The Case for Postsecondary Civic Liaison Networks:

Strengthening the Relationship Between Higher Education and State Election Officials

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Executive Summary

This report introduces the Postsecondary Civic Liaison Network, a state-level framework for strengthening durable, nonpartisan collaboration between postsecondary institutions and election officials. The framework emerged from a three-part deliberative convening in spring 2026 that brought together more than 70 leaders from higher education, nonprofit organizations, government, and the private sector.

Overview of the Convening Experience

The convening examined how stronger relationships between postsecondary institutions and state election officials might improve access to trusted election information while creating infrastructure for broader civic learning and participation. Participants moved from examining challenges in civic education and voter engagement, to exploring existing state partnerships and policy approaches, to stress-testing a prototype framework. Throughout the process, participants emphasized nonpartisanship, flexibility across state contexts, stronger integration with existing civic infrastructure, and the need for practical approaches capable of surviving leadership and political transitions.

Examining the Problem

Postsecondary learners are navigating college and university life amid intense political polarization, negative partisanship, and declining trust in democracy. Leaders across the ideological spectrum are growing concerned about America's civic health, and specifically that of young people. Postsecondary institutions and election officials are both well-positioned to play a role in preparing the next generation of leaders for life in a thriving democracy, but efforts are fragmented, under-resourced, and constrained by concerns about perceived partisanship.

This lack of coordination in many states results in inconsistent access to accurate information, uneven civic learning opportunities for students, and missed opportunities to build trust in democratic processes. Without clearer partnerships, shared guidance, and sustainable infrastructure, civic education and voter engagement efforts will remain limited in reach, credibility, and impact.

Recommended Framework (Full, page 73)

The resulting framework recommends beginning with voluntary, relationship-based implementation rather than a legislative mandate. Its distinguishing feature is the formal integration of election officials as an institutional anchor of a statewide postsecondary network, creating durable, two-way communication between campuses and the public officials responsible for administering elections.

Phase 1: Establish a Postsecondary Civic Liaison Network

States would establish or strengthen a network connecting public and private postsecondary institutions with state election officials. Participating institutions would designate two Civic Liaisons, while election authorities would identify consistent points of contact for colleges and universities. Together, these relationships would create direct pathways for distributing official, nonpartisan state-based election information and for campuses to raise questions, identify student-facing challenges, and communicate emerging needs. Importantly, the Civic Liaison Network positions election officials as the visible, trusted source of election information and provide campuses with clear, usable, nonpartisan resources.

***Phase 2:* Adaptable Activation Pathways**

Once the network is established, states and institutions could pursue additional activities based on local priorities, resources, and capacity in three areas: (1) Institutional Capacity Building, (2) Student Civic Leadership Development, and (3) Civic Learning & Community Engagement. These activities are intended to build upon existing work rather than create a parallel civic engagement system.

Framework Design Overview

The framework seeks to advance three primary goals: establish durable, nonpartisan coordination between postsecondary institutions and election officials; increase student access to accurate, trusted, and nonpartisan election information; and expand opportunities for student civic participation, leadership, and engagement.

Importantly, this approach is intended to serve the full range of postsecondary institutions and students. Its application may differ for residential and online students, in-state and out-of-state students, adult learners, and students who are not eligible to vote. Election-specific information should reflect students' individual voting circumstances, while broader civic learning and engagement opportunities can serve a wider range of students.

Ultimately, the Civic Liaison Network is intended as adaptable infrastructure rather than a uniform national program. Success should be assessed not simply by the number of Liaisons appointed, but by whether durable relationships are established, authoritative information becomes easier to access, student-facing election questions are resolved, and meaningful opportunities for civic participation and leadership expand.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Convening Overview.....11

Convening Recruitment

Convening Format & Assurances

Convening Theoretical Framework

Convening Facilitation

Session 1 Synthesis: Examining the Problem.....15

Introductions: "What motivated you to be part of this convening?"

Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement Trends

Framing the Problem

Breakouts: Examining the Problem

Post Session Survey

Session 2 Synthesis: Exploring Partnerships.....31

Breakout Session 2.1 Qualitative Insights

Landscape of Postsecondary Civic and Voter Legislation.....43

Breakout Session 2.2 Qualitative Insights

Post-Session Survey:

Session 3 Synthesis: Shaping the Framework.....63

Initial Prototype Framework

Breakout Session 3.1 Qualitative Insights

Breakout Session 3.2 Qualitative Insights

Post-Session Survey:

Our Recommended Framework.....73

Conclusion

References.....92

Appendix A: Participant Project Overview

Appendix B: Participant FAQs

Appendix C: Convening Participant Bios

Introduction

Despite decades of civic engagement efforts, young adults ages 18 to 29 still vote at the lowest rates of any age cohort (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2026), and broader civic indicators reveal declining trust in government and increased disillusionment with politics all together (Institute for Citizens & Scholars, 2023). These trends are consistent among college students, particularly in non-presidential election years and in moments of heightened conflict and controversy. Beyond voting, emerging evidence suggest the effects of growing up in a screen-driven and increasingly AI augmented attention economy have weakened students' capacities for critical thinking and dialogue across differences (Kozyreva et al., 2023). Despite higher education's stated civic mission, evidence suggests that many colleges and universities continue to struggle to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to sustain a healthy democracy (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2026). Across the country, however, there are promising examples of bi-partisan supported, state-based efforts to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and local election officials in their state.

This report examines the scope of the challenge, highlights promising practices from across the country, reveals key discussions from a special convening on advancing postsecondary civic education and voter engagement, and proposes a model for establishing a research-informed collaboration between election officials and postsecondary institutions. Coordinated practices could expand trusted nonpartisan civic education, motivate postsecondary action, reduce concerns about political indoctrination, and revitalize town–gown relationships by positioning campuses as hubs for cross-ideological civic engagement. At a minimum, however, the framework serves as a conversation starter to encourage college and university leaders, and election officials to collaborate more directly.

Convening Overview

Seeking to gain input from leaders and scholars from across the ideological spectrum, Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) Fellow, Dr. Alex Kappus, developed a convening format, deployed in spring 2026 to engage a group of scholars and leaders around a central purpose: To explore ways to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and state election officials to advance trusted nonpartisan civic education and voter engagement. The following section outlines details about how the convening was organized, how each meeting was structured, and the outcomes of the convening.

Convening Recruitment

Participants were recruited through purposeful identification and invitation based on their professional expertise, lived experience, and demonstrated engagement with issues related to civic education, voter engagement, election administration, postsecondary education, high impact learning experiences, college student development, and democratic participation. Recruitment was guided by a deliberate effort to assemble a cross-ideological group capable of contributing differentiated perspectives. An initial invitation list was generated, and participants could nominate others they recommended to the convening. Participants received a project description (Appendix A) and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document (Appendix B).

The convening included scholars, election officials, nonprofit leaders, student leaders, higher education administrators, and other practitioners whose work intersects with civic learning and democratic engagement (bios found on page 82, Appendix C). Participants were selected not only for their subject matter expertise, but also for the distinct viewpoints they brought to the conversation. Some participants possessed decades of experience in civic education and voter engagement, while others approached these issues from adjacent fields or with newer perspectives. This diversity was intentional and reflected the project's commitment to examining challenges and opportunities from multiple angles.

The recruitment strategy sought to ensure ideological diversity across the participant pool. Rather than pursuing consensus, the convening was designed to foster thoughtful dialogue among individuals holding differing assumptions, priorities, and perspectives regarding civic education, voter engagement, and the role of postsecondary institutions in advancing both. Participants were informed that disagreement was both anticipated and welcomed as part of a constructive exchange of ideas.

While participants represented a range of political and ideological viewpoints, the convening was not positioned as an advocacy effort. Instead, it served as a research-informed, nonpartisan exploration of how states and postsecondary institutions might strengthen collaboration in ways that are lawful, constructive, and broadly credible across political contexts. The ultimate objective was to generate recommendations grounded in evidence and practice that could be supported across the political spectrum while respecting legal, institutional, and civic boundaries.

Convening Format & Assurances

Due to the strong interest following the call for participation, the convening was organized into three distinct tracks (A, B, and C), with each track consisting of three sessions. Participants were encouraged to remain within the same track throughout the convening to foster continuity, strengthen relationships, and build trust among colleagues over time. At the same time, flexibility was emphasized, recognizing that professional and personal obligations could affect attendance. Participants were invited to attend sessions across tracks as needed, with the priority placed on engagement and participation whenever possible, over adherence to a specific track across all three sessions.

Several assurances were established to create a trusted environment for candid discussion and collaboration. All information collected and reported from the convening was de-identified unless explicit permission was granted for attribution. Public attribution of comments, ideas, or contributions occurred only with participant approval, and individuals retained the right to withdraw their contributions from any public-facing reports or documents, including this very deliverable. In addition, the convening was free from financial conflicts of interest, as the Fellowship supporting this work was unpaid and participants received no financial incentives related to participation in the convening.

Convening Theoretical Framework

The Convening design was grounded in a modified version of the *Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*, (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). The framework was selected to provide a basic structure through which to guide participants methodically through an experience by which they could discuss the problem in detail, but aim to produce a tangible, agreed upon concept to drive action and improvement.



- Clarify Goals, Values, & Public Purpose
- Define the problem
- Assemble the evidence
- Construct alternatives
- Select the criteria
- Project the outcomes
- Confront the tradeoffs
- Stop, focus, narrow, deepen, decide
- Tell the story

Convening Facilitation

The convening was intentionally designed as a facilitated discussion operating in a focus group-style format. Participants were invited to share perspectives, experiences, and insights through structured dialogue, rather than engage in collaborative writing or formal project-based committee or taskforce-style work. No expectation was placed on participants to co-author documents, complete assignments, or contribute work outside of the scheduled sessions. This approach to clearly define time and commitment expectations yielded strong participation from notable leaders across the field, serving as a substantial but manageable commitment.

The facilitator's role was to guide discussions, pose questions, introduce relevant research and contextual information when helpful, and synthesize participant insights into practical recommendations and guidance. While the facilitator provided structure and support for the conversations, the expertise and lived experience informing the convening resided with the participants themselves. The process was designed to elevate and learn from that collective expertise, using discussion and reflection as the primary means of knowledge generation.

In the next section, each convening session overview and associated synthesis will be presented, offering an in depth look at the contents of the discussions across each track in the three sessions.

Session 1 Synthesis:

Examining the Problem

Over 70 participants enrolled in three tracks (A, B, and C) took part in Session 1 of the Convening to Advance State-Based Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement. Track A had 18 participants, Track B had 22 participants, and Track C had 31 participants.

The session began with participant introductions, which lasted approximately 28 to 35 minutes. During this time, individuals were invited to share their name, role, and what motivated them to participate in the convening. This purposeful activity was meant to draw participants in, engage them, and start to give shape to a shared purpose. Following introductions, participants reviewed the goal of the project, the overall structure of the convening, the format of the sessions, and agreed-upon "ways of engagement."

Participants then engaged in a brief activity examining data from multiple sources that highlighted key trends in youth civic participation. Building on this activity, participants spent around 30 minutes reviewing prevailing trends shaping the civic health of young people, examining current research on civic and political engagement, and highlighting the role that civic and community engagement activities can play in strengthening democratic participation.

Participants were then divided into breakout groups for 15 to 20 minutes to reflect on the material presented. Each group was invited to share high-level observations, questions, and recommendations with the broader group. The session concluded with brief closing remarks and an invitation for participants to complete a short post-session survey.

The following section will now detail information presented to participants and share synthesized qualitative data responsive to engagement opportunities throughout the session.

Session 1 Introductions: "What motivated you to be part of this convening?"

Each participant across the tracks were invited to introduce themselves and to share their motivation for joining this convening. Participants described a strong sense of urgency and shared purpose in joining the convening, with many motivated by concern about the current state of democracy, including declining youth civic knowledge, political polarization, and disengagement from civic life. A central theme across responses was a deep commitment to supporting young people's civic development, with participants emphasizing the importance of helping students build civic knowledge, agency, and pathways to contribute to a healthier democracy.

Participants were particularly drawn to the cross-ideological nature of the convening. One participant said,

> *"I have worked for a Republican representative, and I have worked for a Democrat at the United States House of Representatives. Teaching is why I'm here. Teaching young people, getting them activated to vote. When I taught in K-12, I didn't teach half of my class. I taught the entire class…I love seeing all sides engaged in the process of democracy."*

Many participants also highlighted the civic mission of higher education, noting that colleges and universities play a critical role in preparing students for civic and social responsibility.

Several participants emphasized the importance of stating a broad conceptualization of higher education, including institutions often overlooked in conversations about civic education and voter engagement. Specifically, participants are concerned about the over-emphasis on elite and highly resourced four-year institutions in the civic and vote engagement space. Underscoring this point, one participant said,

> *"I'm really concerned about the role of the community colleges and regional publics where I've spent the bulk of my career, where the bulk of students actually go to school, being left out of the conversation when we think about reforms, because the things that are capable at other kinds of institutions might not work for us."*

Importantly, the convening invitation was interpreted as a valuable opportunity to bring together diverse stakeholders across sectors, including higher education, nonprofit organizations, and election officials, to share knowledge and collaborate on solutions.

Participants expressed particular interest in translating research and experience into practical strategies that strengthen civic education, reduce barriers to participation, and expand opportunities for democratic engagement. Finally, there was a strong emphasis on action, wanting to use this convening as an opportunity to not just talk about democracy, but to contribute constructively to democratic life.

Session 1 Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement Trends

One of the first activities Convening attendees participated in was the review of some initial framing about youth civic participation. Namely, participants reviewed key statistics that shed light on concerning trends in a multiple-choice quiz format. Following the activity where participants could guess the answers to multiple-choice questions, the presenter shared data specifically about the complexity of the higher education system. For the sake

of this report, these statistics have been translated from the multiple choice quiz into narrative format and described below.

Recent evidence suggests that both democratic participation and public confidence in key civic institutions remain significant challenges in the United States, particularly among younger Americans. In New York City's 2025 mayoral election, for example, youth voter turnout reached 28%, a figure widely recognized as unusually high for a municipal election and substantially above the average youth turnout of approximately 9% observed across the 30 largest U.S. cities (CIRCLE, 2025). While this demonstrates the potential for meaningful youth political engagement under the right conditions, it also highlights the persistent participation gap that characterizes many local elections.

Patterns of civic participation among college students reveal similar concerns, especially in non-presidential election years. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), for example, only 31% of college students voted in the 2022 midterm elections (Gismondi et al., 2024). Some may assume that institutions with substantial resources, strong academic reputations, and highly engaged student populations are exceptions to this trend. However, the rates are consistent even at elite institutions. For example, just 36% of Harvard's 22,732 eligible undergraduate and graduate student voters participated in the 2022 midterm election (ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, 2022). Although this rate exceeds the national average, it underscores a broader reality. Even at one of the world's most prestigious universities, nearly two-thirds of eligible students did not vote. These findings suggest that increasing civic participation among college students remains a concern across institutional type and context.

At the same time, public trust in higher education as an institution has eroded in recent years. Gallup's 2025 polling found that only 42% of Americans reported having either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education. This trend is especially pronounced across the partisan divide. Among Republicans, confidence was even lower, with just 26% expressing substantial trust in colleges and universities (Gallup, 2025). These findings suggest that higher education institutions face growing skepticism regarding their role and value within American society, and especially among voters identifying as Republican. Trust challenges extend beyond higher education. The Institute for Citizens and Scholars (2023) reported that 52% of young adults express little or no trust in government institutions. Such findings are particularly concerning given the central role that trust plays in democratic participation, civic learning, and public engagement.

