

Braver Angels Debate and Civil Discourse Program Overview

Who is Braver Angels?

Braver Angels (formerly Better Angels) is a 501c3 nonprofit devoted to helping America overcome political polarization.

If feelings about our political adversaries can be represented on a spectrum, our objective is to move Americans from hatred or disdain to respect and appreciation. All of our programming works to ensure equal representation of “reds” and “blues,” and to help people engage with those on the other side of the aisle.

Our work is rooted in grassroots organizing. Our grassroots volunteers (supported by a small staff) leverage Braver Angels programs and unique organizing structure to impact community life and American institutions.

Our approach is guided by the Braver Angels Pledge:

- As individuals, we try to understand the other side’s point of view, even if we don’t agree with it.
- In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
- In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.

To learn more please visit www.braverangels.org.

Purpose of the Debate and Civil Discourse Program

Braver Angels' Debate and Civil Discourse Program is one of the core programs of the organization. This program aims to improve the political and democratic culture of our country, by encouraging thoughtful and respectful civil discourse. We help channel Americans’ moral impulse in politics into productive engagement (political discourse that builds character and relationships) rather than destructive engagement (disdainful and polarized political discourse, which damages relationships and character).

Our impact model focuses on spreading this more productive form of political dialogue to three target constituencies:

1. **Civically engaged citizens** – Americans of all stripes that want to engage in thoughtful political dialogue and are dissatisfied with echo chambers and twitter mobs
2. **Students** (both high school and college) – students represent the rising generation of American politics; cultivating positive political culture among students lays a foundation for a less polarized future
3. **Political Actors** including political **advocacy groups, candidates** and **staffers** – these thought leaders and decision makers have an outsized impact on political culture and policy outcomes

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

--Abraham Lincoln

Connection to Broader Braver Angels Goals

Braver Angels' work over the next year is focused on three big-picture goals:

1. **Fight Better** – develop and spread a positive culture of political disagreement in America
2. **Bind up the Nation's Wounds** – help our country process and heal in the aftermath of what is likely to be an incredibly divisive and polarized election in Nov 2020, regardless of who wins
3. **Build a House United** – recruit grassroots community leaders and organizers to spread the values and tools of Braver Angels throughout the country

The Debate and Civil Discourse Program touches all of these goals, but is most directly tied to goal 1.

Short-term Debate and Civil Discourse Program Goals

By the end of July 2020, our team will have achieved the following short term goals:

1. Expand capacity for our debate program to meet the growing demand for online debates
 - a. Hire **1 intern** to support the online debate program
 - b. Hire **5 paid part time debate chairs** to chair these debates
2. Develop an outreach and engagement strategy (to secure) school partners
 - a. Recruit and train **5 teachers/professors** who will host at least one online debate in their classrooms during the Fall 2020 semester
3. Develop a strategy to secure advocacy group partners for BA debates
 - a. Organize **1 debate per month** cohosted and keynoted by at least 2 advocacy organizations (one red, one blue) starting in August 2020

Program Specifics

- Currently Braver Angels hosts weekly online debates for the general public for 2 hours every Thursday evening.
- Debates involve a resolution (specific framing of debate topic) and then alternating speeches for and against the resolution.
- Debates are chaired by BA staff and volunteers, using modified Roberts' Rules; any participant is allowed to speak or ask questions, though neither is required to attend.
- Debates do not include a vote; the goal is to discuss, listen, and learn, not "win."

How to Get Involved

If you are interested in participating in the Braver Angels Debate and Civil Discourse program as a participant or volunteer there are several opportunities to be involved:

- **Become a volunteer** with our debate team. Volunteers contribute in a variety of ways including helping pick debate topics, recruiting speakers, and/or moderating debates.
- **Partner with us to organize a debate.** Educators, civic associations, advocacy groups, and political candidates have all partnered with Braver Angels to host debates for their communities.
- **Attend a debate and participate** through listening, asking questions, or giving a speech yourself.

To learn more or sign up for any of these opportunities email volunteer debate coordinator, Silas Kulkarni at silaskulkarni@gmail.com. Please allow up to 4 days for response time, based on volunteer capacity.