable Hot Topic discussions. We opened the workshop to the community. We had a great turnout. The room was set up with round tables. There was a “Hot Topic” on each table. Attendees could choose the table where they wanted to have a “crucial conversation” and “collaborate.” Before the “Collaboration Workshop” began, the authors established some rules – the most important one being the “Circle of Silence.” Typical Hot Topics included: Climate Change, Mental Health, Campaign Finances, and so on. It was a great success. Attendees used what they learned in upcoming potentially divisive meetings and told us how these “collaboration techniques” actually worked!

Workshop Connections

<p>“A New Take on Pros/Cons” presented by: Members of San Diego LWV http://www.lwvsandiego.org/</p> <p>Amanda Berg amandalberg@gmail.com</p> <p>Jeanne Brown jhisten.brown@gmail.com</p> <p>Nancy Phung nancy@ivcpr.com</p> <p>Jane Susskind jane@ivcpr.com</p>	<p>“Countywide Civility in SLO” presented by: Members of San Luis Obispo LWV www.slo.ca.lwvnet.org/</p> <p>Marilee Hyman marileehyman@gmail.com</p> <p>Sharon Kimball sharon.e.kimball@gmail.com</p> <p>Emily Penfield emilypenfield@yahoo.com</p>
<p>“Creating Democracy Hubs” presented by: Members of North County San Diego LWV http://lwvncsd.org/</p> <p>Martha Cox marthacox@roadrunner.com</p> <p>Kimber Quinney kquinney@csusm.edu</p> <p>Mary Thompson thompsmg@roadrunner.com</p>	<p>“WA LWV Dialogue” presented by: Members of Washington State LWV http://www.lwvwa.org/</p> <p>Mary Dumas mary@dumas-assoc.com</p> <p>Ann Murphy annmurphy@lwvwa@gmail.com</p>



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA®

Democracy in Dialogue Workshop Presentation • May 16, 2015

Given at the LWVC Convention in San Diego, CA

Presenters: Collaborative Team of LWV Members from San Diego, North County San Diego, San Luis Obispo County and LWV State of Washington

Suggestions for Engaging and Empowering



☒ **Take stock of your community and your League:**

- What are the issues in your community? Is a community survey needed? What's the voter turnout rate in your community?
- Is your League currently engaging with a diversity of voices in your community on any of these issues?
- What obstacles prevent you from doing so?
- Do you have a nucleus of members willing to take on projects of civic engagement?
- Do you need training to accomplish this?

☒ **Do your homework.** Familiarize yourself with the broad scope of civil discourse, community engagement, and deliberative dialogue resources that currently exist. As you become familiar with the wide range of engagement methods available, what approach seems to be the best fit for your situation? Are you looking to provide a "one and done" informative presentation? Are you looking to provide a series of forums that are incremental, resulting in informed dialogue and deliberation? Are you looking to incorporate information, dialogue and deliberation into an initiative building exercise that produces findings for later community use?

☒ **Look for and reach out to potential collaborative partners:**

- Who are the "voices of political analysis" in your community (who gets interviewed during election time by local newspapers or TV)? Seek them out. Make them aware of LWV resources. Look for ways to collaborate – invite them to be headliners at a League forum to draw an audience.
- Mindfully seek out a variety of diverse community groups as potential partners. Ask *"How can the work we are doing align with and support the work you are doing? We are natural collaborators."*
- Encourage your League's group participation in non-League-focused community events, such as holiday food drives, Earth Fairs, etc. to expand your community presence.
- Explore relationships with your local academic institutions. Western Assn. of Schools & Colleges accreditation has a community engagement component. Look for ways that students can support League's work as part of their service learning. Example: Engage student interns at election time for research and online social media posting or observers at government meetings.



- Partner with your local libraries. They are eager participants with a focused mission in community engagement and have low-cost or no-charge facilities for public meetings.
 - Partner with businesses willing to co-host gatherings or provide food/drink to reach a diversity of individuals in your communities in unexpected ways.
- ☑ **Reach out to your elected officials:**
- Encourage the support of your community/county elected officials through capacity-building for them to understand the power of true community engagement.
 - Collaboratively partner with them in seeking ways to fund community engagement activities. Will they champion grant applications, for instance?
- ☑ **Develop a media presence in your community:**
- Create an action team focused on developing a positive relationship with your community/county media. Write letters to the editor or articles of community interest. Incorporate the work of student interns to expand your media presence.
- ☑ **Move toward meaningful change:**
- Be prepared to help citizens understand and exercise their civic power through engagement efforts like Participatory Budgeting and calls for government transparency, accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness.
 - As League, consider the *Deliberative Issue Frame* (501c3) versus *Persuasive Issue Frame* (501c4). As citizens engage on issues, will your League take action?