Taken together, these data reveal a dual challenge confronting American democracy and higher education specifically. Civic participation among young people remains uneven,

while confidence in both governmental and educational institutions has weakened, reflecting broader questions about civic trust, democratic participation, and institutional legitimacy. Addressing these trends will require intentional efforts to rebuild trust, strengthen civic learning opportunities, and create pathways for meaningful democratic engagement. Higher education institutions, working alongside public agencies and community partners, have an important role to play in restoring confidence in democratic processes and preparing students to participate effectively in civic life.

In the session, participants also reviewed data about the vast diversity present among postsecondary institutions. First, by reviewing data on enrollment by Carnegie Classification, participants were encouraged to think about their own assumptions about higher education based on their own prior experiences or popular media's emphasis on elite, doctoral granting universities. Take, for instance, that roughly 27% of all degree granting institutions are associate's degree focused, or that regional public universities serve over 70% of the totally number of enrolled students in higher education (Cecil, 2026).

The point made in the session is that when policymakers and the public think about higher education, they tend to forget just how vast the system is throughout each state. Not only are there incredible public colleges and universities, but there are also high-quality private colleges and universities as well in each state. Community colleges hold a particularly powerful, and untapped role in serving as civic hubs for their communities.

Attendees were then invited to consider the fact that among the 16 University of North Carolina System institutions, we tend to mostly hear about UNC Chapel Hill, and hardly ever about the 58 incredible community colleges throughout the state. Combined with private institutions, there are more than 130 accredited institutions in just one state, serving nearly every county and corner.

To that end, what if all colleges and universities, including community colleges, were better positioned as civic hubs, not only for their current students, but also for the communities that surround them? Postsecondary institutions are often among the most enduring and trusted institutions in their regions, with physical spaces, educational resources, convening capacity, and relationships that extend well beyond the students they enroll. University extension units already demonstrate what it can look like for higher education to reach beyond the boundaries of campus and serve communities directly. These existing structures could be more intentionally leveraged to support civic learning and strengthen connections among postsecondary institutions, state and local election officials, and the public. More broadly, improving town-gown relationships remains an understated opportunity. Campuses can create spaces where students and community members come

together to access reliable information, learn about civic processes, engage across differences, and participate in public life. In this way, positioning colleges and universities as civic hubs could strengthen not only student engagement, but also the civic capacity of the communities these institutions call home.

Following the contextualization of higher education, attendees reviewed some key research on youth student civic education and voter engagement.

Session 1: Framing the Problem

Colleges and universities are educating students during a period of profound civic, social, and technological disruption. Young adults are navigating an environment characterized by negative partisanship, political polarization, declining trust in institutions, and unprecedented exposure to information and misinformation (Pew Research Center, 2024). Social media platforms and algorithm-driven information ecosystems often amplify outrage, reinforce ideological divisions, and expose students to toxic sociopolitical discourse (Guess et al., 2020). Simultaneously, advances in artificial intelligence are rapidly transforming how information is produced, disseminated, and consumed, creating new opportunities for civic learning while also raising concerns about misinformation, disinformation, and the erosion of shared understandings of truth (UNESCO, 2023).

Research suggests that many college students enter higher education with limited knowledge of government, democratic institutions, and American history, while also facing growing challenges in distinguishing credible information from false or misleading content (Guess et al., 2020). These conditions contribute to low levels of political trust and increasing disillusionment with formal democratic structures. Young people are also confronted with unequal opportunities for civic participation. Voters between the ages of 18 and 29 consistently participate at lower rates than older age groups, experiences with voter registration and election administration vary considerably across states, and longstanding disparities persist in the political participation of Black youth and other populations with historically lower rates of political participation (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2024).

These trends are concerning not only because they affect electoral participation, but because they undermine the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and relationships necessary for democratic self-governance. In an era marked by hyperpolarization and social fragmentation, the need for institutions that can cultivate informed, engaged, and resilient citizens has become increasingly urgent.

Civic Learning as a Possible Antidote

Higher education has long embraced a civic mission rooted in the preparation of students for participation in democratic society. A growing body of research suggests that civic and community engagement can serve as a powerful mechanism for advancing both educational and democratic outcomes. Civic and community engagement (CCE) has been identified as a high-impact educational practice associated with improved student persistence and college completion (Song et al., 2017). Through participation in civic learning experiences, students have opportunities to explore their values, connect their academic fields to broader societal challenges, and develop a stronger sense of meaning and purpose (Yob, 2014).

Beyond academic outcomes, emerging evidence suggests that civic engagement is positively associated with student well-being. Participation in CCE, for example, has been linked to improved mental health outcomes, with particularly significant benefits for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds (Fenn et al., 2024). Research also demonstrates that engaging with individuals across social, cultural, and political differences is among the strongest predictors of socially responsible leadership development among college students (Beckert & Harris, 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that civic learning can function not only as a democratic imperative, but also as a strategy for student success, belonging, leadership development, and well-being.

The research reviewed above should not be interpreted to suggest a simple causal relationship among civic knowledge, institutional trust, and civic participation. Rather, they suggest that civic learning can provide important knowledge, skills, relationships, and opportunities that may support democratic participation alongside broader institutional, social, and political conditions.

The Gap Between Aspiration and Reality

Despite higher education's longstanding commitment to civic development, institutional efforts have often fallen short of their stated aspirations. While colleges and universities increasingly promote civic and community engagement, scholars have noted that many initiatives continue to emphasize service-learning, volunteerism, and community service while devoting comparatively less attention to democratic knowledge, political learning, civic literacy, and electoral participation (Mitchell et al., 2023; Beaumont et al., 2024; Saltmarsh, 2021). At many institutions, civic education remains peripheral to the curriculum, and exposure to democratic learning experiences varies considerably depending on a student's major, co-curricular involvement, or institution (Daniels, 2021).

Recent data illustrate this challenge. In a national pre-election survey conducted by CIRCLE in 2023, 62% of young people reported feeling qualified to vote, and among those respondents, 88% indicated that they intended to participate in the 2024 election. Yet only 47% ultimately voted. This gap between civic confidence, intention, and action highlights the persistence of structural, informational, and motivational barriers to participation (CIRCLE, 2024). Civic knowledge alone is insufficient to produce democratic participation. Rather, young people must develop the practical skills that enable them to navigate registration, voting, and broader forms of civic engagement (Hillygus & Holbein, 2023). Beyond voting, many students report difficulty discussing political issues across differences, concerns about self-censorship, and broader disillusionment with democratic institutions and processes (Knight Foundation & Ipsos, 2024; Heterodox Academy, 2024).

Nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, and civic intermediaries have attempted to address these gaps by providing resources, programming, and support to campuses. While these efforts have produced important successes, they often depend on external funding, temporary initiatives, or individual campus champions. As a result, promising practices frequently struggle to achieve sustainability, scale, or institutionalization. Furthermore, in election seasons, partisan organizations tend to descend on colleges campuses and in social media feeds, leaving students to navigate the terrain in a highly polarized context.

A State-Based Opportunity

Addressing these challenges requires durable infrastructure capable of reaching students consistently and at scale. One promising opportunity lies in strengthening partnerships between postsecondary institutions and state election officials, particularly Secretaries of State. Such partnerships could expand access to trusted, nonpartisan civic education, reduce barriers to democratic participation, improve awareness of election processes, and provide students with reliable information in an increasingly fragmented information environment.

Rather than creating entirely new initiatives, this approach builds upon existing examples of successful collaboration between campuses and election officials. The central question is not whether effective models exist, but whether higher education and state leaders can work together to institutionalize and scale them. Strengthening campus-state partnerships offers a potential pathway for advancing civic learning, democratic engagement, and voter participation while preserving the nonpartisan principles essential to maintaining public trust across ideological perspectives.

Session 1 Breakouts: Examining the Problem

During each track, participants listened to a presentation that reflected the narrative above about key trends in civic education and voter engagement, with specific emphasis on young people and postsecondary education. Participants were encouraged to listen closely and take notes on what resonated, what they would add, and whether these concerns were shared across the ideological spectrum. Participants then divided out into randomly assigned small groups to address four questions. Synthesis of the information collected by note takers in each group is outlined below.

What resonated with you?

- **Student Confidence and Engagement**: Students often feel unprepared to vote; experiential learning and civic skill-building help them gain agency and make civic participation meaningful beyond elections.
- **Role of Higher Education**: Colleges are central to civic life but face low trust, perceived partisanship, and a tension between educational and civic missions. Elite institutions dominate attention, leaving smaller schools under-recognized.
- **Civic Learning and Knowledge**: Teaching both civic knowledge and skills is essential. Students face digital literacy gaps, information overload, and competing distractions from social media and entertainment.
- **Systemic and Structural Challenges**: Civic engagement is shaped by broader societal trends (polarization, misinformation, low trust) and institutional systems that often fail to support sustained participation. Collaboration across sectors is critical.
- **Nonprofits and External Actors**: Nonprofits fill gaps left by campuses, but can make the landscape complex and difficult to navigate.
- **Hope and Opportunities**: Initiatives like Civic Hubs and intersecting collaboration are promising if translated into actionable, measurable strategies. Civic engagement should be ongoing, problem-focused, and inclusive.
- **Tensions / Questions**: How to make civic learning organic, maintain nonpartisanship, prioritize engagement amid competing demands, and build trust and intrinsic motivation in students.

What would you add?

- **Civic Engagement Beyond Voting:** Focus on ongoing civic skills— community participation, advocacy, public problem-solving, and other forms of civic action—not just elections. Engagement builds itself over time.

- **Higher Ed Challenges**: Low trust in institutions, overemphasis on knowledge vs. skills, and elite-focused resources limit impact. Civic initiatives risk being seen as partisan.
- **Access and Inclusion**: Efforts should reach students who have historically had less access to civic learning and participation opportunities and account for differences in students' experiences and preparation. K-12 preparation affects readiness.
- **Modern Civic Landscape**: Students face misinformation, social media influence, declining historical knowledge, and a perceived lack of agency in democracy.
- **Structural Support Needed**: Institutions must provide infrastructure beyond student governments, embed civic work in curriculum and co-curricular activities, and clarify terms and purposes.
- **Tensions**: Balancing knowledge and skills, maintaining trust/nonpartisanship, and fostering sustained engagement despite political, structural, and social barriers.

Anything you disagree with?

- **Voting Is Not the Only Marker**: Voting alone does not define civic engagement; engagement is broader and multifaceted.
- **Framing and Language**: The term "civic engagement" may lack positive associations and needs careful reframing, especially in a politicized context.
- **Knowledge vs. Skills**: Debate over whether civic education should focus on content (knowledge) or methods/practical skills.
- **Student Interest and Barriers**: Young people may be more interested in participating than assumed; structural barriers often limit follow-through.
- **Institutional Trust and Inclusion**: Distrust in universities complicates engagement; students should have meaningful roles in shaping the systems they participate in.
- **Complexity of Consensus**: Achieving a shared understanding of civic education is challenging due to partisanship and varying institutional contexts.

What concerns are shared across the ideological spectrum?

- **Perception of Partisanship**: Efforts to promote student voting or civic engagement are often seen as partisan, and higher education itself is viewed as politically charged. Action civics can raise concerns about influencing elections.
- **Institutional Challenges**: Universities face ideological scrutiny, low incentives to change the status quo, and questions about the value and ROI of higher education. Polarization affects how civics is received across different audiences.

- **Engagement and Voice**: Young people's perspectives are often missing; civic education should start earlier and provide opportunities for students to contribute as storytellers and creators.
- **Opportunities in Polarization**: While polarization is challenging, it can help identify shared problems and motivate collective solutions if approached carefully.
- **Low Participation**: Low voter turnout remains a concern, emphasizing the need for more inclusive, accessible, and meaningful civic engagement initiatives.

The next opportunity for qualitative insights was during the report-out about what was shared in small groups. This is understandably an abbreviated, narrated view of what will have more texture below.

5 Key Insights from Small Group Report-Outs

- **Nonpartisanship Is Fragile and Politicized** – Civic engagement efforts, even those historically nonpartisan, are often viewed through a partisan lens, making clear communication and careful framing essential.
- **Civic Engagement Extends Beyond Voting** – Students need opportunities to develop broader civic skills, participate in community life, and cultivate a sustained civic identity, rather than only focusing on election cycles.
- **Youth Disillusionment and Information Overload** – Young people are not inherently apathetic but often feel powerless, overwhelmed by misinformation, and uncertain about how to engage effectively in civic life.
- **Institutional Role and Access Gaps** – Higher education institutions face political and cultural pressures that constrain civic programming, while regional and community colleges, often overlooked, are critical sites for fostering meaningful civic engagement.
- **From Dialogue to Action** – Building trust, fostering collaboration across sectors, and translating convening insights into practical strategies are essential to ensure civic engagement efforts have a lasting impact.

Session 1: Post-Session Survey

In the closing minutes of the first session, participants were invited to complete a brief survey. The survey was then shared in the recap/follow-up email. 38 out of 71 participants completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 53%.

By attending today's session, I gained deeper insight into the challenges facing young people and their introduction to civic life:

Strongly Agree - 23.7% (9)

Agree - 50% (19)

Neutral - 21.1% (8)

Disagree - 2.6% (1)

Strongly Disagree - 2.6% (1)

The facilitator created an environment where I felt like I could freely express my ideas:

Strongly Agree - 81.6% (31)

Agree - 15.8% (6)

Neutral - 0% (0)

Disagree - 0% (0)

Strongly Disagree - 1% (1)

The attendees appear to have bought into making this a constructive opportunity to come together across differences:

Strongly Agree - 76.8% (29)

Agree - 18.4% (7)

Neutral - 2.6% (1)

Disagree - 0% (0)

Strongly Disagree - 2.6% (1)

I feel optimistic that these convenings will result in something tangible:

Strongly Agree - 39.5% (15)

Agree - 44.7% (17)

Neutral - 7.9% (3)

Disagree - 5.3% (2)

Strongly Disagree - 2.6% (1)

Participants were invited to complete two open responses:

Write a 3-4 sentence summary of what you hope this convening's discussions may specifically address or influence.

Summary of responses:

Participant responses reflected strong enthusiasm for the convening and a shared commitment to strengthening civic education and voter engagement across postsecondary institutions. A dominant theme was the desire for the convening to produce actionable outcomes, including practical recommendations and tools that can influence institutional practice and state-level policy. Participants also emphasized the importance of strengthening partnerships between higher education institutions and Secretary of State offices, identifying these relationships as a promising pathway for expanding campus-based civic education and voter engagement efforts.

Many respondents highlighted the value of cross-sector collaboration, noting that civic education initiatives often operate in silos and would benefit from greater coordination and shared learning. Participants also expressed interest in developing shared, nonpartisan language that can support civic engagement efforts across diverse political and institutional contexts. Finally, participants underscored the importance of expanding civic education and youth engagement while navigating the broader political, cultural, and institutional challenges that shape civic participation today. Together, these responses suggest strong interest in ensuring that the convening leads to practical strategies, durable partnerships, and field-wide resources that can strengthen civic learning and democratic participation.

Do you have any further comments, suggestions, or concerns regarding the convening facilitation? (22 responses)

Summary of responses:

Qualitative participant feedback on the facilitation of the first convening session was positive. Many respondents expressed appreciation for the thoughtful organization of the session, the clear framing of the project, and the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of leaders from across higher education, nonprofit organizations, and civic engagement initiatives. Several participants also noted enthusiasm for the intellectual energy of the group and expressed excitement about continuing the discussions in future sessions.

Participants offered a small number of constructive suggestions for future convenings. Some respondents recommended increasing opportunities for interaction, particularly through more frequent small-group discussions, to help sustain engagement during longer virtual sessions. A few participants also suggested streamlining large-group introductions in favor of breakout conversations to allow participants to connect more directly with one another. Others encouraged the creation of mechanisms for continued collaboration and knowledge sharing, such as an email list or shared repository where participants can exchange research, tools, and resources.

