
PRINCIPLES & PROGRAM

PRINCIPLES

To guide Better Angels and for consideration by all, we offer these principles for depolarization.

For Citizens

- Try to understand the other side's point of view, even if we don't agree with it.
- Engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
- Support political ideas and leaders that bring us together rather than divide us.

For Civic groups and Faith Communities

- When feasible and to the degree consistent with your mission, seek opportunities to work for depolarization.
- In any activity aimed at depolarization, seek to ensure that liberals and conservatives in roughly equal numbers conceive, design, fund, organize, lead, and evaluate the activity.

For Scholars

- When feasible and to the degree consistent with your vocation, seek opportunities to study depolarization and make recommendations for the future.
- In any collaborative intellectual work on polarization, seek to ensure that liberals and conservatives in roughly equal numbers conceive, design, fund, organize, lead, and evaluate the work.

For Media

- Know and respect the difference between reporting and editorializing.
- Know and respect the difference between news and entertainment.
- On TV, radio, podcast, and other programs, don't have guests who only repeat talking points for their side.
- On TV, radio, podcast, and other programs, invite guests with opposing views who'll talk with rather than at or about each other.
- On shows you host and in commentaries you offer, engage your opponents' best arguments, not their worst or most extreme.
- In conversations you lead involving disagreements, push for accurate rather than exaggerated, imagined, or feigned disagreement.
- In reporting or commenting on news, favor substance over superficiality.
- When you inadvertently say or write something factually incorrect, publicly correct it.
- When a guest on your program says something factually incorrect, give them an opportunity publicly to correct it.

For Politicians

- Treat opponents with respect.
- Seek opportunities to acknowledge shared values with opponents.
- Seek opportunities to find political common ground with opponents.
- Engage your opponents' best arguments.
- Decline to engage in personal attacks.
- Do not presume that your opponents are acting in bad faith.
- When taking a stance on an issue, show voters your rationale and evidence, cite your sources, and present your argument in a way that permits fact-checking.
- Advocate for principles of depolarization as one of your main priorities.

PROGRAM

For Better Angels, we advise consideration of this program for depolarization.

Overview

Better Angels works in four areas: community mobilization, media, scholarship, and politics and public policy.

Mobilization

1. Better Angels continues and expands its program of community red-blue workshops, skills workshops, on-going Better Angels Alliances, training and support for Better Angels citizen- moderators and volunteer organizers, Better Angels Debates and other activities in high schools and on college campuses, working with diverse partner organizations to realize Better Angels principles, and holding monthly webinar meetings for Better Angels members.
2. Better Angels strives for a continually growing membership that reflects the country we seek to serve.
3. Better Angels continues to rely decisively for its success on a large and growing number of volunteer leaders from across the country, assisted by a small staff.

Media

1. Better Angels Media (BAM) produces podcasts, videos, columns, issue forums, and grass-roots reports exemplifying Better Angels media principles.
2. Self-selected red-and-blue pairs of Better Angels members write and submit jointly-authored letters to the editor or op-eds in newspapers around the country on topics related to polarization, with a goal of at least 50 such letters or op-eds (about 3 per month) published by the end of 2019 and 150 (about 8 per month) by the end of 2020.
3. Several or more Better Angels leaders write regular columns related to polarization for outside publications.
4. Better Angels sponsors periodic awards for best work in the media related to depolarization, honoring bloggers, columnists, podcast hosts, reporters, TV and radio hosts, online and print editors, and others modeling Better Angels media principles.

Scholarship

1. Better Angels sponsors a Council on the Common Good – an independent, politically diverse group of respected scholars, public intellectuals, and civic and religious leaders who meet periodically and engage in on-going interdisciplinary deliberation, collaborative research, and publication to explore the nature and extent of American polarization, interact with civic groups working at ground level for depolarization, and offer recommendations for the future.
2. Better Angels identifies a group of respected scholars specializing in program evaluation to provide independent evaluation of Better Angels programs.
3. Better Angels creates a “Better Angels Scholars” Facebook page to attract and invite interaction among scholars supportive of Better Angels.

Politics & Policy

1. Better Angels disseminates its principles nationally to political leaders and organizations at all levels, seeking their support.
2. Self-selected red-and-blue pairs of elected officials are permitted or invited two-by-two to observe or participate in Better Angels workshops and other activities.
3. Delegations of Better Angels members organize nationally to hand-deliver a copy of Better Angels principles to every member of Congress so as to discuss these principles with them and seek their public endorsement of them.
4. Better Angels holds periodic conferences in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere for candidates, prospective candidates, and elected officials interested in Better Angels principles.
5. Periodically one red and one blue public official are invited to participate together in a Better Angels podcast or other media forum.

6. Self-selected red-and-blue pairs of elected officials are permitted or invited to join Better Angels two-by-two and endorse Better Angels principles.
7. Each year one red and one blue public official is invited to address the Better Angels Convention and answer delegates' questions on the topic of Better Angels principles.
8. Periodically a national working group recommends ways for Better Angels publicly to recognize members of Congress from both parties demonstrating fidelity to Better Angels principles.



This document was unanimously adopted at the 2018 Better Angels Founding Convention by 150 delegates — half red and half blue — representing more than 3,100 dues-paying members.