Excerpt from **Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson** by Robert A. Caro, (p. 953), “To keep the two sides negotiating – to keep the 1957 civil rights bill from degenerating into the open hostility and bitterness on the Senate floor in which so many previous civil rights bills had died – **he had to persuade them to conduct the debate in an atmosphere of outward friendliness and respect, or at least civility**, so for some days after Part III had been disposed of, the opening scene of the Senate each noon hour featured the Majority Leader as Emily Post. In statements written by Reedy and delivered during his opening remarks each day, **Johnson encouraged the Senate to mind its manners, saying on one day that the Senate was on trial, that the world was watching it, and that he was confident that the Senate would do itself proud, that his colleagues would “continue debate as reasonable men.”** On another day, he said he was happy to see his confidence justified. “**Never before have I seen in the Senate a debate which has contributed so much to understanding. In that sense, I think the debate has been one of the finest that the Senate has ever had.**” Day after day, he repeated his plea that they **be fair and open-minded, open to reason and compromise, and praised them for being so reasonable and open-minded thus far** – which of course made it harder for them to act otherwise, and kept them, as much as possible, on their best behavior.”

**First Rollout Dates for Civil Discourse Presentations
And the
Adoption of the Civility and Civil Discourse Resolution**

Previous Presentation Dates and Locations:

- **Saturday-05/16/15** "Creating Common Ground for Civility"-LWVC Convention
- **Tuesday-07/07/15** CD presentation to **San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors**
- **Friday - 07/10/15** CD presentation to **Meeting of Mayors in Grover Beach**
- **Wednesday-07/15/15** CD presentation on **Dave Congalton Radio Show-KVEC**

Future Confirmed Presentation Dates and Locations:

- **Thursday-08/20/15** CD presentation to **Paso Basin Advisory Committee.**
- **Thursday-08/20/15** CD presentation to **LAFCO (PBAC Report-Hearing).**
- **Tuesday-08/25/15** CD presentation to **Arroyo Grande City Council.**
- **Wednesday-08/26/15** CD presentation to **Oceano CSD.**
- **Thursday-08/27/15** CD presentation to **Good Morning SLO -Chamber of Commerce.**
- **Tuesday-09/01/15** CD presentation to **San Luis Obispo City Council.**
- **Tuesday-09/15/15** CD presentation to **Pismo Beach City Council.**
- **Monday-09/21/15** CD presentation to **Grover Beach City Council.**
- **Tuesday-10/27/15** CD presentation to **Atascadero City Council.**
- **Thursday-11/05/15** CD presentation to **Los Osos CSD.**
- **Tuesday-11/10/15** CD presentation to **Morro Bay City Council.**

The Civil Discourse Study – 05/16/15 – LWVC Convention Workshop Script

INTRODUCTION: “Hi! I’m Sharon Kimball, 1st Vice President of the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County, Chair of the local Civil Discourse Study ... and I LOVE ROBUST, FRANK, FACT DRIVEN CIVIL DISCOURSE ... ON ALL THE TOUGH ISSUES.

Opening Slide #1: (“How to Direct A Local Study prepared by Ellen Taylor-LWVC)

If your League has NEVER done a local study or if, like us, it’s been more than 10 years since you’ve done a local study, then, I highly recommend, “How to Direct A Local Study” prepared by Ellen Taylor and financed by the State League’s Education Fund. (... and Yes, I downloaded all 43 pages and followed EVERY suggestion.)

I’d love to share the unabridged version of our yearlong study – so many resources and compelling stories – but time won’t allow – so here’s the Executive Summary ...

Slide #2: (Scope of Study Issue #1: What is Civil Discourse-Definition
Issue #2: New or Updated position?
Compile Best Practices)

WE WERE FACED WITH 2 KEY ISSUES:

FIRST: What IS Civil Discourse? (It’s not like there were many examples!)

SECOND: At the end of our study, would we be ADDING a new position?

OR ...

UPDATING an existing Position?

AND FINALLY ...

What ARE the Best Practices of Civil Discourse?

Slide #3: (Where do we begin?)

WHAT IF ...

We could find RESOURCES for these KEY ISSUES in our own COUNTY?

...

while RAISING AWARENESS and BUILDING SUPPORT for CIVIL DISCOURSE along the way?