Finally, several respondents emphasized the importance of ensuring that the convening ultimately produces tangible outcomes, such as practical recommendations or implementation resources that can influence practice and policy. Participants also noted the potential value of incorporating perspectives from individuals with direct experience in political or policymaking environments to strengthen the feasibility of proposed strategies.

Taken together, feedback indicates strong satisfaction with the facilitation approach and a high level of enthusiasm for continuing the work, while also highlighting opportunities to increase interaction, strengthen collaboration mechanisms, and maintain focus on actionable outcomes.

Session 2 Synthesis:

Exploring Partnerships

Most participants enrolled in the three tracks (A, B, and C) returned to take part in the second of three sessions of the Convening to Advance State-Based Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement. Track A had 18 participants, Track B had 21 participants, and Track C had 30 participants.

The session across all three tracks began with the image of a bridge and a quote by Eboo Patel, Founder of Interfaith America, which read, “Bridges don’t fall from the sky. People build them.” The purpose of this framing was to encourage participants to consider the session a step forward toward building bridges of understanding among participants from a wide range of ideological perspectives.



Participants revisited the project's purpose, session format, and reaffirmed our “ways of engagement,” or norms for interacting with one another, especially as differing perspectives take hold. Participants then reviewed data and findings from session 1 across all three tracks.

Next, the facilitator, Dr. Alex Kappus, presented what he referred to as "assumed boundaries" of the project, grounded in the original purpose and framing of the project, informed by the first session's participants, and outlined below:

- Aimed at exploring the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and other election officials to advance trusted nonpartisan civic education and voter engagement.
- Widely accepted as a nonpartisan effort by leaders across the ideological spectrum as such, or at a minimum, viewed as a balanced, bi-partisan approach.
- Inclusive of the full spectrum of postsecondary institutions of higher learning (2-year, 4-year, regional, public/private, grad, online, adult learners, etc.)

With this framing in mind, participants were then divided automatically into small breakout groups for 20 minutes to review two primary questions:

> Q1: What challenges could be addressed through stronger partnerships between postsecondary institutions and Secretary of State or election officials?" and,
>
> Q2: What problems are explicitly outside the scope of this effort? Participants were encouraged to take notes in their breakout rooms.

When participants returned, each group was asked to share a summary of their discussion. About halfway through the session, participants then reviewed current state-based efforts to encourage, and in some cases require, civic and voter engagement at the postsecondary level. The review included both legislative and non-legislative efforts across both red and blue states. With this high-level review in mind, participants were then invited to reflect in small groups on these two questions:

> Q1: In listening to the landscape, what stood out to you about the various efforts happening around the country?, and
>
> Q2: What kinds of civic education and voter engagement efforts could be viewed as trusted and nonpartisan by leaders across the ideological spectrum? Participants were again encouraged to take notes in their breakout rooms.

After 20 minutes, participants were invited back to the main space to report out about their discussions. Prior to departure, participants were invited to complete a short survey.

The following section outlines key content reviewed and synthesized data from the two breakout conversations, labeled 2.1 and 2.2 respectively.

Breakout Session 2.1 Qualitative Insights

After an introduction and reviewing the high-level findings from the first session, the first breakout meeting of the second session asked participants to discuss the following questions:

- Q1: What challenges could be addressed through stronger partnerships between postsecondary institutions and the Secretary of State or election officials? and,
- Q2: What problems are explicitly outside the scope of this effort?

The next section represents the synthesis of both written notes from the breakout groups in all three convenings, as well as the verbal report-outs from each group.

Q1 Review: What challenges could be addressed through stronger partnerships between postsecondary institutions and Secretary of State or election officials?

Across breakout groups, participants consistently affirmed the promise that stronger partnerships between postsecondary institutions and Secretaries of State or election officials could deliver in addressing a wide range of challenges related to credibility and coordination of civic education and voter engagement efforts. A central theme was the unique role election officials can play as trusted, nonpartisan sources of authority, helping institutions navigate the tension between educational outreach efforts and perceptions of partisanship, by grounding efforts in the rote mechanics and the process of voting. Many discussions highlighted persistent gaps in voter education, access, and clarity for students, particularly registration rules, voting locations, and changing state election laws, which are often exacerbated by limited communication between stakeholders.

Participants also pointed to inefficiencies caused by institutions working in isolation, duplicating materials and efforts that could be streamlined through shared resources and coordinated efforts. Structural challenges such as high turnover among campus staff, lack of dedicated personnel, and uneven institutional commitment further complicate sustained engagement. At the same time, groups identified an opportunity to expand beyond voter registration and turnout toward deeper civic education, skills-building, and career pathways in election administration and public service. Ultimately, participants underscored that more proactive, consistent, and institutionalized partnerships could reduce barriers to voting, combat misinformation, improve access across campus types, and strengthen both civic capacity and institutional legitimacy.

The following offers to categorize ideas shared in this first breakout of the second session, and to list core challenges discussed and what strengthened partnerships between postsecondary institutions and Secretaries of State and election officials could produce.

Challenge #1: Credibility, Trust, and Nonpartisanship

Institutions face real and perceived risks when engaging in civic work, namely:

- Perception that campus civic engagement is "left-leaning" or partisan
- Difficulty separating political engagement from partisanship
- Institutional hesitancy due to political pressures or scrutiny
- Need for trusted, authoritative voices to validate programming

Opportunity: Election officials can serve as trusted, nonpartisan partners, helping campuses confidently engage students while maintaining neutrality.

Challenge #2: Voter Education and Information Gaps

Students deserve clarity on voting processes, requirements, and timelines. Furthermore, the rise of misinformation underscores the need for authoritative, timely communication. Misinformation is essentially a failure of trusted, accessible information. Specifically, students lack understanding in:

- How elections work (mechanics, processes)
- Where to vote (home vs. campus, mail, polling location)
- How to register to vote and how to look up what will be on their ballot
- Key dates, deadlines, and requirements
- Clear, digestible, student-centered materials
- Rapidly changing election laws
- Civic education beyond voting (e.g., systems, structures, impact of participation)

Opportunity: Co-developed, vetted information and content to support ongoing education.

Challenge #3: Access and Structural Barriers to Voting

Structural barriers such as polling site availability, ID requirements, and registration complexities can negatively impact youth participation in voting specifically. Collaboration can improve policy awareness and understanding of civic duty. Specific items officials and college/university leader can most closely collaborate on to address:

- Confusion about voter registration status and eligibility
- Challenges getting to a polling location
- Different laws around IDs, including use of student ID as a valid identification
- Uneven access across institution types (especially community colleges)

Opportunity: Clearer guidance and collaboration on access solutions.

Challenge #4: Coordination, Efficiency, and Redundancy

Decentralized efforts lead to duplicated work and missed opportunities for scale. Specifically, participants outlined the following items that could be addressed through stronger partnerships:

- Campuses duplicating efforts and "reinventing the wheel"
- Lack of data sharing (e.g., registration, turnout insights)
- Inefficiencies in decentralized, institution-by-institution approaches

Opportunity: Shared resources, standardized materials, and coordinated campaigns.

Challenge #5: Relationship-Building and Institutional Infrastructure

Partnerships often depend on individuals rather than systems. Turnover disrupts continuity. Key points that greater collaboration could counter include:

- Lack of clear points of contact within institutions or election offices
- Inconsistent, proactive outreach from election officials

Opportunity: Institutionalized programs and services (offices vs. individuals), regular touchpoints, and clearer engagement norms.

Challenge #6: State Context and Policy Variability

Difference in governance structures and political climates require tailored approach. Wide variation in:

- Roles of Secretaries of State vs. election boards
- Laws, policies, and political environments
- Some states more proactive about this work than others
- No one-size-fits-all model for partnership

Opportunity: Effective partnerships must be adaptable to state-specific contexts and constraints.

Challenge #7: Civic Engagement Beyond Voting

There is a need to move from transactional engagement (registration and turnout) to transformational learning that builds civic knowledge, skills, and agency. Overemphasis on voter registration and turnout alone, with limited focus on:

- Civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions
- Understanding the voting system itself

- Systems of accountability and election integrity
- Civic identity and long-term engagement

Opportunity: Expand to holistic civic education and capacity-building

Challenge #8: Student Engagement and Culture

Because this work is often not institution-wide or institutionalized on campuses (living in a single office or center), civic participation is not engrained into campus life. This leads to:

- Students unaware of election timing or processes
- Civic engagement often siloed in partisan student groups
- Need to make engagement more accessible and appealing (e.g., events, competitions, etc.)

Opportunity: Normalize and socialize civic participation through campus culture and programming.

Challenge #9: Workforce Development and Civic Pathways

Connecting students to careers in election administration and public service remains an underdeveloped strategy in both civic engagement and postsecondary education. Specifically, participants indicated:

- Students maintain limited awareness of careers in election administration
- Underutilized opportunities: Poll worker recruitment & internship programs

Opportunity: Create pathways into public service and election-related careers.

Challenge #10: Resources, Staffing, and Sustainability

Limited staffing, funding, and institutional prioritization hinder sustained efforts. Specific items participants discussed included:

- Insufficient staffing in both campuses and election offices
- Civic engagement roles often added onto existing jobs
- Lack of sustained funding or institutional commitment
- Work often driven by passion rather than structure

Opportunity: Collaboration creates efficiencies and innovative approaches to sustain the work.

Challenge #11: Uneven Opportunity by Institution Type

Community colleges and less-resourced institutions face greater barriers to supporting civic engagement and education efforts. Accordingly, students attending community colleges receive less access to partnerships, tools, and national initiatives than student counterparts at better resourced institutions.

Opportunity: Targeted support to expand access and reach.

Challenge #12: Data, Accountability, and Visibility

Limited transparency and data-sharing obscure what is working, namely:

- Data exists but is not always accessible or actionable
- Lack of accountability for providing voter information to students

Opportunity: Better reporting and transparency.

Q2 Review: What problems are explicitly outside the scope of this effort?

Participants digging into this second question were again encouraged to consider the stated or assumed boundaries of the project, namely:

- Aimed at exploring the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and other election officials to advance trusted nonpartisan civic education and voter engagement.
- Nonpartisan. Widely accepted by leaders across the ideological spectrum as such, or at a minimum, viewed as a balanced approach.
- Postsecondary education: FULL spectrum of higher education (2-year, 4-year, regional, public/private, grad, online, adult learners)

Keeping those boundaries in mind, participants discussed what problems were or should be explicitly outside the scope of this convening's recommendations.

A synthesized summary of this data included:

Across breakout discussions, participants generally found it challenging to clearly define what falls outside the scope, noting the inherently broad and interconnected nature of civic engagement work. That said, there was strong alignment around several additional frames or boundaries.

- Most notably, participants emphasized that this effort should remain strictly nonpartisan, excluding any advocacy related to parties, candidates, or "who to vote for," as well as broader efforts to address systemic political polarization or perceptions of higher education bias.
- There was also consensus that structural issues beyond the control of Secretaries of State or higher education institutions, such as legislative decision-making, voting rights policy, funding constraints, and state or local election system variability, fall outside the scope.
- Additionally, participants cautioned against duplicating existing research or prescribing rigid, one-size-fits-all partnership models, instead favoring flexible frameworks that can be adapted locally.
- Finally, several groups noted that broader institutional questions, such as defining the value proposition of higher education, determining where civic engagement "lives" on campus, or ensuring information reaches all students, extend beyond the boundaries of this work, which should remain focused on building civic capacity through practical, nonpartisan collaboration.

Categorized List of "Out of Scope" Areas

Throughout the breakout groups, participants discussed key items they felt should fall explicitly outside of the scope of collaboration between state election officials and postsecondary leaders.

1. Partisan Advocacy and Political Positioning: This effort should remain strictly nonpartisan and avoid any engagement in candidate, party, or ideological advocacy.

- Avoid supporting or promoting specific candidates, parties, or political agendas
- No activity encouraging engagement in partisan or party-aligned advocacy
- Addressing perceptions that higher education is politically biased
- Attempting to solve broader political polarization or partisan divides

2. Legislative and Structural Policy Issues: Changes to voting laws, policies, and structural election rules fall outside the influence of this effort and its primary actors.

- Influencing or changing state or federal legislation
- Broader voting rights policy debates
- Rules set by legislatures that constrain Secretaries of State
- Structural decisions about voter ID policies or access (e.g., student ID eligibility)
- Variability in state and local election systems that cannot be controlled

3. Funding and Resource Constraints: Broader funding challenges and resource limitations were acknowledged, but participants agreed that the issues are not directly solvable within this initiative.

- Funding levels for Boards of Elections or Secretary of State offices
- Broader higher education funding issues for civic and voter engagement
- Resource limitations that affect implementation (e.g., staffing, marketing capacity)
- Incentive structures for participation that are outside direct control

4. Institutional Autonomy and Internal Higher Ed Questions: Decisions about how institutions organize, prioritize, and implement civic engagement work should remain institution-specific, and should not be a priority for this effort to solve.

- Determining where civic engagement "lives" within an institution
- Making the broader case for the value of higher education
- Dictating how institutions must structure partnerships
- Enforcing faculty participation or guaranteeing adoption of resources
- Ensuring information reaches all students

5. Broader Civic and Cultural Challenges: Deep-rooted societal dynamics shaping civic behavior and trust extend beyond the scope of this effort.

- Addressing misinformation ecosystems or where individuals choose to get information
- Fixing long-term declines in trust in institutions
- Reversing the impacts of echo chambers

6. Scope Beyond Elections-Focused Civic Engagement: Participants indicated that this specific collaboration between state election officials and postsecondary education should not necessarily encompass civic engagement activity far beyond election-related participation.

- Not responsible for defining or solving the full scope of civic education
- Not expanding into all forms of civic engagement (e.g., protest, activism especially)
- Taking on broader community or societal civic health challenges

7. Redundant Work and Overly Prescribed: The focus should be on leveraging existing knowledge and enabling flexible approaches rather than recreating or over-defining solutions.

- Avoid recreating existing research, toolkits, or frameworks
- Do not develop rigid, one-size-fits-all partnership models
- Offer adaptable frameworks

8. Factors Outside Direct Control of the Partnership: Some variables that influence success are inherently unpredictable or beyond the control of participating organizations.

- Whether individuals choose to trust or use provided information
- Discrepancies between state and local election information sources
- Whether partnerships succeed in practice (“best laid plans” challenges)
- External political climate or lack of state support for civic engagement

Landscape of Postsecondary Civic and Voter Legislation

Just prior to the second breakout session, participants reviewed a high-level landscape of civic education and voter engagement efforts at a national level across dozens of states. This included a review of both legislative as well as nonlegislative efforts. The purpose of this presentation was to attempt to help participants understand some of the key efforts happening across the country, that may specifically intersect with this project. While comprehensive, this review does not likely encompass all state-based laws and programs.

Federal Requirements

The primary federal and legal elements provide the highest-level guidance to colleges and universities:

- The reauthorization of the 1998 Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1094(a)(23), specifically Title IV, requires all colleges and universities to "make a good faith effort" (Sec. 162) in promotion of student voter registration.
- Bound by legal restrictions regarding political activity and maintaining nonpartisan approach (Internal Revenue Service [IRS], 2025).

Federal Guidance, Executive Orders, and Department of Education Grants

The two most recent U.S. presidential administrations issued Executive Orders and directed the Department of Education:

Executive Order 14019: Promoting Access to Voting
Signed: March 7, 2021 by President Biden

This executive order directed federal agencies to:

- Expand access to voter registration and election information.
- Develop strategic plans to promote voter registration among eligible citizens who interact with federal agencies.
- Support civic participation by improving access to voting information for students, service members, veterans, people with disabilities, Native communities, and others.
- Encourage agencies, where appropriate, to partner with colleges and universities on voter registration and civic engagement efforts.

