



GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
NEWS RELEASE

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**Study Shows That Polarization in Local Government Decreases
After Participation in Online Learning Program**

A randomized controlled trial with employees of local governments across the United States has shown that a short online learning program using concepts from moral psychology can help bridge ideological divides, allowing officials to better collaborate and solve problems.

CHICAGO, November 15, 2022 – Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) and The Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) have released a joint research study, [Bridging Political Divides in Local Government](#), recommending methods to enhance cooperation within local governments.

[Political polarity has been trickling down from the national level to local government organizations](#), which can complicate decision-making on consequential matters like budgeting. With this in mind GFOA and CDI have conducted a randomized controlled trial to test the effectiveness of CDI's online learning program, [Perspectives](#). The trial has shown that governments can leverage these practical tools to strengthen collaboration and repair fissures in local government.

Perspectives consists of eight 30-minute lessons that weave together psychological concepts with interactive scenarios. [Moral Foundations Theory](#) is a core concept used in the program to help learners understand the root of ideological differences so they can develop the mindset and skills to work with others, even in moments of contention. Compared with participants who did not complete the program, learners who completed Perspectives were able to:

- Better recognize the limits of their own knowledge
- Become more open to the viewpoints of others
- View people holding different beliefs with less animosity and more warmth
- Think about potentially divisive issues in more nuanced ways

(more)

“At the Constructive Dialogue Institute, we value research, and randomized controlled trials are the most reliable and valid form of scientific research,” said Mylien Duong, Ph.D., senior director of research at the Constructive Dialogue Institute. “These positive outcomes demonstrate that partisan division is not beyond repair. We have low-cost, accessible tools at our fingertips that can change how we think about politics, our differences, approaching community challenges, and engaging with each other in all aspects of life.”

Additionally, the report recommends five things that local officials can do, at little to no cost, to start a reversal of polarization in our society.

“Local leaders can make a shift now with minimal time and resources. By learning about their own moral foundations, recognizing the moral foundations in policy conflicts, and reframing goals and strategies, they can put our democracy back on track and better serve their communities,” said GFOA Executive Director Chris Morrill.

GFOA is recruiting local government teams and individuals to participate in the Perspectives program through their [Rethinking Budgeting](#) initiative which considers innovative ideas, new technologies, and updated practices to better meet the changing needs of communities.

To sign up and learn more, local government employees can visit www.gfoa.org/perspectives. Non-government communities and individuals looking to explore Perspectives can find more information at constructivedialogue.org. The online learning program is free to use for educators.

Download and read the full report [here](#).

About Government Finance Officers Association

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) represents over 22,000 public finance officers throughout the United States and Canada. With a mission to advance excellence in government finance, GFOA views its role as a resource, educator, facilitator, and advocate for both its members and the governments they serve. The organization provides best practice guidance, leadership, professional development, resources and tools, networking opportunities, award programs, and advisory services.

About the Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI)

Co-founded in 2017 by psychologist Jonathan Haidt and Caroline Mehl, the Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to equipping people with the mindset and skill set to engage in dialogue across differences. CDI seeks to help institutions, educators, and communities communicate across differences. To accomplish this goal, CDI translates the latest behavioral science research into educational resources that are evidence-based, practical, and scalable.