Slide #4: (Engage County Participation:
• 5 Board of Supervisors)

OUR GRASSROOTS STRATEGY?

Engage COUNTY Participation ... from the very beginning.

We asked each of the 5 Supervisors, “What are YOU doing to promote CIVIL DISCOURSE with other elected officials, staff, and citizens?”

Slide #5: (Engage County Participation:
• 7 City Mayors
• 5 Board of Supervisors)

Then, we reached out to our 7-CITY MAYORS, and asked them, “What are YOU doing to PROMOTE CIVIL DISCOURSE with other elected officials, staff, and citizens?”

Slide #6: (Engage County Participation:

- 28 City Council Members
- 7 City Mayors
- 5 Board of Supervisors)

We posed the same question to our 28 City Council Members.

One elected official at a time ... we were gathering information about Civil Discourse and Best Practices ... with our COUNTY GOVERNMENT ... while RAISING AWARENESS and ENGAGING COUNTY PARTICIPATION ... at the same time.

Slide # 7: (Engage County Participation:

- 4 Countywide Citizen Meetings
- 28 City Council Members
- 7 City Mayors
- 5 Board of Supervisors)

By the time we reached out to our CITIZENS in 4 COUNTYWIDE MEETINGS, we had piles and piles of 3-ring binders filled with COMPELLING INFORMATION about CIVIL DISCOURSE.

Slide #8: (Engage County Participation:

- 6 LWV Consensus Meetings
- 4 Countywide Citizens Meetings
- 28 City Council Members
- 7 City Mayors
- 5 Board of Supervisors)

After reaching CONSENSUS on a DEFINITION and BEST PRACTICES of CIVIL DISCOURSE, on JUNE 14, 2014

a quorum of our members approved the UPDATED GOVERNMENT POSITION ... allowing us to ADD these 3 CRITICAL WORDS ... **PROMOTE CIVIL DISCOURSE.**

Slide #9: (Engage County Participation:

- Local Media
- 6 LWV Consensus Meetings
- 4 Countywide Citizen Meetings
- 28 City Council Members
- 7 City Mayors
- 5 Board of Supervisors)

Now that we had a Position, we were ready to reach out to the LOCAL MEDIA and tell our story.

Slide #10: (Updated Government Position:

The League supports policies and actions that achieve a responsive and representative government, PROMOTE CIVIL DISCOURSE,

It only took 12 MONTHS and OVER 35 MEETINGS to ADD these 3 CRITICAL WORDS! In addition we added the following goal that reads ...

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

IN THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

____ 7th ____ day ____ July _____, 2015

PRESENT: Supervisors

ABSENT:

RESOLUTION NO. _____

CIVILITY AND CIVIL DISCOURSE ACCORD

The following resolution is hereby offered and read:

WHEREAS, We, the San Luis Obispo Members of the Board of Supervisors, in order to ensure **civility** and **civil discourse** in all of our meetings, pledge our commitment to the following **best practices of civility** and **civil discourse**:

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **Respect** the right of all people to hold different opinions in all our meetings;

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **avoid rhetoric intended to humiliate, malign, or question the motivation** of those whose opinions are different from ours in all our meetings;

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **strive to understand** differing perspectives in all our meetings;

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **choose words carefully** in all our meetings;

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **speak truthfully** without accusation, and avoid distortion in all our meetings;

WHEREAS, We pledge our commitment to **speak out against violence, prejudice, and incivility** in all their forms whenever and wherever they occur in all our meetings.

WHEREAS, We commit ourselves to building a civil political community in which each person is respected and spirited public and political debate is aimed at the betterment of San Luis Obispo County and its people and not the disparagement of those with whom we disagree.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Members of the Board of Supervisors and the community of the County of San Luis Obispo, State of California, shall promote the use of and adherence to the principles of **civility** and **civil discourse** in conducting business with elected officials, staff, and citizens:

Upon motion of Supervisor _____, seconded by Supervisor _____, and on the following roll call vote, to-wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAINING:

The foregoing resolution is hereby adopted:

Chairperson of the Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

BY: _____

Deputy Clerk

The San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors'
CIVILITY and CIVIL DISCOURSE ACCORD
July 7, 2015

We, the San Luis Obispo Members of the Board of Supervisors, in order to ensure **civility** and **civil discourse** in all of our meetings, pledge our commitment to the following **best practices of civility** and **civil discourse**:

- **Respect** the right of all people to hold different opinions;
- **Avoid rhetoric intended to humiliate, malign, or question the motivation** of those whose opinions are different from ours;
- **Strive to understand** differing perspectives;
- **Choose words carefully**;
- **Speak truthfully** without accusation, and avoid distortion;
- **Speak out against violence, prejudice, and incivility** in all their forms whenever and wherever they occur.