Executive Order 14148: Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions
Signed: January 20, 2025 by President Trump

This order revoked dozens of Biden executive orders, including Executive Order 14019 (Promoting Access to Voting). It did not establish a replacement policy on student voting; rather, it rescinded the federal directive that agencies promote voter registration and voting access.

Additional higher education actions under President Trump:

Following the rescission of EO 14019, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance affecting campus voting initiatives:

U.S. Department of Education Prohibits Federal Funds from Supporting Political Activism on College Campuses
Issued: August 19, 2025

Among other changes, the Department:

- Rescinded Biden-era guidance permitting certain Federal Work-Study positions related to voter engagement.
- Clarified that Federal Work-Study funds should not support political activities.
- Issued guidance regarding distribution of voter registration forms on campus.

American History and Civics-National Activities Grants (84.422B)
Operated through the Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), this grant program was first established in 2017. In 2025, the Trump administration greatly expanded the funding available and number of awards.

- The grant program is designed to promote:

"new and existing evidence-based strategies to encourage innovative American history, civics and government, and geography instruction, learning strategies, and professional development activities and programs for teachers, principals, or other school leaders, particularly such instruction, strategies, activities, and programs that benefit low-income students and underserved populations."

State-Based Laws Focused on Civic and Voter Engagement

Assembly Bill (AB) 963: California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act

California passed the first state-based law that established several requirements for public colleges and universities related to civic and voter engagement. AB 963: California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (2019) requires each campus of the California Community Colleges and the California State University, and requests each campus of the University of California:

- to designate one person per campus as the Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinator with specified responsibilities, including developing a Civic and Voter Empowerment Action Plan
- to organize at least three events each year, one at least 30 days prior to state-wide election
- to distribute campus-wide emails to students with specific nonpartisan election information
- to incorporate important dates in the academic calendar
- to post social media reminders with nonpartisan voter-related information

Key Resources on the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act

- Bill Text
- Requirements from SOS Office
- Research on AB 963 (2019)

Maryland – Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act

This Maryland law strengthens voter registration access for college students and military-connected voters by requiring institutions to actively facilitate registration and ballot access. It typically mandates that campuses provide voter registration materials, assist with absentee ballot processes for military voters, and coordinate with election officials to reduce administrative barriers. The overall intent is to ensure students and service members can easily register and vote regardless of mobility or residence constraints.

- Link to bill

Minnesota Elections and Voter Outreach Laws for Postsecondary Institutions (2023)

The 2023 Minnesota reforms require postsecondary institutions to actively provide voter registration opportunities and materials to students on a regular basis, including electronic distribution in certain cases. The broader 2023 elections law also expands access through measures like pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds and steps toward automatic voter

registration through state agencies and services. Together, these changes aim to embed voter engagement and registration into routine student interactions with state and campus systems.

- 7 requirements passed into law in 2023

North Carolina House Bill 1115 "Let North Carolina Vote Act" (2017)

- Bill text
- Proposed provisions, such as automatic voter registration offered for college students.
- NOTE: Bill did not pass into law

State Laws Encouraging Polling Locations at Colleges

- NCLS: Five states (California, Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota and Wyoming) require or encourage polling places to be located on university or college campuses, even during mostly mail elections.

- Two additional laws in place that relate to the topic of polling locations:
    - Minnesota HF3447 enables county auditors to place additional polling sites on campus upon request.
    - 2021 New York Senate Bill S4658 - Mandates polling places on campuses that have dorms and at least 300 registered voters

State Laws Related to Civic Education Requirements

According to InsideHigherEd, eight states (Arizona, Florida, Ohio, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Utah) established civics units at 13 different public university campuses. The following sections outlines assorted state-based efforts related to civic centers and civic education requirements.

Florida Statute on Civic Literacy (2018)

- Overview
- The 2017 Florida Legislature amended Section 1007.25, Florida Statutes, to require students initially entering a Florida College System or State University System Institution in 2018-19 and thereafter to complete a course ***or*** an assessment to demonstrate competency in civic literacy.
- In 2021, the Florida Legislature amended Section 1007.25, Florida Statutes, to require students initially entering a Florida College System or State University System institution in 2021-22 and thereafter to complete a course ***and*** an assessment to demonstrate competency in civic literacy.

Ohio Senate Bill 1 (2025) “Advance Ohio Higher Education Act”

- Legislation landing page
- “Each state institution of higher education shall develop a course with no fewer than three credit hours in the subject area of American civic literacy” (p. 15).

Center for Civic Excellence at Utah State University (2025)

- Legislation landing page
- Established a Center and associated governance measures.
- “Requires a report to the Utah Board of Higher Education to consider system-wide changes to general education.”

Texas Senate Bill 37 (2025)

- Legislation landing page
- Relating to the governance of public institutions of higher education, including review of curriculum and certain degree and certificate programs, a faculty council or senate, training for members of the governing board, and the establishment, powers, and duties of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Office of the Ombudsman. Specifically, governing boards must ensure that general education, is "necessary to prepare students for civic and professional life." The bill did not specify or define civic education.

Idaho House Bill 397

- Bill text
- Legislation landing page
- This bill amends Idaho's existing education law to enhance and clarify civics instruction requirements in elementary and secondary schools.

State Higher Education System Policies and Efforts

Multi-State Collaborative for College Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement
About the MSC
According to their website, the MSC is composed of states in which higher education system leaders affirm that:

- public higher education has a civic mission, and part of that civic mission is preparing students for active, effective, informed participation in civic and democratic life;
- some intentional form of civic education should be part of the learning experience of all degree and certificate seeking students in their system—even if that is not the case now and may take some time to achieve;
- joining a learning community with other states that share these values and goals means helping each other develop ways of pursuing them while honoring what is appropriate and feasible within the context of each state.

The following state systems are associated with the MSC and high-level descriptions of the system's unique efforts are found on the About MSC webpage.

- The Arizona Board of Regents
- The University of Hawai'i System
- The Kansas Board of Regents
- The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE)
- The University of Maine System
- The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC)
- The University System of Maryland (USM)
- The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE)
- The Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development
- The New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE)
- The City University of New York (CUNY)
- The State University of New York (SUNY)
- The Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE)
- The Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC)
- The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE)
- The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC)
- The Utah Board of Higher Education (USHE)
- The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV)
- The University of Wisconsin System

Promising Practices in State Election Offices

There are several state election offices leading civic and voter engagement work, worthy of highlighting as promising practices. Perhaps most notably, these efforts happen in Republican and Democratic controlled states. Taken collectively, these programs and initiatives show promise.

Arizona: Arizona ALL IN Campus Voting Challenge

- About
- In partnership with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, Arizona has hosted a campus voting challenge for colleges and universities in the state.

Arkansas: Young Voters Workshop

- About
- Through traveling classroom presentations, workshops and guided tours of the Arkansas State Capitol, the Secretary of State's Education department teaches the young and young-at-heart about Arkansas history, the importance of voting and how elections are conducted throughout the state.

California: California Secretary of State Students Vote Project

- About
- The entity charged with overseeing the administration of A.B. 963, this unit offers support to help colleges and universities fulfill the requirements of the law and so many other elements beyond the law too. Under the direction of California Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., the SVP program puts on educational efforts for Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinators, issues guidance and best practices, oversees a state voting challenge, and more.

Georgia**:** Student Ambassador Program (high school students)

- About
- The Georgia Secretary of State's office launched the Student Ambassador Program in January 2016 to provide Georgia's high school students with an opportunity to engage as leaders within their schools and communities. Through the program, students engage in Georgia civics, encouraging voter registration among their peers and volunteering within their communities. The Secretary of State's office has already partnered with over 150 high schools all across Georgia.

Iowa: Catt Collegiate Challenge

- About
- The Catt Collegiate Challenge is a statewide initiative empowering Iowa's postsecondary institution to integrate civic learning and voter engagement into the core of campus life. Through access to specialized resources, actionable data, and a collaborative statewide network, the Challenge supports campuses in equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to become active participants.

Kentucky: Several Civic Education Initiatives (k-12 focus)

- Kentucky's Secretary of State has a long history of supporting civic education initiatives, such as the Civic Seal, Health Assessment, and more!
- The Civic Seal and State Civic Health assessment are just two extraordinary examples. They are not postsecondary-focused programs, but the concepts could certainly be extended.

Maryland: Student Civic Engagement Ambassador Program (SCEAP)

- About
- The program is designed to encourage student engagement in Maryland civics, promote voter registration and poll worker recruitment among their peers, as well as highlighting other civic volunteer opportunities in their communities.

Michigan: Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force & Voting Challenge

- About
- Founded in 2019, the Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force is a body of current students appointed by the Michigan Secretary of State who aim to improve youth voter engagement and civic participation at higher education institutions in Michigan.
- Michigan also operates the Michigan Campus Voting Challenge, a statewide competition administered by the Secretary of State in partnership with ALL IN.

Mississippi: Secretary of State's Student Ambassador Program

- About
- Through the program, students with a passion for leadership and state government are equipped to return to their schools as proponents of voter education and awareness.

New Jersey: Ballot Bowl

- About
- In partnership with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, NJ Department of State hosts a campus voting challenge for colleges and universities in the state.

Ohio: Civic Engagement Efforts

- About
- Grads Vote program, a civic engagement initiative designed to assist high school seniors with learning how to become active in Ohio's election process.
- The Grads Vote program also encourages high school juniors and seniors to become Election Day poll workers as part of the Youth at the Booth program.

Tennessee: Civic Education and Engagement

- About
- Tennessee's Secretary of State maintains one of the most comprehensive civic programs administered at the state level.
- The focus leans heavily toward K-12, including statewide civics resources, Constitution Week programming, teacher materials, and more.

Vermont: Vermont Campus Voting Challenge

- About
- Vermont maintains several programmatic efforts to encourage postsecondary civic and voter engagement efforts.
- Specifically, Vermont supports a statewide voting challenge, celebrates civic holidays, and provides tailored information to colleges and universities.

Washington: Civic Engagement Program (CEP)

- About
- The Civic Engagement Program (CEP) leads the Office of the Secretary of State's effort to develop strategies and implement resources and programs to ensure that all Washingtonians have access to, interest in, and ability to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. Open to all Washingtonians, but there's an element of the CEP for youth.

NOTE: The elections are notably administered differently from state-to-state. This link, NCSL Election Administration at State and Local Levels, offers a concise way of understanding the differences.

Breakout Session 2.2 Qualitative Insights

Just prior to the second breakout session, participants reviewed a high-level landscape of civic education and voter engagement efforts at a national level across dozens of states. This included both legislative as well as nonlegislative efforts.

The second breakout meeting of the session the asked participants to discuss the following questions:

- Q1: In listening to the landscape, what stood out to you about the various efforts happening around the country?
- Q2: What kinds of civic education and voter engagement efforts could be viewed as trusted and nonpartisan by leaders across the ideological spectrum?

The following section synthesizes the notes and report outs for small group meetings related to these two questions.

Q1 Review:

In listening to the landscape, what stood out to you about the various efforts happening around the country?

Participants were impressed by the seemingly bi-partisan interest in postsecondary efforts. Across the country, however, civic engagement efforts in higher education are notably diverse, uneven, and shaped by local political, cultural, and institutional contexts. States differ in their efforts, with red and blue states often prioritizing distinct aspects of civic education, from institutional instruction to turnout-focused engagement. Many programs emphasize voter participation because it is measurable and seemingly straightforward, but broader facets of democratic citizenship, including community-focused engagement, skill-building, and career pipelines, are increasingly being explored. Effective programs often leverage system-level coordination, dedicated staff, and creative programming, but their impact remains difficult to measure, with limited standardized metrics for civic engagement. Challenges persist around perceived partisanship, limited resources, uneven state participation, and shifting federal priorities.

Groups highlighted the importance of amplifying successful initiatives nationally, fostering collaboration across states, and recognizing a spectrum of civic contributions, acknowledging that engagement looks different for different students and institutions. Partnerships with Secretaries of State offices can help legitimize and scale efforts. Overall,

participants emphasized the need to balance practicality with principle, scale successful models, and address polarization while maintaining trust and inclusivity in civic education.

Q2 Review:

What kinds of civic education and voter engagement efforts could be viewed as trusted and nonpartisan by leaders across the ideological spectrum?

The breakout groups focused on identifying civic education and voter engagement efforts that could be trusted and nonpartisan across ideological lines. Key themes emphasized transparency, neutrality, and skill-building over advocacy. Participants highlighted the importance of educating students and communities about the mechanics of voting, deadlines, and processes, while fostering trust through visible local engagement, poll worker participation, and collaboration with election officials.

Civic engagement was framed not just as knowledge, but as a set of skills and competencies that build leadership, career readiness, and viewpoint diversity. Place-based and local strategies, such as field trips, historical case studies, and leveraging anniversaries like the 250th of the Constitution, were noted as ways to depoliticize civic learning. The groups also stressed the need for digital literacy, deliberative dialogue, and modeling civic skills by faculty and staff.

Challenges included ambiguity around nonpartisanship, shifting perceptions of what is considered neutral, and differences in institutional willingness to engage in civic education. Proposed strategies emphasized coalition-building across nonprofits, institutions, and government offices, institutionalizing civic engagement, and using trusted sources like Secretaries of State for training and lesson plans to reinforce credibility.

Categorized List of Trusted and Nonpartisan Civic Education and Voter Engagement

1. Election Mechanics and Transparency: Educating participants about how elections actually work and making processes visible builds trust and reduces partisan perceptions.

- Educate on voting processes, deadlines, and election mechanics.
- Increase visibility of election officials and poll workers to demystify the process.
- Support local elections as opportunities for nonpartisan engagement.
- Promote transparency in program funding and staffing to build trust.
- Utilize EAC grants to train students and young poll workers.

2. Commitment to Neutrality and Promotion of Trusted Sources: Clearly communicating neutrality and relying on trusted sources helps establish credibility across ideological lines.

- Publish clear nonpartisan statements for programs and institutions.
- Leverage Secretaries of State offices to provide neutral lesson plans and training.
- Collaborate with trusted, bipartisan leaders and speakers.
- Use foundational documents (e.g., Constitution, Bill of Rights) as neutral discussion anchors.

3. Student-Centered Engagement and Skill-Building: Hands-on opportunities and skills development engage students meaningfully while remaining nonpartisan.

- Recruit students for poll work, fellowships, internships, and advisory boards.
- Empower student government to engage collaboratively and responsibly.
- Focus on civic skills and knowledge (digital literacy, deliberative dialogue, leadership development).
- Link civic competencies to career readiness and workforce skills ("civic mobility").

4. Local and Place-Based Strategies: Focusing on local contexts and historical examples makes civic education relatable and less partisan.

- Build town-gown partnerships to contextualize elections and civic participation.
- Conduct field trips to state capitols, election processing centers, or historic civic sites.
- Highlight local narratives, elected officials, and historical figures to make civic education relatable.
- Leverage anniversaries and milestones (e.g., Constitution, Bill of Rights, America's 250th) to unify participation.

5. Coalition-Building and Institutional Alignment: Working collaboratively across organizations amplifies reach and reinforces credibility in nonpartisan work.

- Foster collaboration among higher education institutions, nonprofits, and government offices.
- Align campus efforts under shared goals to avoid partisan perception.
- Establish campus action plans for civic engagement and voter registration.
- Explore regional alliances to amplify nonpartisan initiatives.

6. Inclusive and Perspective-Diverse Civic Learning: Civic education that encourages diverse viewpoints and respectful dialogue strengthens trust and engagement.

- Promote viewpoint diversity in civic education programs.
- Encourage dialogue and communication that is respectful, curiosity-driven, and issue-agnostic.

- Consider how institutions can model civic skills upstream for students and staff.

7. Addressing Challenges in Nonpartisanship: Recognizing and navigating the limits and perceptions of nonpartisanship is essential for designing credible programs.

