

AICGS Project

## **Social Divisions and Questions of Identity in Germany and the United States. Consequences for Politics and Society**

### **An Exchange Outside of the Metropolitan Areas**

This three-year project seeks to address divisions in both German and U.S. societies. The project will focus on a number of factors that are underlying the divisions, including social, demographic, economic, geographic, and identity dynamics. This innovative program begins at a time when open communication and compromise have been neglected in many communities whose members retreat to a space in which each feels most secure. Both the U.S. and Germany are becoming increasingly diverse societies and many people feel marginalized or threatened. This AICGS program seeks to establish new connections within and between diverse communities by bringing individuals together for an honest exchange of the issues. Search #AICGSdialogue on Twitter for highlights from the exchange.

### **Project Description**

The project “Social Divisions and Questions of Identity in Germany and the United States” seeks to establish new connections within and between diverse communities by bringing individuals together for an honest exchange of the issues. Participants will address common challenges of diverse communities, including questions of identity and the polarization of societies, with the goal to seek compromise and consensus in overcoming the existing divide. Project participants will be representative of the diverse societies they belong to and be predominantly members of a younger cohort who live in smaller cities and towns in the U.S. and Germany. The core group of participants will engage in intensive discussions with each other as well as a broader community of experts and stakeholders with whom they will interact on issues of importance.

### **Participants**

AICGS is recruiting sixteen participants (eight from Germany, eight from the U.S.) per year who have been active, professionally or on a voluntary basis, in the service of communities that have experienced societal division and/or marginalization in the U.S. and Germany. Participants ideally will be involved in regional politics, schools and education, civil society organizations, the media, or social and economic efforts that benefit their communities. The project’s focus is on exchange and communication in order to reconnect people and overcome the existing polarization and divide, both within communities and across borders. During the course of one year, participants will come together for two week-long personal meetings (one in the U.S. and one in Germany) and continuously engage with each other via electronic means.

### **About the Program**

AICGS has three primary objectives for the program: (1) bring together people who are actively engaged in their communities for dialogue in order to understand current divisions that shape their societies and develop strategies to overcome them; (2) to promote a better understanding of the challenges facing increasingly diverse societies in Germany and the U.S.; and (3) to strengthen the connection between Germany and the U.S., particularly at the local level, and to establish networks between communities. The project relies on existing German-American sister or partner cities to begin the exchange. Selected cities will be located outside of major metropolitan areas and coasts and will be small to medium sized. Small and local communities have been playing an increasingly important role on both sides of the Atlantic in tackling some of the most pressing challenges of the day, including climate change, infrastructure improvement, and workforce development. Activities comprise week-long personal meetings and exchanges in both cities (the U.S. in the fall; Germany in the spring), as well as virtual group meetings throughout the year. Participants will publish two articles per year on the topic of societal division and questions of identity, produce a podcast, and develop a Story Map at the end of the project year that visualizes and summarizes the results of the exchanges. Participants will be engaging with each other as well as local organizations and institutions that are familiar with the issues.

**Program Year 2019-2020: November 3-9, 2019: Akron, Ohio & April 19-25, 2020: Chemnitz, Saxony**