We commit ourselves to building a civil political community in which each person is respected and spirited public and political debate is aimed at the betterment of San Luis Obispo County and its people and not the disparagement of those with whom we disagree.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Members of the Board of Supervisors and the community of San Luis Obispo County shall promote the use of and adherence to the principles of **civility** and **civil discourse** in conducting business with elected officials, staff, and citizens.

Passed and adopted this _____ day of _____ 2015

Approved this _____ day of _____ 2015

Chairperson _____

Clerk _____

Vote: Ayes: _____ Noes _____

Script for Adoption of Board of Supervisors
Civility and Civil Discourse Accord
July 7, 2015

Talking Points for Civil Discourse Rollout to Board of Supervisors:

- The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization whose members encourage informed and active participation in government, strive to increase the understanding of major public policy issues, and work to influence public policy through education and advocacy. For 95 years, members of The League of Women Voters have been dedicated to the education of voters, the study and advocacy of issues, and the promotion of good citizenship. As a nonpartisan organization, the League takes pride in the fact that they **neither support nor oppose candidates or political parties** but, instead, **work on vital issues of concern to the public.**
- In June of 2014, our League resolved to study and promote civil discourse through action and education.
- The League believes in representative government and the individual liberties established in the US Constitution. **Making Democracy work has always been a primary goal of all Leagues in America.**
- The League believes that Democracy thrives when we ...
 1. ... can discuss differing viewpoints amicably;
 2. ... listen and speak respectfully;
 3. ... strive to understand and be understood;
 4. ... keep an open mind;
 5. ... focus on facts and evidence NOT personalities or parties.
- We believe that all members of the Board of Supervisors and citizens here today want to see San Luis Obispo County thrive now and in the future.
- We would like to thank the Chair and members of the Board of Supervisors for your encouragement and support in adopting a **“Civility and Civil Discourse Accord”** for both current and future members of the Board of Supervisors, their staff, citizens, and our countywide community.
- Adoption of the **“Civility and Civil Discourse Accord”** marks the first step on our new journey together to promote civility and civil discourse countywide.
- The League will be present at public meetings countywide both as Ambassadors and as Observers.
- We would now like to distribute our Civil Discourse pamphlets, buttons, and stickers that were made possible through the support of special donors and a Grant from the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors.
- We hope you will wear these buttons as reminders of Civil Discourse while conducting public business.
- We invite everyone here today to join us in promoting Civil Discourse.

Civil Discourse Presentation - Talking Points
Good Morning SLO – Chamber of Commerce
Thursday, August 27, 2015

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that neither supports nor opposes candidates or political parties but, instead, works on vital issues of concern to the public. The LWV of San Luis Obispo County ...

- Encourages informed and active participation in government;
- Strives to increase the understanding of major public policy issues;
- Works to influence public policy through education and advocacy.

After completing a yearlong countywide **Study of Civil Discourse** in June of 2014, the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County resolved to promote civil discourse through action and education because **making Democracy work has always been a primary goal of all Leagues in America** and the LWV of San Luis Obispo County believes that **Democracy thrives when we ...**

- Can discuss differing viewpoints amicably
- Listen and speak respectfully
- Strive to understand and be understood
- Keep an open mind
- Focus on facts and evidence NOT personalities or parties

In addition to updating our Government Position to include the promotion and advocacy of Civil Discourse, the LWV of San Luis Obispo County has also created a permanent position on our League Board of Directors – Director of Civil Discourse – so we can continue to promote and advocate on behalf of Civil Discourse by ...

- Establishing a Civil Discourse Task Force to carry out our action initiatives
- Publishing a Civil Discourse Brochure outlining the Best Practices of Civil Discourse
- Designing Civil Discourse Buttons and Stickers to raise awareness and build support
- Encouraging government bodies to adopt a “Civility and Civil Discourse Resolution”
- Creating a Civil Discourse Observer Corps to observe public meetings
- Establishing a Civil Discourse Ambassador Corps to speak at public meetings
- Partnering with the NICD* to create Civil Discourse Training Workshops for Elected Officials
- Partnering with schools on establishing a Civil Discourse Curriculum
- Creating a Civil Discourse Speaker’s Bureau to reach out to the Community

***NICD** – The vision of the **National Institute for Civil Discourse** is to “advance the understanding and practice of civil discourse to strengthen democratic traditions and improve governance and public decision-making”. (www.nicd.arizona.edu) The LWV of San Luis Obispo County is currently working with Ted Celeste who works with legislators nationwide in order to help them identify areas of change that provide incentives for constructive engagement and improvements to the political environment.