- Recognize difficulties in defining nonpartisanship versus non-ideological approaches.
- Understand shifting cultural and political perceptions of what is considered neutral.
- Avoid framing civic engagement as advocacy; focus on factual education and participatory opportunities.
- Be aware of institutional hesitancy due to perceived political risks.

Post-Session Survey: In the closing minutes of the session, participants were invited to complete a survey. The survey was then shared in the recap email. 32 out of 70 participants completed the survey, resulting in a **response rate of 46%**.

1. By attending today's session, I gained deeper insight into the ways states, election officials, and educators are advancing civic education and voter engagement:
   a. Strongly Agree - 28% (9)
   b. Agree - 50% (16)
   c. Neutral - 15.6% (5)
   d. Disagree - 3.1% (1)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 3.1% (1)

2. In this second session, the facilitator created an environment where I felt like I could freely express my ideas:
   a. Strongly Agree - 62.5% (20)
   b. Agree - 34.4% (11)
   c. Neutral - 0% (0)
   d. Disagree - 0% (0)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 3.1% (1)

3. In this second session, the attendees have embraced this as a constructive opportunity to come together across differences:

   a. Strongly Agree - 40.6% (13)
   b. Agree - 50% (16)
   c. Neutral - 6.3% (2)
   d. Disagree - 0% (0)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 3.1% (1)

4. Following session 2, I feel optimistic that these convenings will result in something tangible:
   a. Strongly Agree - 25% (8)
   b. Agree - 46.9% (15)
   c. Neutral - 18.8% (6)
   d. Disagree - 6.3% (2)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 3.1% (1)

5. **Write a 3-4 sentence summary of the most important insight or idea you heard or thought of as a result of today's session.**

   Summary of responses:
   A central insight from the session is that advancing civic engagement requires bridging persistent gaps between government entities, higher education, and on-the-ground practitioners through stronger collaboration, clearer communication, and shared understanding. Participants emphasized the importance of distinguishing "political" from "partisan," noting that fear of perceived bias often limits meaningful civic education efforts, and that clearer guidance and visible bipartisan leadership could help legitimize this work.

   At the same time, some participants asserted there is ***no one-size-fits-all solution***, as state contexts, cultures, and policies vary widely, requiring flexible approaches grounded in a common baseline of goals and practices. Ultimately, participants appeared energized about an effort focused on rebuilding trust and improving information sharing.

   Summary of key ideas and promising directions:
   - Decoupling "political" from "partisan" to enable robust civic education without fear
   - Increasing bipartisan leadership and clearer guidance from state and local officials to legitimize and support civic education and voter engagement efforts
   - Investing directly in institutional capacity (e.g., dedicated staff, sustained funding)
   - Expanding focus beyond voter turnout to broader civic knowledge, skills, participation
   - Improving coordination and information sharing across states, Secretary of State offices, and higher education institutions
   - Establishing baseline practices while allowing flexibility for state-specific contexts
   - Prioritizing trust-building and transparency, including clearer communication about goals, roles, and sources of information

6. **As we move into the third and final convening, what ideas do you have for helping us make the most of our last session?**

   Summary of responses:
   Respondents consistently emphasized a desire for the final convening to shift from broad exploration to focused, action-oriented outcomes. There is a wish to build on ideas surfaced in earlier sessions by identifying **practical next steps, clear roles, and tangible commitments**. Some noted that prior discussions felt repetitive or overly diffuse, underscoring the importance of narrowing the scope and structuring conversations around a few priority solutions to stress test and explore trade-offs together. One respondent warned against the tendency to try to fit our work into our own organizational lens, writing, "I felt like some people were focused on explaining what their nonprofit or SoS office already does….rather than finding a way to work together or to uncover problems that could be addressed." This feedback underscored the importance of finding the unique contribution that these convenings will ultimately represent. Finally, multiple participants **emphasized language choice to invite people in** from across the ideological spectrum, not already bought into our work.

7. **Do you have any further comments, suggestions, or concerns regarding the convening facilitation?**

   Summary of responses:
   Participants who responded to this question felt like the first two sessions were well-run, engaging, and valuable, with particular praise for the transparency, warmth, and skilled facilitation in guiding discussion. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to contribute, the quality of the landscape insights shared, and the inclusion of ideologically diverse perspectives.

   At the same time, a few constructive suggestions emerged. Participants, for example, emphasized the importance of clarity on next steps and what comes after the convening, as well as a desire to push conversations further toward **honest dialogue about current challenges and the need for cross-sector collaboration**. Some also noted an opportunity to better **align discussions with the specific needs of partners, particularly state-level stakeholders**, and to ensure conversations are grounded in the current political and operational realities shaping the work.

Session 3 Synthesis:

Exploring the Framework

In the closing weeks of April, attendees from all three tracks (A, B, and C) logged into Zoom for the third and final session of the *Convening to Advance State-Based Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement*. Track A had 18 participants, Track B had 24 participants, and Track C had 22 participants.

The session began by reviewing the original purpose of the convenings:

"The purpose of this virtual convening is to explore ways to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and other election officials to advance trusted nonpartisan civic education and voter engagement."

A quote from the post-session survey from session 2 was displayed to set the tone and to encourage participants to collaborate fully. The quote read:

> "Push people to grapple with where we are, and how essential collaboration is in this moment, not only across institutional types and partisan differences, but across higher ed, non-profits, and SOS. We all have different professional priorities based on promoting/defending our type of institution/organization. Let's set those territorial agendas aside, so that we can work together more productively."

We then reviewed the major activities of the first two sessions to help participants understand the arch of our discussions. We then situated this third session in the broader framework used to design the convenings, the Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016).

We then reviewed a summative problem statement developed using key takeaways from the first two sessions:

> "Young people are coming of age amid intense political polarization and declining trust in democracy. Leaders across the ideological spectrum are growing concerned about the future civic health of our communities.
>
> Postsecondary institutions and election officials both play a role in preparing the next generation of leaders for life in a thriving democracy, but efforts are fragmented, under-resourced, and often constrained by concerns about perceived partisanship.
>
> This lack of coordination results in inconsistent access to accurate information, uneven civic learning opportunities for students, and missed opportunities to build trust in democratic processes. Without clearer partnerships, shared guidance, and sustainable infrastructure, civic education and voter engagement efforts will remain limited in reach, credibility, and impact."

Finally, the facilitator verbally previewed an initial prototype entitled, "A Framework for Advancing State-Based Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement." The framework was developed using the discussions from sessions 1 and 2 with the stated goal: "To strengthen state-based coordination between postsecondary institutions and election officials to advance trusted, nonpartisan civic education, expand student access to accurate information and participation pathways, and establish adaptable, promising practices across diverse state contexts."

The top-level recommendation of the framework is to establish a sustained, state-specific network between postsecondary institutions and election officials, anchored by both campus "Civic Champions" (staff/faculty) and a Student Advisory Board or Leadership Council. This network would be encouraged to collaborate across four different workstreams:

(1) Trusted State-Based Election Information & Nonpartisan Guidance,

(2) Institutional Capacity Building & Training,

(3) Student Civic Leadership & Pathways

(4) Local Civic Learning & Community Engagement.

The majority of our time in session 3 was spent using the prototype to fuel discussion about ways to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and other election officials. The following section synthesizes feedback to the initial prototype framework and qualitative insights from session 3.

Initial Prototype Framework

Using the discussions from the first two sessions, and pulling in relevant guidance from the environmental scan, I developed an initial prototype framework (linked here). The purpose of sharing this framework was to use the bulk of session 3 to reflect on the prototype and to use it as a tool for further sharpening of ideas.

Breakout Session 3.1 Qualitative Insights

After introducing the prototype framework, the first breakout meeting of the session asked participants to discuss the following questions:

- Q1- Outcomes: If this prototype was fully implemented in your state, what would be visibly different for students, institutions, or election officials within 2–3 years, and how would we know it's working?
- Q2- Tradeoffs: What would we have to be willing to deprioritize, simplify, or give up for this to be sustainable and trusted across very different ideological, state, and institutional contexts?

The next section represents the synthesis of both written notes from the breakout groups in all three convenings, as well as the verbal report-outs from each group.

Q1 Review:

Outcomes: If this prototype was fully implemented in your state, what would be visibly different for students, institutions, or election officials within 2–3 years, and how would we know it's working?

Several themes centered the imagined results of an implemented project like this:

1. Institutionalization and Statewide Buy-In

Participants consistently described success as moving civic engagement work from isolated or volunteer-driven efforts into formalized, durable institutional structures. Many emphasized that long-term success would require visible support from Secretaries of State, Governors' offices, university systems, and senior campus leadership.

Indicators of success included:

- Formal state partnerships with campuses
- Dedicated campus and state staff positions
- Civic engagement embedded into campus strategic plans and job descriptions
- Statewide adoption across institution types, including community colleges and smaller campuses
- Public endorsement from Governors or statewide systems
- Broad participation beyond "usual suspect" states and institutions

There was consensus that legitimacy matters. Participants repeatedly noted that without visible support from state leadership, initiatives risk being viewed as performative, partisan, or temporary.

2. Stronger Relationships Between Campuses and Election Officials

A major aspiration was the creation of sustained, trust-based relationships between higher education institutions and election officials, especially in states where little communication currently exists.

Participants envisioned:

- Regular communication between campuses and election offices
- Clear state points of contact for higher education
- Collaborative problem-solving around student voting barriers
- Shared infrastructure for election information dissemination
- Cross-campus and cross-sector coalitions

Many participants viewed relationship-building itself as a key outcome, not simply a means to increase turnout. Several noted that regular engagement could reduce

recurring student voting problems such as long lines, confusion around registration, or inconsistent access to election information.

3. Expansion and Professionalization of Civic Infrastructure
Participants emphasized that civic engagement work is currently uneven, under-resourced, and often dependent on informal labor. Success would require building sustainable infrastructure and professional capacity.

Desired changes included:

- Paid campus civic champions or coordinators
- Dedicated staffing within Secretary of State offices
- Professional support systems and implementation resources
- Toolkits, action plans, and statewide frameworks
- Networks for sharing promising practices
- Reduced reliance on student turnover cycles

A recurring concern was that many institutions already face staffing and resource constraints. Participants repeatedly stressed that "commitment without currency is counterfeit," underscoring the need for sustained funding.

4. Student Civic Identity, Leadership, and Participation
Participants envisioned a stronger culture of civic participation among students. Outcomes extended beyond voter turnout alone and included broader forms of democratic engagement and leadership development.

Indicators of success included:

- Increased student voter registration and turnout
- Greater civic agency
- More engagement in local civic activities
- Students serving as poll workers or civic leaders
- Civic engagement credentials, transcript recognition, or pathways into public service
- Students participating in statewide advisory boards or coalitions

Several participants emphasized that students need opportunities to see civic participation as meaningful, accessible, and connected to their lived experiences rather than dominated by national partisan conflict.

5. Accurate, Nonpartisan Election Information
Participants consistently identified trusted, nonpartisan election information as a critical role for state election officials and campus partnerships.

Desired outcomes included:

- Faster and more accurate dissemination of election information
- Increased student trust in election processes
- Clear guidance amid misinformation, AI-generated content, and political polarization
- Greater emphasis on voter education fundamentals rather than partisan rhetoric

Participants frequently framed Secretaries of State as uniquely positioned to serve as reliable, nonpartisan civic information sources.

Key Considerations from Q1 Discussion:

Measurement and Ambiguity Around Success Metrics

A major tension emerged around what exactly the initiative is intended to accomplish and therefore how success should be measured.

Participants debated whether the primary goal is:
Increasing student voter participation, OR
Strengthening relationships and infrastructure between higher education and election systems

This distinction shaped conversations about evaluation. Suggested metrics included:

- NSLVE participation and turnout data
- Voter registration rates
- Civic identity and civic agency measures
- Participation in civic programming
- Cross-campus collaboration indicators
- Reduced Election Day barriers and confusion
- Statewide participation and institutional adoption

Participants acknowledged that relationship-building and culture change are more difficult to quantify than turnout metrics.

Flexibility Across Institutional and Political Contexts

Participants repeatedly emphasized that implementation must accommodate major differences across states, institution types, and political environments.

Key concerns included:

- Avoiding exclusion of smaller or under-resourced institutions
- Adapting to different governance structures

- Addressing varying campus capacities
- Navigating highly polarized political environments
- Balancing statewide consistency with local flexibility

Many participants stressed the importance of adaptable frameworks with shared non-negotiables rather than rigid compliance models.

Q2 Review:

Tradeoffs: What would we have to be willing to deprioritize, simplify, or give up for this to be sustainable and trusted across very different ideological, state, and institutional contexts?

The following themes were formed in response to discussions about tradeoffs:

1. Navigating Partisanship and Public Perception

The most dominant theme across discussions was concern about perceptions of partisanship.

Participants repeatedly noted:

- Student voter engagement is increasingly viewed as politically partisan
- Secretaries of State can also be perceived as partisan actors
- Civic engagement work can trigger institutional fear or concern
- Public trust depends heavily on nonpartisan framing and implementation

Participants emphasized that:

- Processes must be visibly fair and bipartisan
- Efforts should focus on the act of voting rather than electoral outcomes
- Messaging must emphasize civic participation fundamentals
- Organizations may need to deprioritize wedge issues to preserve broad coalitions

Many described this as a central tension threatening sustainability.

2. Clarifying the Boundary Between Civic Education and Voter Engagement

One of the strongest philosophical tensions centered on whether civic education and voter engagement should remain linked within the initiative.

Some participants argued:

- Civic education naturally includes political issues, power, and democratic participation

- Students need historical and political context to engage meaningfully

Others worried that:

- Combining civic education with election official partnerships creates political risk
- Election officials are not experts in civic education
- Discussions of contentious issues could undermine trust and bipartisan support

Several participants suggested narrowing or clarifying the initiative's scope to focus primarily on nonpartisan voter engagement infrastructure.

3. Capacity, Labor, and Sustainability

Participants consistently highlighted concerns about labor burden and implementation capacity. Common concerns included:

- Initiative fatigue
- Over-reliance on one "champion"
- Adding responsibilities to already overextended staff
- Resource disparities across campuses

Many stressed that sustainability would require:

- Dedicated funding
- Compensation for civic champions
- Shared ownership across institutions
- Distributed leadership models rather than single-point dependency

Participants also worried that state-level coordination responsibilities could pull campus leaders away from direct student engagement.

4. Compliance vs. Voluntary Engagement

Participants expressed concern that overly prescriptive or compliance-oriented approaches could reduce trust, creativity, and buy-in.

Key tensions included:

- Mandates versus incentives
- Checklist compliance versus culture change
- Encouragement versus enforcement
- Standardization versus local flexibility

Many advocated for:

- Adaptable frameworks

- Shared principles and non-negotiables
- Coalition-building approaches
- Leveraging existing networks rather than creating parallel systems

5. Funding and Resource Tradeoffs

Funding emerged as both a practical and philosophical tradeoff. Participants questioned:

- Who pays for implementation?
- What existing priorities lose funding or attention?
- Whether institutions will perceive this as an unfunded mandate

There was widespread agreement that without meaningful financial investment, the initiative risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

6. Structural and Cultural Change

Participants recognized that implementation would require shifts in institutional culture and longstanding practices. This included:

- Letting go of siloed approaches
- Challenging institutional traditions
- Building cross-sector collaboration
- Embedding civic engagement into broader campus culture
- Moving from episodic programming to sustained systems

Several participants emphasized that the ultimate goal is not simply adding programming but creating durable cultural change around democratic participation.

