



BIPARTISAN LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

WORKING GROUP REPORT

allhealthpolicy.org



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Report

From May-June 2024 the Alliance convened a working group of 6 experts to inform the development of a new and innovative educational program for congressional staff. This report summarizes the discussions, key learnings, and outcomes of the three working group meetings.

Background Information

The Alliance for Health Policy has a rich 30+ year history of educating congressional and executive agency staff on health policy, the root of the nation's health care issues, and the trade-offs posed by various proposals for change.

When discussing health care and coverage, policy conversations often feel outdated, rooted in largely 20th-century policies. Today, we have the opportunity to take a fresh approach: what if we collaborated to find common ground on health coverage policy?

In 2025, the Alliance will launch the Bipartisan Learning Communities Program, a pioneering educational and relationship building program that aims to inspire collaboration, catalyze solutions, and cultivate future health policy leaders.

To inform the development of this program, the Alliance convened a working group of 6 experts with experience building the capacity of the congressional workforce through fellowship and cohort-based programs, educating policymakers on health policy issues, and implementing best practices in adult learning and human-centered design.

The goals of the working group were to:

1. Develop best practices for engaging congressional audiences.
2. Map available resources and case studies for supporting the program.
3. Identify challenges to creating bipartisan learning communities and proposed strategies for overcoming them.
4. Identify innovative approaches for community building/ engagement, adult learning, and human-centered design, and opportunities to apply them to the program.
5. Generate recommendations for a cohort learning model that will enable the Alliance to meet our goals for this program.



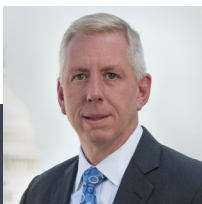
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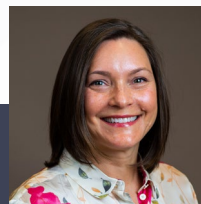
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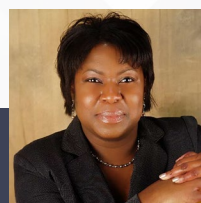
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MEETINGS SUMMARY

Overview

A description of the working group timeline and process can be found below.

Working Group Process		
Meeting #1 Monday, May 20	Meeting #2 Thursday, June 13	Meeting #3 Tuesday, June 25
Meeting Objectives		
Answer the question, “what does good look like?”	Answer the question, “how might we?”	Finalize recommendations and special presentation by Keith Yazmir

Meeting 1: Identifying Key Issues and Goals

The first meeting for the working group took place on May 20 from 1-3PM ET via Zoom. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce members to the planning process and each other, review key insights the Alliance gathered from conversations with other experts and through interviews with congressional staff, source case studies that provide an example of ‘what good looks like,’ and identify ideal attributes of an educational program based on these case studies.

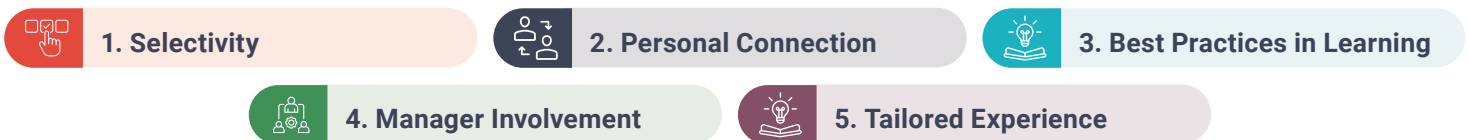
Case Studies: What Does Good Look Like?

The working group proposed the following programs as potential case studies to learn from in this planning process:

1. **AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowships Program:** A cohort-based program for PhD-level scientists and engineers placed in congressional offices, offering alumni active recruitment roles, access to career coaches, and professional development stipends.
2. **NAM Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellows Program:** Highly selective mid-career program with a comprehensive orientation. Features numerous high-quality presenters, providing extensive networking opportunities.
3. **Stennis Congressional Staff Fellows Program:** An elite program for congressional staff, focusing on problem-solving and institutional reform, featuring high-quality speakers.
4. **Congressional Research Service Briefing Model:** A series of mandatory in-person briefings requested by senior staffers, ranging from introductory to in-depth sessions to accommodate various levels of expertise.
5. **Collective Next’s Leader Lab:** A self-directed program designed to help rising leaders translate and internalize core competencies.
6. **Beneficent Design’s Corporate Leadership Development Program:** A program for participants nominated by managers, providing access to mentors, community-building activities, conferences, and ongoing support for personal and professional development.

Consistent themes from the discussions included the importance of collaborative learning to foster community, clear program objectives, evaluation and iteration, selectivity of speakers and participants, and supervisor or manager involvement.

Members then voted on the most important attributes, which Alliance staff synthesized into five categories:



Meeting 2: Exploring Potential Solutions

The second meeting for the working group took place on June 13 from 1-3PM ET via Zoom. This meeting focused on finalizing the top attributes of an educational program and incorporating these attributes into the new program through a phased approach. To ground the planning discussion, the Alliance also shared notable parameters and limitations, which included considerations on the Alliance's budget, staffing, and calendar/timing.

A Phased Approach: How Might We?

Alliance staff led members through brainstorming activities to generate recommendations for the program's five phases: preparation, kickoff, execution, readout, and iteration. Members proposed incorporating the following tactics and considerations into each of the five phases.

Phase 1

PREPARATION

Easy Application Process

Align on a straightforward application and/or nomination process with minimal barriers

Cohort Structure Meets Overall Goals

Identify clear cohort parameters (size, alumni role, diversity, etc.).