Learn to disagree
without being disagreeable.
Use courtesy and respect in words and deeds.
Talk to each other
instead of at each other.



Be Respectful

Listening is as important as
expressing your own views.
Listening is not the same as agreeing.
Recognize opposing positions.



Listen with an Open Mind

Reach across the aisle.
Seek shared values.
Challenge stereotypes.
Ask pertinent questions.
Identify and focus on problems.
Articulate, argue and defend issues.
Be open to compromise.



Find Common Ground

Viewpoints on Civil Discourse

"Come together, in open dialogue, to discuss
the great issues of our day, learn from each other,
and work to move our society forward."

UC President Janet Napolitano

"Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability
to cope with conflict by peaceful means."

Ronald Reagan

"Honest disagreement is often a
good sign of progress."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Differences of opinion lead to inquiry,
and inquiry to truth."

Thomas Jefferson



We invite you to join the League of Women Voters to promote
Civil Discourse as an essential way of life for a thriving democracy.

LWVSLO.org

Brochure produced by LWV SLOCO Civil Discourse Committee

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Steve and Marian Saldo

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New and Improved
Methods for

Civil Discourse



in the
Public Arena

"With malice towards none,
with charity for all"

*Abraham
Lincoln*

**Effective
Ideas & Solutions** EASY TO USE

"Good governance is a clash of ideas and values in the
political arena. We need to listen to our opponent's
arguments and look for areas of common interest
...if we are to govern this country effectively."

Brint Milward, National Institute for Civil Discourse

-AND SO IT BEGINS...



"...And so it begins..."

What is Civil Discourse?

It is courteous, constructive communication
characterized by mutual respect, fairness,
and attentive listening.

Why Does Civility Matter?

Civil Discourse promotes informed discussion of public
issues essential for government bodies and citizens
to make good decisions.

Improving Civility is Easy

Shine a bright light on civility!
Call on others to do the same.



Find points of
disagreement and their
solutions amicably.

Be kind to one another,
even if you disagree
on stuff.

10 Simple Rules for Civil Discourse



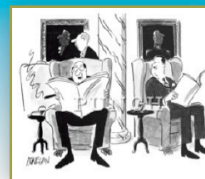
A Presiding Chairperson sets the tone of a meeting...

- 1) Leads by example and encourages others to do the same. Shows respect to all in actions, body language, and speech.
- 2) Encourages open spirited debates on all facts by contending parties.
- 3) Provides adequate time for public comment.
- 4) Actively listens. Thanks speakers and, where appropriate, acknowledges public input.
- 5) Speaks truthfully without distortion.
- 6) Never comments on the motivation of a speaker.
- 7) Limits discussion to merits of issues. Explains the rationale and evidence to support opinions and conclusions.
- 8) Promotes rules publicly. Gives a brief reminder before meetings.
- 9) Enforces the rules. Allows no disruptions of a meeting. Allows no slanderous, profane or negative personal remarks.
- 10) Regularly reviews/updates rules (city/county codes, codes of ethics, Robert's Rules, Brown Act, pledges).

...and ensures fair treatment with Rules of Order and Decorum



"Civil Discourse makes a difference for
the good so we can have an environment
that calls people to government service.
We owe it to our democracy and to every
young person who will inherit it."
J. Mullen Jr., Allegheny College



"Good God winifred! How long has civility cost nothing?"

Civility: Not Just Politeness

It means be tolerant. Listen, don't interrupt. Refrain from
sarcasm. Be respectful. Speak in modulated tones. Stick
to the issue. Recognize there are two sides. Avoid labels.

Tip> To prevent shutting down conversation, choose civil
words. Civility increases your chance of being heard.

Civility vs. Free Speech

You may have the right to say what you want but there is
no need to say it in an inflammatory or insulting manner.

"We can only exercise our right to free speech insofar
as we feel safe and respected in doing so, and this in
turn requires that people treat each other with civility."
J. Mullen Jr., The Importance of Civility in Public Discourse

Tip> Attack the message, not the messenger

INTIMIDATE	CONTRADICT	ARGUE	REFUTE	DEBATE
Violence, threats, personal attacks, name calling	"I'm right! You're wrong!"	Using half-truths or lies	Construc- tively point out errors of opposition	Using reason and evidence

The Spectrum of
Bad, Better, and Best Ways to Communicate