



# 2020 CITIZEN'S GUIDE 2.0

PRACTICAL INFORMATION TO PROMOTE  
ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AMONG ELECTED  
OFFICIALS

## **2020 Citizen's Guide to Ethical Leadership Among Elected Officials 2.0**

### **Overview**

In December of 2019, LeaderEthics-Wisconsin published the 2020 Citizen's Guide to Ethical Leadership Among Elected Officials. The purpose was to provide practical suggestions for the average citizen to raise public awareness regarding the importance of ethical leadership. At the time the document was released, it was listed as "1.0"...recognizing that the political environment is evolving and that future updates were likely.

In October of 2020, LeaderEthics-Wisconsin announced the 2.0 supplement. The links to both the 1.0 version and the 2.0 supplement are below. We suggest the reader initially review 1.0 since it contains relevant background information. And because the 2020 national election may have some altering impacts, look for the 3.0 update in 2021.

## Resources for Ethical Leadership

In the 1.0 version of the 2020 Citizen's Guide, we listed eight organizations that should be bookmarked as resources for promoting ethical leadership. Each of these organizations take differing approaches. However, their overriding goal is the same...to promote integrity in the American Democracy. In the 2.0 supplement, we are highlighting three of those organizations because of our increased use and positive involvement.

**Bipartisan Policy Center** - Provides articles and information about bipartisanship actions. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org> The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way many organizations are conducting their business. The Bipartisan Policy Center is no exception. Since the spring of 2020, they have been offering high quality virtual seminars at no cost to the viewer. For example, a recent seminar focused on election integrity and it featured the Secretary of State in Colorado (Democrat) and the Secretary of State in Ohio (Republican). They shared their extensive experience with voting by mail. They shared their respective process and guidelines to ensure voter identification is thoroughly verified and the ballots are properly recorded. The incidence of voter fraud in their states is virtually nonexistent. They also concluded that, in their experience, voting by mail does not favor either political party, *and* it has resulted in a higher level of voter participation. Given the swirling misinformation about voting by mail, this kind of programming is both informative and timely. And it is but one example of the high-quality programs they offer. The Bipartisan Policy Center also provides information on middle ground positions for a variety of policy issues, providing a pathway for better collaborative legislative solutions. They warrant a bookmark on your electronic device.

**Braver Angels** - Promotes civility between liberal and conservative views. <https://braverangels.org/>. The Braver Angels organization (formerly known as Better Angels) was founded by David Blankenhorn, Bill Doherty, and David Lapp shortly after the 2016 presidential election. The organization's name was inspired by Lincoln's plea for national unity at the close of his first inaugural address. They quickly grew to become a national organization with a presence in most states. Braver Angels promotes a format for civil discourse among people who are declared conservative or liberal voters. The goal is to help people develop a better understanding of

the tools of social discourse, allowing them to gain new insight into the different, yet legitimate, perspectives others may hold.

Braver Angels has a Wisconsin presence. They have held a number of sessions in communities around the state including three in La Crosse. In recognition of the intensity of the November 2020 elections, they have launched an initiative called *With Malice Towards None*. Essentially they are focusing their efforts on establishing a civil dialog among citizens regardless of the outcome of the election. Braver Angels, by their very nature, puts their emphasis on conversations between citizens in local communities. At LeaderEthics-Wisconsin, we believe this is where the change process begins...in local communities. We encourage members and followers to check them out.

**The Fulcrum** - Promotes strategies to reverse dysfunctions in the American democracy. <https://thefulcrum.us/> The Fulcrum is a nonprofit/nonpartisan digital news organization focused on efforts to reverse dysfunctions in the American democracy. Through original stories, news gathered from other sources and The Fulcrum opinion forum, their efforts are focused on money in politics, redistricting, voting rights, election access, government ethics, civic engagement and the imbalance of powers. In 2020, The Fulcrum initiated the Democracy Madness program. Similar to the March Madness College Basketball tournament, The Fulcrum developed an issue-based competition using feedback from members to determine the issue with the greatest amount of public support. In the 2020 competition, the issue of Ranked Choice Voting surfaced as the highest priority. The Fulcrum uses a variety of approaches to call attention to the problem areas in the American democracy. Their determination and persistence to build support for change is commendable.

### **What About Social Media News?**

The growth and expansion of internet technology, particularly the increased use of social media has led to a dramatic increase in the availability of news. It has also led to the expanded development of a host of quasi media sources with a variety of biases. There are various sources that show the relative bias from media organizations. And there are a number of fact-checking sources as well. At LeaderEthics-Wisconsin, we believe two exemplary sources for checking media bias are **AllSides** and **Media Bias/**

**Fact Check.** It should be stated that both sites clearly state that all media has some bias. We recommend members and supporters to bookmark these two sites.

