ILLINOIS SEN. DON HARMON
BILLD CLASS OF 2005
Sen. Harmon was chosen Senate president by his caucus earlier this year. First elected in 2002, he has served in several leadership positions during his tenure, including as an assistant majority leader and president pro tempore. In 2019, he also was chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a member of the Revenue Committee.

INDIANA REP. TODD HUSTON
BILLD CLASS OF 2016
First elected to the Indiana House in 2012, Rep. Huston is serving as speaker-elect for the 2020 legislative session. Later this year, he will take over the post of speaker of the House. Last year, Huston was co-chair of the Ways & Means Committee; he continues to serve as a member of that committee. He also previously served as speaker pro tempore.

INDIANA SEN. LIZ BROWN
BILLD CLASS OF 2017
In November, Sen. Brown was selected to serve as assistant majority floor leader for communications for her caucus. She previously served as an assistant majority floor leader for parliamentary affairs. This session, she also is chair of the Senate Ethics Committee and a member of the Appropriations and the Health & Provider Services committees, as well as the School Funding Subcommittee.

IOWA REP. JOHN WILLS
BILLD CLASS OF 2016
At the beginning of this legislative session, Rep. Wills was elected speaker pro tempore for the Iowa House. The second-term legislator previously served as an assistant majority leader and majority whip. He currently is a member of the Agriculture, Appropriations, Commerce, and Veterans Affairs committees in the Iowa House.

Please submit Alumni News to Laura Tomaka, CSG Midwest program manager for BILLD. She can be reached at ltomaka@csg.org.

WHY TO APPLY: ALUMNI EXPLAIN HOW BILLD PAVES WAY TO SUCCESS FOR NEWER LEGISLATORS

The Council of State Governments’ Midwestern Legislative Conference is seeking applicants for the 26th annual Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development. Thirty-nine fellowships will be awarded to state and provincial lawmakers for the 2020 BILLD program. These fellowships are awarded on a competitive basis by the MLC’s BILLD Steering Committee — a bipartisan group of legislators from each of the MLC member jurisdictions.


Applications are due by April 8; they are available at csgmidwest.org.

The intensive five-day program is conducted by the MLC in partnership with the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Since inception of the training program in 1995, more than 875 Midwest legislators have taken part in the annual program. Here are four reasons to apply this year, through the words of some of those BILLD graduates.

DEVELOP AND HONE CRITICAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICYMAKING SKILLS

Throughout the five-day program, BILLD Fellows participate in a series of interactive workshops with professional development experts, scholars and legislative leaders that fine-tune the skills they need to be effective legislators and leaders.

Nebraska Sen. Suzanne Geist, who attended BILLD in 2018 as a second-year legislator, says she gained confidence as a result of taking part in the leadership institute: “I have additional training behind me. I have unique solutions to offer other legislators because of the experience I have had.” According to Iowa Rep. John Wills, a 2016 graduate of the BILLD program, the training helped advance his legislative career: “The aspect that has helped me most is the ability to form coalitions and to listen. This ability, I believe, has helped me become the speaker pro temp.”

MASTER KEY POLICIES AND POLICYMAKING STRATEGIES

BILLD focuses on important issues facing state policymakers, along with strategies to address them. Scholars from the University of Minnesota, as well as outside experts, provide a context for effectively analyzing state policies and programs, evaluating information, and communicating with constituents and colleagues. The goal: Help legislators craft effective state policy.

“I have been more attentive and thoughtful in my approach after BILLD,” adds Wills. Geist also says she benefited from the broad view of policies covered: “I learned that many states face the same issues my state faces. It provided me with a great opportunity to hear proposals and solutions in other states.”

UNDERSTAND AND STRENGTHEN STATE LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS

BILLD allows participants to explore the historical context of the role of state legislatures in the nation’s larger governance system. This deeper understanding of the institution in which they serve helps BILLD graduates become better advocates and guardians of the legislative branch.

“BILLD reaffirmed that my role as a member of the legislative institution is to work with everyone, regardless of political party, to effect change,” says Minnesota Rep. Fue Lee, who attended BILLD in 2019 as a freshman legislator.

NETWORK WITH THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST EMERGING LEADERS IN THE MIDWEST

Each BILLD class is comprised of some of the most promising new legislators from across the region. While in Minneapolis for the training program, fellows have the chance to share their knowledge, learn from one another’s experiences, and forge long-lasting relationships.

“I highly recommend BILLD because of the relationships you build with your colleagues that transcend parties and politics,” Lee says. Having a network of colleagues across the region has helped Wills as well: “I have friends that I made at BILLD where we bounce ideas, thoughts and challenges off one another to this day.”

According to Geist, BILLD was “the best use of time and political capital for any legislative conference I’ve attended.” In offering advice to colleagues considering applying for a BILLD fellowship, Geist acknowledges that there are many events and programs that compete for legislators’ time. “However, BILLD is an educational and networking formula for success that will set your career on a positive trajectory,” he says. “It gives you the tools and ability to be a better legislator.”