

# The Civil Discourse Study

Before you can take Action ...

You need a Position ...

Before you can have a Position ...

You need a Study ...

## January 12, 2013 ...

- Members – tired of “Uncivil Discourse.”
- Members – eager for “Civil Discourse.”
- Felt the Democratic process was broken.
- Wanted to build support for Civil Discourse.
- Reactions to the 2012 Presidential Election.
- We don't want to see this in local government.

# So Many Questions: 1<sup>st</sup> Study Meeting

- Why study Civil Discourse?
- How do we study Civil Discourse?
- What is our Scope?
- What is our Strategy?
- How do we envision our Position?
- How do we structure Unit Meetings?
- What is our goal for Consensus?

# Why study Civil Discourse?

- So we could promote Civil Discourse.
- We did not have a Position on Civil Discourse.
- There was no precedent for Concurrence.

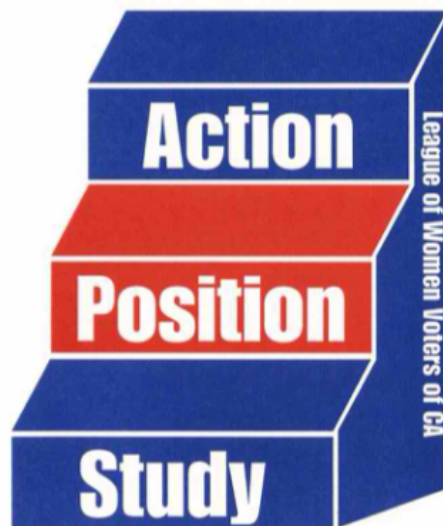
# How do we even do a Local Study?

- We had not done a local study in 10 years.
- CD was not an Issue with clear pros and cons.
- We were were taking the “road less traveled.”
- Did the League have any helpful resources?

# Thank You Ellen Taylor!

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## **How to Direct A Local Study** **League of Women Voters** **of California Education Fund**



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# Where would we put our Position?

- Are we adding a New Position?
- Are we updating an Existing Position?
- What Position are we Updating?

# **Our First Consensus!**

- ... Updating an Existing Position.
- ... Updating our Government Position.



# Scope for Civil Discourse Study

- Expand our Government Position
- Include Definition and Emphasis on CD
- Develop Definition as it applies to Government
- Ask SLO County Board of Supervisors about CD
- Ask 7 City Councils about promoting CD
- Develop Best Practices for government bodies

# Phase I: Civil Discourse Study

- Send Letter to 39 elected officials in County\*
- How do they currently promote CD?
- Request hard copies of procedures (not available on government web sites).
- Our Study Committee reviewed 7 web sites.

# Phase II: Civil Discourse Study

- Searched League online web sites
- Searched City, County, State online web sites
- Searched Organizations online web sites
- Searched US Government web sites

# **Phase III: Unit Meetings**

- Held 4 Brainstorming Unit Meetings
- Held 4 Consensus Unit Meetings

# What is Civil Discourse?

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

# The Best Practices of Civil Discourse

- Leadership
- Leadership
- Leadership

# 10 Best Practices of Civil Discourse

- Lead by example: show respect to all in actions, body language, and speech.
- Encourage open spirited debates on all facts by contending parties.
- Provide adequate time for public comment.
- Listen actively. Thank speakers and, where appropriate, acknowledge public input.
- Speak truthfully without distortion.

# 10 Best Practices of Civil Discourse

- Never comment on motivation of speaker.
- Limit discussion to merits of issues. Explain the rationale and evidence to support opinions and conclusions.
- Promote rules publicly. Give brief reminder before meetings.
- Enforce the rules. Allow no disruptions, no slanderous, profane, or negative personal remarks.



# 10 Best Practices of Civil Discourse

- Regularly review/update rules (City/County Codes, Codes of Ethics, Robert's Rules of Order, The Brown Act, and Pledges).

# Updated Government Position

- The League supports policies and actions that achieve a responsible and representative government, **promote civil discourse**, increase citizen understanding ... supports policies and actions which promote the effective operation of citizen advisory commissions, committees, task forces, and other advisory bodies.

# Updated Government Position

**Goal #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.

# **Post-Study Actions**

- **Formed CD Civil Discourse Task Force**
- **Recruited 18 members and growing**
- **Received Grant from Board of Supervisors**
- **Designed and printed 10,000 CD Brochures**
- **Designed and ordered CD buttons and stickers**
- **07/07 Board of Supervisors adopt CD Resolution**
- **07/10 CD Presentation to Meeting of Mayors**
- **Formed CD Ambassadors and Observer Corps**
- **Partner with NICD- Train Elected Officials in CD**

# **Future CD Action Team Goals**

- Add Civil Discourse tagline to all stationery.
- Present CD Accord to City Councils
- Develop Civil Discourse Workshops
- Develop Civil Discourse badge for Scouts
- Develop Civil Discourse Speaker's Bureau
- Develop Civil Discourse Curriculum

# Why does Civil Discourse Matter?

- Civil Discourse promotes informed discussion of public issues essential for government bodies and citizens to make good decisions.
- Citizens and elected officials have a right to express their free speech but in an environment that makes them feel safe and respected.
- We need to be the change we want to see if we are to attract young people to government service and civic engagement.

# **WE are the message ...**

- In our nonpartisan Candidate Forums.
- In our Pros and Cons Forums.
- In our advocacy efforts for Voter's Rights.
- In our advocacy efforts on Issues.
- In everything we do to make Democracy work.

# Now, We can be the Messenger

- On how to hold Crucial Conversations
- On how to have Constructive Debates.
- On how to reach across the aisle.
- On how to disagree without being disagreeable.
- On how to look for areas of common interest.
- On how to reach better decisions by being more respectful, open-minded, diverse, and inclusive.



# **Civil Discourse Outreach Campaign**

Our President, Director of Communications, and Director of Civil Discourse built a positive relationship with the Media in our Media Outreach Campaign to raise the consciousness and build support for Civil Discourse.