Strategic Recruitment

Recruitment starts through managers.

Reach out to top offices for nominations.

Incorporate measures like bipartisanship into criteria for participants.

Multi-step Preparation

Host information sessions to help individuals decide whether to apply or nominate.

Define and communicate the program's value proposition.

Tailored Guest Speakers

Develop a speakers bureau.

Phase 2

KICKOFF

Co-Create Vision for Success

Co-create goals through goal-setting exercises.

Set clear expectations for success and ground rules.

Demonstrate the value of the program/organization.

High Energy & Social Interactivity

Conduct a strong orientation program paired with a social kickoff dinner.

Identify and share communication modes.

Phase 3 EXECUTION

Creative Event Formats

Implement a self-led, tailored learning approach with a core curriculum, allowing participants to add relevant content.

Consider self-organized groups by topic for deep dives.

Map out learning objectives and align events accordingly.

Clear Plan for Evaluation and Assessment

Identify 3-5 success indicators upfront and plan to measure them.

Conduct mini-surveys after each event with a point person for follow-up.

Leverage Mentoring & Coaching

Incorporate nominators/Change Agents to show growth.

Blended Policy & Skills Curriculum

Incorporate professional/workforce development skills into policy education training.

Perform a needs assessment with senior health staffers to address transitions from junior to senior roles.

Offer interactive leadership workshops.

Consistent Social Events

Offer unique opportunities and experiences, including off-site trips.

Phase 4 READOUT

Co-Create the Evaluation Report

Allow attendees to co-author the evaluation report, providing key insights and reflections.

Conduct video interviews.

Comprehensive Evaluation

Utilize multiple evaluation instruments and tactics, including pre/post trials of learning objectives.

Align on Realistic Outcomes

Level set on short, medium, and long-term outcomes.

Phase 5 ITERATION

Congressional Timing

Align content with the Congressional calendar.

Keep, Change, or Stop Plan

Conduct a post-program survey and gather recommendations for what to keep, change, or stop.

Meeting 3: Finalizing Recommendations

The third and final working group meeting was held on June 13, 2024, from 1-3 PM ET at Alston & Bird in Washington, D.C., with all six members in attendance. The meeting focused on exploring approaches for promoting bipartisan dialogue and included a special presentation by Keith Yazmir, partner at maslansky + partners, who shared messaging and framing considerations for effectively engaging bipartisan audiences. The working group also used this time to finalize recommendations for the Alliance to consider in its program planning and discuss next steps.

Alliance staff facilitated discussion on a potential timeline and structure for this program, and members proposed the following recommendations:

- **Align timing with congressional milestones:** The group was strongly in favor of beginning programming well after the 2024 election to allow for Congressional office changes and time for “settling in.”
- **Focus on early career audience:** The majority of the conversation focused on the needs of early career learners including elements of participation as experts and mentors. This aligned with the recognition among Congressional staff that there is a need among early career staff and those new to healthcare policy for education.
- **Account for changing definitions of bipartisanship:** Members commented on how what is seen as bipartisan is in flux and what we would have defined as bipartisan 5, 10, 20 years ago is different than today.
- **Change the role of senior staff in this program cohort:** The program had originally been conceived with two tracks: one track of programming for those new to healthcare policy, and a second track of programming for senior health policy practitioners on the Hill. There is greater interest in meeting needs of more junior staff members among the audience, so efforts should focus there. Senior staff can play a role as expert resources.
- **Be intentional in language:** Use plain language wherever possible and align the name of the fellowship or cohort-based program with how the audience views themselves. Consider aspirational, brag-worthy framing to pique interest.

OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Working Group members reviewed the program attributes and provided final recommendations.

 Selectivity	 Personal Connection	 Best Practices in Adult Learning	 Manager Involvement	 Tailored Experience
<p>Elite speakers with proven ability, skills, and knowledge</p> <p>Nomination and application process to ensure commitment</p> <p>Clearly communicated eligibility criteria</p> <p>Reputation for high-quality experiences</p>	<p>In-person events with outings or off-Hill trips</p> <p>Dinners to build social cohesion</p> <p>Multiple social channels for relationship building</p> <p>Robust alumni network</p>	<p>Collaborative and applied learning principles</p> <p>Evaluation and iteration of the program</p> <p>Clear learning outcomes and objectives</p> <p>Small and large group breakouts</p> <p>Co-creation of an end product</p> <p>Peer-led elements</p>	<p>Mentor and advisor opportunities</p> <p>Supervisor buy-in for attendance and engagement</p> <p>Manager-nominated participation process</p> <p>Clearly defined learning objectives, timing, and purpose</p>	<p>Curriculum reflects the perspective of health policy implementers</p> <p>Program aligned with the congressional calendar and bipartisan priorities</p> <p>Content relevant and deemed worthy of participants’ time</p> <p>Manager involvement in curriculum development</p> <p>Professional development tailored to the audience</p>

CONCLUSION

The working group meetings culminated in a set of strategic recommendations for the Alliance to integrate into developing its innovative Bipartisan Learning Communities Program for congressional staff. These insights provide rich learnings for designing educational programs that engage congressional staff. By focusing on selectivity, personal connection, best practices in learning, manager involvement, and a tailored experience, the program is poised to create strong, collaborative communities that enhance policy knowledge and skill building within the congressional workforce that will hopefully lead to constructive conversations and improvements in federal health policy. For those working with congressional audiences it is worthwhile to build educational programming around the needs of legislative staffers. The Alliance extends its gratitude to the working group members for their invaluable contributions and commitment to advancing nonpartisan dialogue and education.