Cross-Cutting Themes in the 3.1 Breakouts

1. ***Trust as the Central Variable***

   Whether discussing election officials, campuses, students, or the public, participants repeatedly returned to questions of trust:

   - Trust in institutions
   - Trust in nonpartisanship
   - Trust in election information
   - Trust across ideological divides

2. ***Sustainability Requires Infrastructure***

   Participants strongly agreed that volunteer-driven or symbolic approaches are insufficient. Long-term success requires:

   - Staffing

- Funding
- Formal structures
- Leadership buy-in
- Institutional ownership

3. Ongoing Tension Between Ambition and Practicality

Participants were energized by the potential of the initiative, but repeatedly wrestled with:

- Scope
- Capacity
- Political feasibility
- Measurement challenges
- Competing definitions of success

4. The Initiative Is Both Technical and Cultural

Participants framed the initiative as not only operational, but cultural and relational in nature. The discussion moved beyond voter registration mechanics into broader questions of:

- Civic culture
- Democratic norms
- Public legitimacy
- Institutional responsibility

Breakout Session 3.2 Qualitative Insights

The second breakout meeting of the session asked participants to discuss the following questions:

Q1: Would you adopt this as is, adapt it, or not move forward? Why?
Q2: What's the most important change needed to strengthen it?

The following section synthesizes the notes and report-outs for small group meetings related to these two questions.

Summary from Breakout Session 3.2

Participants broadly viewed the prototype as promising, ambitious, and potentially impactful, but not yet ready for adoption "as is." **The dominant sentiment favored adapting and narrowing the framework rather than abandoning it.** Across groups, participants consistently emphasized the need for clearer goals, stronger operational design, sustainable ownership structures, and a more targeted scope.

The discussion revealed a central tension: participants strongly supported the vision of strengthening civic learning and institutional-election official partnerships, but **worried the framework currently attempts to solve too many problems simultaneously**. Concerns centered on sustainability, institutional capacity, political risk, duplication with existing efforts, and whether the initiative's primary purpose is civic engagement, civic education, relationship-building, or systems change.

Participants repeatedly emphasized four priorities:

- Clarify the initiative's core purpose and theory of change.
- Build from existing infrastructure rather than creating parallel systems.
- Pilot narrowly and intentionally before scaling.
- Institutionalize leadership and support structures so the work survives turnover and political change.

At the same time, participants identified significant opportunities:

- Deepening nonpartisan civic learning
- Strengthening campus-election official relationships
- Expanding civic engagement beyond voter registration
- Centering student leadership
- Reaching underserved institutions, especially community colleges
- Creating durable state-level civic ecosystems

Key Themes from Discussion

1. Strong Support for the Vision, But Significant Concern About Scope
The most consistent theme was that participants liked the overall concept but felt the framework was too expansive and operationally overwhelming in its current form.

Key Insights

- The framework was described as "very detailed," "robust," and "comprehensive," but also potentially "onerous."
- Many participants felt it was trying to address too many goals at once:
    - Civic education
    - Voter registration
    - Institutional partnerships
    - Cultural change
    - Community engagement
    - Statewide coalition building
- Multiple groups recommended narrowing the intervention or phasing implementation.

Representative Perspectives

- "Pick a lane."
- "This prototype seems to be trying to address all of the things all at once."
- "There are a lot of things being proposed simultaneously."
- "Maybe this should be a phased rollout."

Emerging recommendation:

- Focus initially on 1–2 workstreams
- Create tiered engagement models ("Level 1, Level 2, Level 3")
- Treat the pilot as a learning and research initiative rather than a full-scale implementation

2. Sustainability and Institutionalization Are Critical
Participants consistently emphasized that the greatest threat to success is turnover, both within higher education and government.

Key Concerns

- Secretary of State offices change leadership frequently.
- Campus champions often leave positions or are unpaid.
- Programs disappear when presidents, deans, or administrators change.
- Reliance on one passionate individual is fragile and unsustainable.

Repeated Ideas

- Institutionalize the work across departments and systems.
- Embed civic engagement into offices rather than individuals.
- Develop campus-wide ownership structures.
- Identify stable backbone organizations at the state level.

Specific Suggestions

- Use multiple campus champions rather than one.
- House the work within existing structures (government affairs, civic offices, student affairs, etc.).
- Create state-level coordinating entities or partnerships.
- Secure multi-year external funding.

Core Tension

- Participants believed executive-level buy-in matters enormously, but also noted that presidential support alone is insufficient because leadership changes frequently.

3. Avoid Reinventing the Wheel

One of the strongest and most repeated themes was concern about duplication.

Existing Organizations Mentioned

- Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV)
- ALL IN
- Campus Compact
- NASPA
- Andrew Goodman Foundation
- League of Women Voters
- National Conference on Citizenship

Key Concern

Participants worry about creating a "CLDE industrial complex" with overlapping networks, initiatives, and coalitions competing for limited institutional capacity.

Central Questions Raised

- What is the distinct value proposition?
- Why create a new structure instead of expanding existing ones?
- Could Secretaries of State simply be integrated into existing civic engagement coalitions?

Emerging Consensus

The initiative should:

- Build atop existing infrastructure

- Coordinate rather than compete
- Fill clear gaps rather than replicate services

4. Civic Education vs. Voter Engagement Remains Unresolved
A major conceptual tension emerged around whether the initiative is primarily:

- A voter engagement effort
- A voter education campaign
- A civic education initiative
- A democracy-strengthening project
- A relationship-building initiative

Notable Perspectives

- Civic education may belong primarily in K–12.
- Colleges may be better positioned for voter participation and engagement.
- Secretaries of State can engage around voting processes, but not issue advocacy.
- Civic engagement tied to issues can easily be perceived as partisan.

Participants generally supported:

- Expanding the initiative to include activities/education beyond voter registration
- Helping students understand institutions and systems
- Promotion of civic activities like poll working
- Purposeful opportunities to engage in constructive conversation across differences

5. Political Risk and Perceptions of Partisanship Are Major Barriers
Participants repeatedly noted that institutions and public officials increasingly fear being perceived as partisan.

Common Concerns

- Higher education is operating "from a place of fear."
- Civic engagement work is often interpreted politically.
- Secretaries of State in some state political contexts may privately support the work but avoid public endorsement.
- Institutions fear scrutiny around partnerships and programming.

Several participants stressed that:

- Nonpartisan civic engagement does not necessarily shift ideology.
- Red and blue states alike should participate.
- If participation is concentrated in only some states or political contexts, existing gaps in civic infrastructure and polarization may deepen.

Participants believed successful implementation will require:

- Careful framing
- Clear nonpartisan boundaries
- Trusted messengers
- Bipartisan or cross-ideological participation

6. Student Leadership Must Be Central

Participants consistently argued that students should not simply be recipients of programming but co-creators and leaders.

Key Ideas

- Peer-to-peer engagement is most effective.
- Students feel unheard by institutions and governments.
- Student voices increase legitimacy and trust.
- Traditional programming models no longer resonate with younger generations.

Suggestions

- Include student government leaders
- Create student advisory structures
- Empower students as facilitators and conveners
- Design programming for Gen Alpha and future student populations

Notable Insight

- Participants emphasized that civic engagement programming must evolve beyond traditional workshops and lectures toward participatory, networked, and student-centered models.

7. Institutional Diversity: Regional Publics and Community Colleges Matter

Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of designing for different institutional contexts.

Key Considerations

- Community colleges are often overlooked.
- Elite institutions and resource-rich campuses already have advantages.
- Institutional structures vary dramatically.
- Rural, regional, online, and commuter campuses engage students differently.

Pilots should intentionally include:

- Community colleges
- Under-resourced campuses
- States with limited existing infrastructure

8. Need for Clearer Governance, Ownership, and Operational Design

Participants consistently requested clarity around:

- Who owns the initiative?
- Who coordinates it?
- Who funds it?
- Who is accountable?

Questions Raised

- Is this led by DKP?
- By Secretaries of State?
- By higher education systems?
- By a national intermediary organization?
- By a coalition?

Participants also wanted:

- Clear implementation models
- Case studies
- Defined success metrics
- Resource expectations
- Governance structures

Overall Takeaways

Participants did not reject the framework. Instead, they treated it as a promising but highly ambitious foundation that requires sharper focus, clearer operationalization, stronger sustainability planning, and deeper integration with existing civic infrastructure.

The strongest emerging vision was not of a new standalone program, but of a durable, cross-sector civic ecosystem that:

- Connects campuses and election officials,
- Centers student leadership,
- Adapts to institutional context,
- Strengthens democratic participation,
- Can survive political and leadership turnover over time.

Cross-Cutting Strategic Recommendations

1. **Narrow and Phase the Initiative:** Focus first on a smaller set of achievable goals rather than a comprehensive democracy ecosystem.

2. **Build with Existing Infrastructure:** Partner with existing civic engagement networks rather than creating parallel systems.

3. **Pilot Intentionally:** Select a small number of politically and institutionally diverse states for learning-oriented pilots.

4. **Institutionalize Leadership:** Create durable campus and state-level structures that survive turnover.

5. **Center Students:** Move from student participation to student involvement and leadership.

6. **Clarify the Core Goal:** Determine what the initiative is fundamentally about.

7. **Develop a Strong Measurement Strategy**: Participants want a way to measure success.

Post-Session Survey: In the closing minutes of the session, participants were invited to complete a survey. The survey was then shared in the recap email. 22 out of 64 participants completed the survey, resulting in a **response rate of 34%**.

1. Following session 3, I feel optimistic that these convenings will result in something tangible:
   a. Strongly Agree - 27% (6)
   b. Agree - 68% (15)
   c. Neutral - 4.5% (1)
   d. Disagree - 0% (0)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 0% (0)

2. In this third session, the facilitator created an environment where I felt like I could freely express my ideas:
   a. Strongly Agree - 73% (16)
   b. Agree - 27% (6)
   c. Neutral - 0% (0)
   d. Disagree - 0% (0)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 0% (0)

3. In this third session, the attendees have embraced this as a constructive opportunity to come together across differences:

   a. Strongly Agree - 68% (15)
   b. Agree - 32% (7)
   c. Neutral - 0% (0)
   d. Disagree - 0% (0)
   e. Strongly Disagree - 0% (0)

4. **How do you feel about where we landed in today's session? (1-2 sentences)**

   Summary of responses:
   Participants were energized by the possibility of producing a tangible, practical framework for advancing civic engagement, while also recognizing **significant challenges related to implementation, ownership, and sustainability**. Participants valued the diversity of perspectives represented in the discussions, particularly tensions between different regional contexts, institutional cultures, and levels of experience, with many noting that disagreement surfaced important insights rather than undermining progress. A recurring debate centered on **who should ultimately lead these efforts, with some participants emphasizing the unique reach and accessibility of Secretaries of State offices** compared to higher education institutions. At the same time, participants consistently stressed that any successful framework must account for wide variation across states and institutions, provide clearer operational guidance, and address practical barriers,

including staffing, funding, time, and institutional capacity. Ultimately, participants appeared cautiously optimistic that a **phased, flexible, and well-supported initiative** could create meaningful long-term impact.

Summary of key ideas:

- Producing tangible and actionable outcomes grounded in practical implementation
- Valuing disagreement and diverse viewpoints as productive components of the process
- Clarifying leadership roles and responsibility for civic education efforts
- Expanding civic engagement access beyond traditional higher education pathways
- Building phased implementation strategies that allow gradual growth over time
- Providing clearer operational guidance, ownership structures, and accountability
- Investing in staffing, funding, and institutional capacity to support sustainability
- Offering turnkey tools, project management, and implementation support
- Recognizing significant differences across state, regional, and institutional contexts
- Building upon and acknowledging existing national and state-level initiatives
- Encouraging small, achievable steps that help institutions build momentum and confidence
- Strengthening collaboration between higher education institutions and election officials

5. **What ideas do you have for the life of this project beyond today (3-4 sentences)**
   Summary of responses:
   Participants emphasized that the project's next phase should focus on practical implementation, strategic partnerships, and sustainable infrastructure rather than creating something entirely new. Overall, respondents envision the project evolving into a collaborative, pilot-driven framework for strengthening campus-state partnerships around civic engagement, supported by existing networks and adaptable to local contexts.

   Key themes included:

   - **Pilot and scale thoughtfully**- Respondents suggested starting with states that already have some civic engagement infrastructure to test and refine the model before expanding to less-developed contexts. Others noted value in targeted pilots that address both upstream relationship-building (e.g.,

between campuses and Secretaries of State) and downstream implementation.

- **Leverage existing networks and avoid duplication**: A strong consensus emerged around partnering with existing organizations and coalitions (e.g., ALL IN, SLSV, NASPA) rather than building parallel systems. Respondents stressed using existing infrastructure, relationships, and expertise whenever possible.
- **Create ongoing collaboration structures**: Several participants expressed interest in a continued coalition, national network, or voluntary working groups/cohorts to guide next steps, share learning, and support implementation and assessment.
- **Prioritize education and student leadership**: Several respondents highlighted the importance of focusing on civic and voter education, not just voter registration, and creating structured opportunities for students to lead and participate in civic engagement efforts.
- **Clarify ownership, funding, and accountability**: Many noted that successful implementation will require clear champions, sustainable funding, defined ownership, and accountability mechanisms at both campus and state levels.
- **Design for multiple users and contexts**: Participants encouraged a user-centered approach, recognizing that schools, states, and partners will have different needs and that implementation must be adaptable across varied political and institutional environments.

6. **Do you have a recommendation for a state where we should consider piloting the convening concepts? If so, do you have an interest or a referral for supporting the pilot effort in a state?**

Summary of responses:

Balance Political Diversity
Several respondents emphasized the importance of:

- Including both strongly Republican and strongly Democratic states.
- Prioritizing politically divided or "contested ownership" states.
- Demonstrating that civic engagement infrastructure can work across ideological contexts.

Don't Only Choose States Already Doing This
A recurring tension emerged:

- Existing infrastructure makes implementation easier.
- But selecting only mature states may limit innovation and broader applicability.

Several respondents encouraged including:

- States where efforts are emerging but not fully institutionalized.
- States without strong existing systems to test replicability.

Be Careful with "Pilot" Framing

Respondents cautioned that:

- States already active in this work may resist language implying they are not already leaders.
- A framing around "collaboration," "expansion," or "shared learning" may land better than "pilot."

Existing Infrastructure Matters

Strong infrastructure was repeatedly cited as valuable:

- Secretary of State initiatives
- Higher education networks
- Existing civic engagement coalitions
- Institutional champions
- Youth engagement ecosystems

Relationships and Champions Are Key

Many recommendations depended less on the state itself and more on:

- Trusted institutional connectors
- Political validators
- Existing partnerships

The following states were mentioned among respondents

- Alabama: A potentially valuable conservative-state pilot opportunity that could leverage emerging leadership infrastructure and Republican champions.
- California: A mature example state already doing significant civic engagement work that could serve as a national model.
- Illinois: Recommended as a strong Democratic-state example for ideological balance in the pilot portfolio.
- Iowa: An emerging opportunity because the Secretary of State office has already launched a collegiate civic engagement initiative.
- Michigan: Viewed as a state with strong existing civic engagement infrastructure and institutional capacity.
- Minnesota: Recognized for robust youth engagement systems, though state office bandwidth may be a consideration.
- North Carolina: Highlighted as a state with strong existing infrastructure that could support implementation efforts.
- Ohio: A politically competitive state with existing Secretary of State relationships and potential partnership opportunities.

- Pennsylvania: Suggested as a promising pilot state with direct interest expressed in supporting the effort.
- Texas: Seen as a uniquely interesting and large-scale testing ground for bipartisan civic engagement strategies.
- Virginia: Recommended for its strong civic learning networks and politically mixed environment that could help test national scalability.