**AllSides** <https://www.allsides.com>

AllSides provides media bias ratings for over 800 media outlets and writers, designed so consumers can easily identify different perspectives. Their ratings of media sites range from liberal to conservative. They also cover some stories simultaneously from the liberal-moderate-conservative view...essentially providing a something like a “three dimensional perspective” of the story. They regularly ask subscribers to “rate their ratings” in order to ensure they are not inadvertently showing their own bias.

**MediaBias/FactCheck** <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com>

Media Bias/Fact Check (MBFC), founded in 2015, is an independent online media outlet. MBFC is dedicated to educating the public on media bias and deceptive news practices. Similar to AllSides, they rate over 3000 media sites worldwide ranging from liberal to conservative. However, they also identify and rate scientific, satire and conspiracy sites. Furthermore, they fact check the fact checkers.

### **What About Social Media Posts?**

Some social media posts make only a vague reference to a news source (or they are simply statements posted from an unidentifiable source) with the intent of enticing a “like” and a “share”. They may be designed to raise doubts about a particular candidate or political party. Or they may be designed to deepen the political polarization in this country. In any case, once you are drawn into liking or sharing, you are providing your data which will likely lead to future social media messages of a similar nature...a snowballing effect. In essence, someone is seeking to draw you into their digital data base so that they may potentially be able to manipulate your positions or actions.

There are several sources for quick identification of unreliable and disreputable postings in social media. LeaderEthics-Wisconsin likes the summary provided by **Ad Fontes Media**, “**Top Six Red Flags that a News Story is Unreliable, Disreputable and Embarrassing for You to Share**”.

It offers examples in lay terms that are easy to recognize. The following are taken from this summary:

- 1) The post explicitly states that it is telling the truth, and/or everyone else is lying to you*
- 2) The post contains short conclusory opinion statements*
- 3) The post is organized as a list of questions or hypotheses*
- 4) The post puts the burden on you to answer the questions*
- 5) The post asks you to prove a negative, which is often not possible*
- 6) The post suggests a plot by someone (e.g. the media or government) but does not exactly say what the plot is or provide any evidence for it.*

They point out if any of these conditions is present, it is likely the post has unreliable or disputable information. Remember, the social media business model is based upon enticing users to share your data. When in doubt, do nothing. If you find the post disturbing, block the source from future posts. And we recommend members and supporters to bookmark the Ad Fontes Media website for a periodic review.

### **Common Cause Education Fund - Disinformation Tip Line**

You can take action to remove disinformation. This 501c3 nonpartisan organization is an affiliate of Common Cause. They have developed a national network designed to identify, report and remove disinformation from social media...specifically posts intended to misinform voters or suppress voting. They offer simple steps to report suspected disinformation posts. Click here to check it out. <https://reportdisinfo.org/>

### **Sometimes Simple is Best**

While it may be helpful to have a quick reference guide for promoting ethical leadership, some of the best practices fall under the category of common sense.

- **Thank elected leaders who practice the core concepts of ethical leadership and let them know that people care about ethical leadership.** When we have had conversations with current and former elected officials, they often remark that they greatly appreciate positive comments from constituents. At LeaderEthics-Wisconsin, we often refer to the “heavy lifting” of ethical leadership. In other words, living up to the principles of ethical leadership is not easy. And often, the legislative issues are not black and white, rather they are extremely complex. Elected officials greatly appreciate hearing from constituents who value their efforts. Let them know.
- **Endorse & support bipartisan efforts.** These efforts often do not get the media coverage. Your support can help change that. For example, the First Step Act of 2018 was significant bipartisan legislation, approved by Congress and signed into law by President Trump. It reduced sentencing for non-violent offenders in federal prisons. Essentially, it was the first major federal criminal justice legislation in more than two decades. Yet most citizens are not aware of the First Step Act. And this Act was not the only recent bipartisan legislation accomplished at the state or national level. Why is that? News coverage seems to clearly focus on conflict and political divisiveness. What can you do? As a citizen, you can thank elected officials when they support bipartisan efforts such as this, and you can share your appreciation with others.
- **Support efforts to reach out to students.** These are the next generation leaders. Your support can help them to endure the resistance they may experience in their efforts. And we can benefit from learning of their perspectives regarding the political landscape. For example, students at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse formed a new student organization in 2019, *Students for Ethical Leadership within Government (SELG)*. Local citizens can reinforce such efforts by inviting SELG members to speak at a service club or church group. Promoting ethical leadership among elected officials should be viewed as a journey that is best taken with others...particularly those in the next generation.

### **Next Steps**

The 2020 national election is likely to produce a shift in the political landscape. LeaderEthics-Wisconsin will be pursuing dialog with members

regarding “next steps” beginning early in 2021. Look for updated information through the monthly editions of *The Ethics Report*. For more information about LeaderEthics-Wisconsin, check out our website at: [leaderethicswi.org](http://leaderethicswi.org). And if you like what we are doing, become a member. You can help make a difference.

Lee Rasch, Executive Director  
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