

NEXTGEN ROUNDTABLE: CIVIL DISCOURSE LAB

BUILDING STUDENTS' DELIBERATIVE SKILLS



For much of the 21st century, Americans have struggled to navigate a polarized political world—one that has suffered from a lack of thoughtful communication, respect, and deliberation across differences. Even in the calmest of times, civil discourse requires knowledge, skills, commitments, and attitudes that Americans must actively learn and develop.

As longtime partners, **Close Up** and the **Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University (DDL)** have seen the power of bringing young people together to obtain this knowledge and these skills. We are continuing this important work by offering our multi-day **Civil Discourse Lab** to students looking to build their deliberative skills. As part of Close Up's **NextGen Roundtable** series of programming focused on deliberation, this is an opportunity for youth to participate in and reflect on a variety of discursive activities and foster vital competencies and dispositions.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?

By focusing on the knowledge, skills, commitments, and attitudes of deliberative democracy, the NextGen Roundtable: Civil Discourse Lab responds to and counteracts the present political climate—in which we largely fail to communicate across differences or even acknowledge that alternative perspectives have value.

The skills of deliberative democracy broadly align with the **skills of communication**—skills which are necessary for finding success in higher education, the workplace, and community life. Young people who undergo this training have shown a greater likelihood to vote, to engage in substantive discussion with their peers, and to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In this intensive, four-day deliberation program, high school students will investigate a range of views and proposals around a pressing policy issue. They will review balanced resources to develop their knowledge of the issue and a comprehensive understanding of differing viewpoints. Students will consider ideas from varied political and academic backgrounds, encounter elected officials and public policy experts who hold a range of views, and reflect on the importance of open-mindedness and hearing from multiple perspectives in a democracy. Through a series of workshops, deliberations, and an expert panel, students will deepen their understanding of government and policymaking, develop empathy for people who hold very different views, and think critically about their own beliefs, ideas, and assumptions.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This customizable high school program can be offered as part of a community-building orientation, for a specific course, or for a particular grade level. When possible, we will partner schools together to increase the range of perspectives and backgrounds present for deliberation. *Please contact us if you are interested in customizing a program for your school or to learn more about middle school opportunities.*

COST

The tuition is approximately \$1,500 per student and includes educational materials, hotel accommodations (two to a room), meals, and evening activities. *Final program cost will be determined upon finalizing dates (and optional transportation package).*

DATES

The program will be offered on the following dates:

- August 26-29, 2025
- January 20-23, 2026
- April 7-10, 2026

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SAMPLE SCHEDULE

DAY 1

Foundations of Civil Discourse

Students will consider why people disagree by examining a series of values and tensions that animate public discourse in the United States. Students will consider what they tend to prioritize when making decisions and begin to compare these values to the broader political landscape.

Arrive in Washington, D.C.

Lunch & Orientation

Foundations of Civil Discourse Workshop

Jefferson, FDR, and MLK Memorials Visit: Examine examples of leaders and eras that have influenced America's core political values.

Dinner & Social Activity

DAY 2

Building Deliberative Skills

Students will build a deeper understanding of a pressing policy issue, engage with a panel of policymakers and panelists, and deliberate with each other towards consensus around that issue.

Breakfast

Policy Inquiry Workshop: Work together to review a broad range of policy proposals, understand the issues at hand, and generate questions for the expert panel.

Expert Panel: Hear from a panel representing a range of opinions and expertise on the policy issue.

Lunch

Capitol Hill Visit: Attend a committee hearing or meet with your representative or their staff.

Dinner

White House & Freedom Plaza or Night Monument Tour

DAY 3

Navigating Challenging Conversations

Students will build the skills needed to facilitate civil discourse with a range of participants, practice those skills, and consider different models of dialogue and deliberation that they could implement in their schools and communities.

Breakfast

Deliberation Workshop: Building on the knowledge gained from experts across the political spectrum, work to find consensus around a series of policy recommendations for the issue.

Facilitation Training: Take part in facilitation training to learn how to serve as Civic Ambassadors and encourage and contribute to civil discourse in the broader school and local community.

Lunch

Facilitation Training Part 2

National Museum of African American History and Culture Visit

Dinner

Night Monument Tour

DAY 4

Program Reflection

Students will reflect on the program and consider ways to implement what they have learned to make an impact in their community.

Breakfast

Reflection Workshop

Smithsonian Museum Visit & Lunch

Depart for Home



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