7. **Do you have any further comments, suggestions, or concerns regarding the convening overall?**

Summary of responses:
Participants expressed overwhelmingly positive feedback about the convening, consistently emphasizing the value of bringing together a thoughtful and action-oriented group for meaningful dialogue across civic engagement and higher education. Many praised the quality of facilitation, coordination, and leadership, **noting that the discussions felt substantive, collaborative, and unusually productive compared to other coalition efforts**. Several participants expressed interest in continued involvement and future convenings, while others encouraged integrating this work into existing state and local civic engagement initiatives to maximize impact and sustainability. Overall, respondents conveyed strong appreciation for the opportunity, optimism about the project's potential, and enthusiasm for continued collaboration moving forward.

Our Recommended Framework

State-Based Postsecondary Civic Partnership Infrastructure

The following framework represents a model for strengthening trusted collaboration between postsecondary institutions and election officials to improve student access to official, nonpartisan election information, voter engagement resources, and civic participation opportunities. These ideas were developed through the process articulated in the preceding pages, namely a national cross-ideological convening of over 70 leaders who met three times throughout the spring of 2026.

Our collective recommendation is to begin with voluntary, relationship-based implementation rather than requiring a legislative mandate. This recommendation is not intended as a judgment on the appropriateness of legislation or existing statutory approaches. Rather, the convening participants deliberately removed legislative and voting-policy change outside its scope and emphasized a framework that could be adapted across differing state political, legal, and higher education contexts.

The recommended two-phase framework begins by strengthening a foundational element that remains inconsistent or absent in many states: durable relationships and two-way communication between higher education and election officials. Trusted election information represents an important initial function of the infrastructure but is not the framework's ultimate boundary. Once established, the Civic Liaison Network provides a foundation through which campuses, students, election officials, and civic partners pursue phase 2, representing broader opportunities for civic learning, student leadership, dialogue, and community engagement. Those activities will vary considerably by state and institution and need not be led by election officials themselves. The purpose of the network is to create durable connective infrastructure through which that broader ecosystem can collaborate more effectively.

Phase 1: Establish a Postsecondary Civic Liaison Network

Two foundational elements we encourage states to explore, shape, and resource within their unique context:

1. State-Campus Partnership Infrastructure ("Civic Liaison Network")

We encourage states to build a sustained, state-specific network between all (public and private) postsecondary institutions and state election officials. Notably, some states already use a campus champion model, and organizations such as Students Learn

Students Vote (SLSV) have long advocated for designating campus champions as a best practice. This effort is distinct in proposing a statewide coalition structure that formally integrates state election officials and establishes direct and sustained communication pathways between:

- **Designated Civic Liaisons:** two staff or faculty leaders from every college and university in the state; and
- **Dedicated election official points of contact:** designated officials who serve as consistent partners to participating institutions.

The questions of who initiates the network and who ultimately stewards it are related but distinct. Either role should be determined through each state's unique context, and the organization that begins the conversation need not be the organization that houses or sustains the network over time. Possible models are outlined below.

2. Trusted Nonpartisan Election Information

Position election officials as the visible, trusted source of election information and provide campuses with clear, usable, nonpartisan resources. This Includes:

- official election information dissemination
- voter process education
- official communication toolkits for student engagement
- problem-solving response pathways

State election officials are already responsible for these very functions, so this network assists in establishing a direct connection to representatives at colleges and universities who are best equipped to receive and pass along information, and to collaborate.

The establishment of a Civic Liaison Network in each state would represent a step in the right direction, especially to assist colleges and universities in fulfilling the reauthorization of the 1998 Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1094(a)(23), specifically Title IV, which requires all colleges and universities to "make a good faith effort" (Sec. 162) in promotion of student voter registration. Ideally, Civic Liaison Networks would help students access trusted, nonpartisan information relevant to their individual voting circumstances and provide clear pathways to authoritative election information when those circumstances extend beyond the institution's state.

Ideally, the Civic Liaison Network would provide the opportunity for each state to collaborate proactively in the ways best fit. Accordingly, we suggest a second phase, where state election officials and the Network explore optional pathways for collaboration.

Phase 2: Adaptable Activation Pathways

These pathways are intended to build upon, rather than replace, existing research and practice in postsecondary civic learning and engagement. Resources such as the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education's Election Imperatives 2.0 offer research-informed guidance for institutions seeking to strengthen political learning, student agency, dialogue, participation, and campus conditions for democratic engagement beyond the mechanics of voting (Thomas et al., 2018). The Civic Liaison Network can provide statewide infrastructure through which institutions adapt and advance this work in partnership with election officials and other civic organizations.

Additional areas that state actors and institutions may pursue based on local priorities, resources, and staff bandwidth:

A. Institutional Capacity Building

The Civic Liaison network provides a powerful vehicle for building institutional capacity to better support civic and voter engagement efforts. Examples of activities include:

- Equip campuses with the trusted state-based knowledge and support needed to implement nonpartisan efforts.
- professional development for Civic Liaisons
- campus civic health assessments and civic plans
- campus coalition guidance

B. Student Civic Leadership Development

Create structured opportunities for students to shape, lead, and participate in civic engagement efforts, connected directly to state and local systems. Examples include:

- state student civic advisory councils
- civic volunteer pipelines (i.e. poll workers, state agency internships, etc.)
- peer engagement training and civic leadership credentials

C. Civic Learning & Community Engagement

Ground efforts as nonpartisan learning and community engagement in local contexts to increase relevance.

- state and local civic pride and engagement
- campus-hosted programs featuring election officials
- Leverage university extension units, bridging campus-community divides.
- opportunities to encourage constructive engagement across political divides

Framework at a Glance

The model is designed as connective infrastructure. It begins with a state-level relationship between election administration and postsecondary education, establishes consistent campus and election-official points of contact, and then creates a foundation for deeper civic learning and leadership opportunities.

Across states, the organization that initiates the network may differ from the organization that ultimately stewards, convenes, or funds it. What remains constant is the formal integration of election officials as an institutional anchor and the emphasis on durable, two-way relationships with postsecondary institutions.

STATE-BASED POSTSECONDARY CIVIC PARTNERSHIP INFRASTRUCTURE

↓

PHASE 1

1. STATE-CAMPUS PARTNERSHIP ("CIVIC LIAISON NETWORK")	**2. TRUSTED NONPARTISAN ELECTION INFORMATION**
Designated campus Civic Liaisons + Dedicated election official points of contact	Official election information dissemination + Voter process education + Communication resources + Problem-solving pathways

↓

PHASE 2: ADAPTABLE ACTIVATION PATHWAYS

A. Institutional Capacity Building	**B. Student Civic Leadership Development**	**C. Civic Learning & Community Engagement**

Theory of Change

Postsecondary institutions represent one of the few statewide systems with direct and sustained access to millions of students, including emerging voters as well as adult learners at different stages of civic life. Importantly, the reach of postsecondary education should not be understood as limited to traditionally aged students or first-time voters. Colleges and universities enroll approximately 39% of all 18- to 24-year-olds in the United States, while also serving millions of adult learners whose ages, life experiences, employment, and prior experiences with civic participation vary considerably (NCES, 2024). The opportunity described in this framework therefore extends beyond young people or those navigating an election for the first time. Postsecondary institutions provide recurring points of connection with Americans across stages of adulthood, creating opportunities to strengthen civic knowledge, participation, and connection throughout the lifespan. When postsecondary institutions and election officials establish sustained, trusted, nonpartisan coordination structures, students gain more consistent access to accurate information, opportunities for civic participation, and pathways for meaningful engagement in civic life. Over time, these relationships can strengthen institutional capacity, reduce barriers to participation, and support a healthier civic culture across diverse state contexts. While this framework centers postsecondary institutions, they represent only one part of a broader civic ecosystem, and future efforts should consider how these networks might connect with K-12 schools, libraries, community organizations, faith communities, and other trusted civic spaces.

Exploring Governance Structures

Initial implementation will begin through a small number of cross-state learning partnerships designed to test, refine, and adapt the framework across diverse political and institutional contexts. The framework is intended to complement, coordinate with, and strengthen existing civic engagement efforts rather than replace them.

> **State-Level Coordinating Coalition:** Each state would establish or utilize existing Coordinating Coalitions comprised of officials from the Secretary of State or chief election official, higher education system representatives, college and student representatives, and civic organizations.
>
> **Campus-Level Teams:** Two faculty and staff members from each college and university would be invited to serve as Civic Liaisons. The Liaisons would be encouraged to establish or coordinate an existing campus-based team comprised of representatives from student affairs, faculty, institutional leadership, and students. Because Civic Liaison responsibilities require time and sustained

engagement, states and institutions should consider how participation is recognized and incentivized. Depending on institutional context, this might include stipends, protected staff time, professional development opportunities, formal recognition of the role within existing responsibilities, or access to statewide leadership and peer-learning opportunities. The goal is not necessarily to create a new position, but to ensure that those asked to steward this work have both the capacity and institutional support to do so. One key consideration is a protocol for ensuring succession planning, addressing vacancies, and communicating back to state election officials for up-to-date roster for each campus.
NOTE: The framework is intended to be adaptable across diverse institutional contexts, including community colleges, regional public universities, private institutions, rural campuses, and under-resourced institutions.

Planning for Sustainability: Establishing a Civic Liaison Network does not necessarily require substantial new funding, particularly when states, colleges and universities, and partner organizations can leverage existing personnel, relationships, and infrastructure. Sustaining and deepening the work, however, requires intentional consideration of capacity and resources at both the statewide and institutional levels.

At the state or network level, partners should consider what resources are necessary to coordinate the network, maintain communication, convene participants, provide training, support student involvement, and evaluate progress. Funding and support might come from state agencies, higher education systems, colleges and universities, higher education associations, nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, or a combination of these sources.

Sustainability must also be considered at the campus level. Designating a Civic Liaison alone does not ensure that an institution has the capacity to participate meaningfully. Colleges and universities might support the work by incorporating Civic Liaison responsibilities into existing roles, providing protected staff time, offering professional development or stipends, supporting student leaders, or dedicating institutional resources to stipends and civic and voter engagement activities. The appropriate level and form of support will vary considerably based on institutional size, structure, and available resources.

Sustainability also depends on participating institutions and individuals seeing clear value in the network. Beyond advancing civic and voter engagement goals,

participation can provide campuses with direct access to election officials, trusted information and technical assistance, professional development, peer learning, statewide relationships, and new leadership opportunities for students and staff.

Governance Pathways

While there are many possible governance configurations, the following chart imagines some possible scenarios. NOTE: State election officials are a required institutional anchor, regardless of who convenes or administers the network

Illustrative Model	Initiator	Steward / Convener	Potential Funding	What It Could Look Like
State-Led	Secretary of State	Secretary of State	State appropriation or agency resources	Network becomes part of the state's voter education/outreach infrastructure
Higher Education-Led	Campus coalition	Participating institutions / steering committee	Institutional contributions, association support, or grants	Institutions jointly build and maintain the network with election officials as partners
System-Led	Higher education system	System office	System resources, institutional contributions, or grants	System provides coordination and resources across participating campuses
Intermediary-Led	Association or nonprofit	Association / nonprofit	Philanthropy, grants, membership resources, or contracts	Intermediary provides the backbone connecting campuses and election officials
Shared Partnership	Multiple partners	Joint steering committee + designated backbone organization	Braided funding from government, higher education, and philanthropy	Governance and financial responsibility are distributed across sectors
Pilot-to-Institutionalized	Any of the above	May change over time	Grant/philanthropy → recurring institutional or public funding	External funding launches the network, followed by a planned transition to sustainable support

Key Considerations on Governance

Each governance pathway offers distinct advantages and considerations. The appropriate structure will depend on a state's election administration system, higher education landscape, existing relationships, organizational capacity, and available resources. These pathways are not mutually exclusive, and states may combine elements of multiple approaches or evolve their governance structure.

- **State Election Office Led**: Housing or stewarding the network within a Secretary of State's office or other state election authority provides a direct

connection to authoritative election information and embeds the partnership within the state's election administration infrastructure. This approach may also provide a clear statewide communication channel for participating institutions. At the same time, staffing capacity, priorities, and resources may change across administrations, and election authority is more decentralized in some states than others. Sustained higher education involvement is also important to ensure the network operates as a two-way partnership rather than primarily as a channel for distributing information to campuses.

- **Higher Education Led**: A network initiated and stewarded by colleges and universities can generate strong institutional ownership and build from existing relationships, expertise, and understanding of student needs. This approach may be particularly viable where institutions already collaborate around civic engagement or other statewide priorities. However, voluntary coordination can depend heavily on individual leaders and available institutional capacity, and achieving broad statewide representation may require significant outreach. Formal partnership with election officials remains essential to establishing the authoritative election-administration connection at the center of the Civic Liaison Network.
- **Higher Education System Led:** A university, community college, or statewide higher education system can leverage existing administrative structures, leadership relationships, and communication channels to establish a network efficiently across its member institutions. System offices may also be well positioned to provide coordination, training, resources, and expectations that support institutional participation. The primary limitation is reach: a system-based network may exclude independent, private, or institutions belonging to other systems. States pursuing this pathway should consider whether and how the network might eventually connect with institutions beyond the originating system.
- **Intermediary Convened**: A higher education association, nonprofit organization, or statewide civic coalition can provide valuable connective infrastructure between higher education and election officials. Intermediaries may bring dedicated convening capacity, established relationships, fundraising expertise, technical assistance, and continuity that individual institutions or public agencies cannot easily provide on their own. At the same time, sustainability may depend on organizational priorities or external funding, and the network should be designed to complement rather than duplicate existing civic engagement initiatives. Election officials should remain formally

embedded as an institutional anchor of the network, even when an intermediary provides its administrative or convening backbone.

Across all four pathways, the organization that initiates the network does not necessarily need to be the organization that ultimately stewards, convenes, or funds it. Governance may evolve as participation grows and relationships mature. What remains consistent is the framework's emphasis on durable, two-way infrastructure connecting higher education with the public officials responsible for election administration.

Distinguishing the Civic Liaison Network

The Civic Liaison Network is intended to complement, rather than replicate, the important work of existing national and state civic engagement organizations and initiatives. Its distinguishing feature is the formal integration of election officials as an institutional anchor of a state-based higher education network. While the entity that initiates, convenes, funds, or stewards the network may vary by state, the framework establishes a durable line of communication between the public officials responsible for election administration and designated representatives within colleges and universities.

This structure positions authoritative, nonpartisan election information and two-way communication with election administrators as core infrastructure rather than as a program or resource provided to campuses. Existing civic organizations can play important roles as conveners, funders, technical assistance providers, and partners within this infrastructure without duplicating the functions they already serve.

Goals & Sample Indicators

The recommended framework prioritizes the establishment of durable civic infrastructure while recognizing student participation as an important longer-term outcome. Voter registration and turnout provide valuable indicators of student civic participation and should remain part of how states and institutions understand progress. However, these outcomes are influenced by many factors beyond the Civic Liaison Network, including election type, candidate competitiveness, political context, institutional characteristics, and student demographics. Changes in turnout alone therefore cannot determine whether the network is functioning effectively.

Evaluation should begin with the outcomes the framework is designed to influence most directly: whether durable relationships and communication channels have been established; whether they persist through personnel and leadership transitions; whether colleges and universities can efficiently access authoritative election information; whether

questions and election-related challenges are resolved effectively; and whether students have meaningful opportunities to inform the work. Accordingly, the framework seeks to advance three goals.

Each state would establish indicators appropriate to its context, with examples including:

1. **Establish durable, nonpartisan coordination structures between postsecondary institutions and state election officials.**
    - Sample Indicators: Percentage of participating campuses with designated Civic Liaisons; continuity of campus participation through Liaison or leadership transitions; frequency of two-way communication between Civic Liaisons and election officials.
2. **Increase student access to accurate, trusted, and nonpartisan election information.**
    - Sample Indicators: Reach and engagement with official election information distributed through participating institutions; student awareness of trusted election resources; time required to respond to or resolve election-related questions raised through the network.

3. **Expand student civic participation, leadership, and engagement opportunities.**
    - Sample Indicators: Student participation in civic leadership or advisory roles; student poll worker or civic volunteer participation; students' registration and voting rates as longer-term indicators of student participation.

Guiding Principles

This effort is designed to be nonpartisan, state-adaptable, and partnership-oriented. Rather than creating a new compliance structure or standalone program, it focuses on strengthening civic infrastructure through voluntary collaboration between postsecondary institutions, election officials, students, and existing civic engagement organizations.

The framework is intended to support diverse institutional contexts and complement existing efforts, not replace them. It is not designed to serve as a partisan voter mobilization effort or institutional mandate, but to strengthen trusted coordination between campuses and election officials.

To that end, it's important that this effort moves beyond a communication channel. Surely, this network would be valuable to exist as a communication channel, but more so, there are opportunities to utilize this work to support civic skill development, highly relevant and

valuable workforce skills (i.e. teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, communications, information and data literacy, problem-solving, etc.).

Sample Implementation Scenarios

The Civic Liaison Network concept is intentionally designed to be adaptable to the unique higher education, election administration, and civic infrastructure of each state. There is no single organization that must initiate or house the work, nor is there a prescribed timeline for implementation. In some states, election officials may serve as the catalyst; in others, higher education leaders, system offices, associations, or nonprofit organizations may initiate and steward the effort.

The following scenarios illustrate four possible pathways for implementation. Each moves through three stages: **Getting Started, Building the Network, and Deepening the Work.** A state might move through them over several months or several years depending on existing relationships, capacity, resources, and opportunities.

Scenario 1: Secretary of State Initiated and Housed

In this scenario, a Secretary of State's office recognizes an opportunity to strengthen communication and collaboration with colleges and universities across the state. The office chooses to house the Civic Liaison Network within an existing voter education and outreach unit. This means recognizing two team members will need additional capacity, and that effort is realized by sunsetting an outdated civic education program.

Getting Started: Establish a Trusted Communication Network

The Secretary of State invites every college and university in the state to designate one or two Civic Liaisons. The office identifies a staff member to serve as the primary point of contact for the network and another to assist with content development. These staff members begin periodic communication with Liaisons containing important election dates, deadlines, guidance, and direct links to student-relevant resources. Importantly, communication flows in both directions: Civic Liaisons have a clear pathway for raising questions, identifying challenges, and sharing information from their campuses with election officials.

Building the Network: Create a Student Feedback Loop

As relationships develop, the Secretary of State establishes a statewide student advisory group representing different institutions, regions, and student populations. Students meet periodically with election officials and Civic Liaisons to identify questions, barriers, and information needs experienced by young voters. Their perspectives help inform both statewide voter education efforts and the work of individual Civic Liaisons.

Deepening the Work: Turn Student Insight into Action

Through the student advisory group and Civic Liaison Network, a recurring

challenge emerges around a particular aspect of the voting process. The Secretary of State partners with students and Civic Liaisons to develop an educational intervention addressing the issue. The network pilots the resource, gathers feedback, and evaluates its effectiveness, creating a cycle in which student experience informs election education and future improvements.

Scenario 2: College and University Initiated and Stewarded

In this scenario, a group of higher education leaders who already collaborate through an existing statewide convening learn about the Civic Liaison Network framework. Rather than waiting for a state agency to initiate the effort, they begin organizing institutions and invite election officials into the conversation.

Getting Started: Establish a Coordinating Committee

A small group of college and university leaders forms a Civic Liaison Network Coordinating Committee. The group identifies institutions already engaged in nonpartisan civic and voter engagement, maps existing relationships with election officials, and develops an initial vision for the network. Representatives approach the Secretary of State's office and other relevant election officials to explore partnership and identify a consistent point of contact.

Building the Network: Expand Participation Statewide

The Coordinating Committee leverages relationships with presidents, student affairs leaders, faculty, civic engagement professionals, and other campus leaders to invite institutions across the state to designate Civic Liaisons. Participating institutions and election officials establish shared goals for the network and agree upon basic expectations for participation, communication, and collaboration.

Deepening the Work: Build Capacity Through Training

A participating institution volunteers to host an annual Civic Liaison Training. The Coordinating Committee develops the program in partnership with election officials and experienced campus practitioners. Training addresses election administration, nonpartisanship, campus communication, student engagement, navigating institutional structures, and promising practices from participating campuses. Over time, the gathering becomes an opportunity for both onboarding new Liaisons and continued professional learning across the network.

Scenario 3: Higher Education System Initiated and Stewarded

In this scenario, a community college system office identifies the Civic Liaison Network as aligned with its strategic priorities related to student success, civic learning, community engagement, or workforce development. The system begins within its own institutions while building a partnership with state election officials.

Getting Started: Establish the Infrastructure and Resources
The system office identifies a system-level staff member to coordinate the initiative and approaches the Secretary of State's office about establishing a partnership. Recognizing that Civic Liaison responsibilities require institutional capacity, the system also pursues external grant funding to support implementation. Funding would support coordination, training, programming, and modest stipends for participating Liaisons.

Building the Network: Launch Across the System
The system works with presidents, provosts, student affairs leaders, and other institutional leaders to socialize the concept and invite campuses to designate Civic Liaisons. The system hosts an initial orientation outlining the purpose of the network, basic responsibilities, available resources, and relationship with election officials. Regular communication and convenings begin, creating connections among Liaisons who previously may have been doing similar work independently.

Deepening the Work: Create Student Leadership Pathways
Building on the institutional network, the system pilots a student civic fellowship or leadership program at several campuses. Student Fellows work alongside Civic Liaisons while receiving training and opportunities to collaborate with peers across institutions. The pilot provides a pathway for students to contribute directly to voter education and broader civic engagement while developing leadership skills. Lessons from the initial campuses inform potential expansion across the system and, eventually, beyond it.

Scenario 4: Nonprofit Higher Education Association as Convener
In this scenario, an existing statewide nonprofit recognizes that it already has many of the relationships necessary to connect campuses and election officials. Perhaps the practice of appointing civic champions is already present at many campuses. Rather than "owning" the Civic Liaison Network, the organization serves as its convener and backbone, providing continuity and coordination across participating institutions and public agencies.

Getting Started: Convene the Partners
The organization brings together a small group of higher education leaders, election officials, students, and civic partners to explore the Civic Liaison Network framework and assess the state's existing infrastructure. The group identifies what already exists, where communication or coordination gaps remain, and which organizations are best positioned to contribute. Together, participants establish initial principles and determine an appropriate governance structure for the network.

Building the Network: Create Shared Infrastructure
The convener supports outreach to institutions across the state and works with

election officials to establish a roster of Civic Liaisons and public-sector partners. It provides the connective infrastructure for the network, such as regular convenings, shared resources, communication channels, onboarding materials, and opportunities for peer learning. Responsibility remains distributed: election officials provide authoritative election information, campuses lead institution-specific implementation, students provide insight into their experiences, and the convener helps keep the partners connected.

Deepening the Work: Become a Statewide Learning Network
As participation grows, the network moves beyond information sharing toward collaborative learning and problem-solving. Working groups might form around recurring challenges, student leaders might help develop new resources or initiatives, and campuses might share approaches that have proven effective in their own contexts. The convener can help document lessons, evaluate progress, and connect the network to broader state and national resources. Over time, the network becomes durable civic infrastructure capable of responding to emerging needs while maintaining trusted relationships across sectors.

What These Scenarios Illustrate

These scenarios are not intended as prescribed implementation models. Instead, they demonstrate that the Civic Liaison Network can begin from different places and develop in different ways. A Secretary of State might initiate the work. Colleges and universities might organize themselves and invite election officials into partnership. A higher education system might begin by building infrastructure within its own institutions. An association or nonprofit might provide the connective tissue among organizations already doing related work. Across each scenario, however, a common progression emerges. Start with relationships and communication, build durable infrastructure and shared capacity, and then use that infrastructure to create deeper opportunities for student voice, learning, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. The framework is therefore less a program to be replicated than an infrastructure that can be adapted to the realities and opportunities of each state.

Why a State-Based Approach?
The Civic Liaison Network is best situated on a state-by-state basis for several reasons. Election laws, administrative structures, higher education systems, and civic ecosystems vary considerably across states. A state-based approach allows the framework to respond to these differences while creating durable connections between the institutions that educate students and the public officials responsible for administering elections.

Election authority and state context: Election administration is inherently state-specific. States differ not only in election laws, deadlines, and procedures, but also in how authority is organized among state and local election officials. Similarly,

higher education landscapes vary considerably in the mix of public systems, independent institutions, community colleges, coordinating bodies, and statewide associations. Organizing the Civic Liaison Network at the state level allows partners to develop structures and practices responsive to these distinct contexts rather than imposing a uniform national model. Because election administration structures vary, this report uses state election authority to refer broadly to the Secretary of State, board of elections, election commission, or other entity responsible for statewide election administration or coordination.

Continuous change at the federal level. Recent changes in federal policy further underscore the value of state-based infrastructure. The rescission of Executive Order 14019 and subsequent U.S. Department of Education guidance, including restrictions on the use of Federal Work-Study funds for voter registration, voter assistance, poll work, and related activities, reflect a changing federal environment for campus voter engagement. The Civic Liaison Network does not depend on federal directives or Federal Work-Study funding to operate. Instead, it establishes direct, nonpartisan relationships between colleges and universities and the public officials responsible for administering elections within their states. This state-based structure allows participating institutions to receive and share authoritative election information, raise questions, and address student-facing election issues within applicable federal and state requirements. Individual institutions should continue to assess their activities and funding sources for compliance with current law and guidance.

Complementing existing civic infrastructure: A state-based approach also positions the Civic Liaison Network to complement, rather than replicate, the work of existing national and state civic engagement organizations and initiatives. Its distinctive contribution is the formal integration of election officials as an institutional anchor of a higher education network. National organizations, nonprofits, higher education associations, and other civic partners can continue to provide valuable resources, training, research, convening, and technical assistance. The Civic Liaison Network provides connective infrastructure through which those efforts can intersect with authoritative election administration and the particular needs of colleges, universities, and students within a state.

Taken together, these considerations point toward a model that is state-based but not uniform. Each state can determine how the network should be governed, convened, funded, and implemented while maintaining a common commitment to durable, two-way relationships between higher education and election administration.

Accounting for Student Residency, Eligibility, and Enrollment Contexts

The state-based structure of the Civic Liaison Network should not be understood to assume that all students share the same relationship to the state in which their institution is located. Postsecondary institutions serve students with varied residency, citizenship, enrollment, and educational circumstances. Some students may maintain voting residency in another state and participate through absentee or mail voting. Online students may live far from the physical campus, including in another state. Adult learners may balance education with employment, caregiving, and other responsibilities that shape how and when they engage with civic information and opportunities. International students and other students who are not eligible to vote in U.S. elections remain members of campus communities and may participate in appropriate civic learning, dialogue, community engagement, and other non-electoral activities.

Accordingly, Civic Liaison Networks should distinguish between election-specific information, which must reflect a student's eligibility, residency, and applicable election rules, and broader civic learning and engagement opportunities that may be relevant to a wider range of students. Campuses should also develop pathways for directing students whose voting residence is in another state to authoritative information from the appropriate election officials. For institutions serving substantial online or multistate populations, coordination across state networks would be particularly valuable.

Future Considerations

As state-based Civic Liaison Networks develop, an opportunity may emerge to connect individual networks into a broader national learning community. Such a network-of-networks could allow states to exchange training materials, implementation tools, evaluation approaches, student engagement strategies, and lessons learned across election cycles. A successful intervention developed with students in one state, for example, might inspire adaptation elsewhere, while challenges identified across multiple states could reveal opportunities for shared learning and collaborative problem-solving.

Several structures for facilitating this cross-state learning may warrant exploration. One possibility is the development of regional hubs that connect neighboring states with shared geographic, institutional, or election administration contexts. Another is intentional state-to-state learning partnerships, which could pair states facing similar implementation challenges or create opportunities for collaboration across differing political and policy contexts. These structures could allow participating states to compare approaches, share resources, and identify which elements of the framework translate across state contexts.

A second opportunity is to establish periodic gatherings of state election officials, Civic Liaisons, students, and other network partners. Annual or biennial convenings could provide dedicated space to assess implementation, share emerging practices, examine

challenges from recent election cycles, and plan collaboratively for future work. Such gatherings might occur alongside existing national conferences, during post-election planning periods, or as standalone convenings supported by philanthropic or organizational partners.

These possibilities are intentionally offered as future considerations rather than prescribed components of the framework. Early implementation should provide evidence about which forms of cross-state coordination add value, which partnerships emerge organically, and what additional infrastructure is necessary to sustain a broader national learning community.

Next Steps

The next step for this work is to identify a small number of states interested in testing the framework across differing higher education, election administration, and political contexts. In each participating state, an initial convener would bring together election officials, higher education leaders, and existing civic partners to assess current infrastructure and determine an appropriate governance model. Early implementation should focus on Phase 1, documenting the resources, relationships, challenges, and outcomes associated with establishing the network before broader activation or expansion.

Conclusion

This framework is offered not as a finished product, but as a starting point for state-based conversation and ultimately action. States differ in their governance structures, institutional landscapes, political contexts, and civic traditions. For that reason, no single approach will fit every state. Rather, the *Civic Liaison Network* is intended to provide a flexible foundation that states can adapt to strengthen relationships between postsecondary institutions and election officials in ways that reflect state-based priorities, resources, and needs.

The opportunity is significant. Every election cycle, millions of students navigate voter registration, residency requirements, absentee voting, and changing election procedures while balancing the demands of college life. At the same time, election officials are tasked with communicating accurate, trusted information with limited capacity and resources. Stronger partnerships between these two systems can help ensure that students have consistent access to official, nonpartisan information while creating new opportunities for civic learning, leadership, and participation.

The premise of this framework is not that better information alone will generate trust or civic participation. Rather, it is that durable relationships, authoritative information, civic learning, and accessible opportunities for participation together create stronger conditions in which trust, agency, and engagement can develop.

This work also recognizes that strengthening democracy is not the responsibility of any one institution. It requires sustained collaboration among higher education, election officials, students, and civic organizations. By investing in trusted relationships and practical infrastructure, states can build lasting capacity that extends well beyond any single election cycle.

Ultimately, the success of this framework will not be measured simply by the number of Civic Liaisons appointed or partnerships established. Its success will be reflected in whether civic participation becomes more accessible to students and whether students themselves become more informed, more confident in their participation, and more connected to their communities. If these partnerships strengthen students' capacity to participate in civic life and their trust in public institutions, they will have created benefits that endure far beyond the campus and far beyond Election Day.

Getting Started

The Postsecondary Civic Liaison Network is designed to be adapted to the governance structures, relationships, and civic infrastructure of individual states. There is no single organization that must initiate this work, nor is there one prescribed pathway for implementation.

For states interested in exploring the model, a practical starting point is to identify a small group of potential partners, including representatives from the state election authority, public and private postsecondary institutions, higher education systems or associations, students, and existing civic organizations. Early conversations can focus on several questions:

- What relationships between higher education and election officials already exist in the state?
- Who is best positioned to initiate the conversation, and who might ultimately steward the network?
- Which institutions and organizations should be represented in an initial planning group?
- What would a manageable Phase 1 pilot look like?

- What resources, incentives, or support would participating institutions need?
- How will the partners determine whether the network is providing value?

States do not need to build the entire framework at once. Initial implementation can begin with a small number of participating institutions, a defined communication structure, and a shared commitment to improving access to trusted, nonpartisan election information. The relationships and lessons developed through that work can inform broader participation and future Phase 2 activities.

Interested in Exploring the Framework?

This implementation brief is intended to encourage continued learning, adaptation, and collaboration. Higher education leaders, election officials, civic organizations, students, and others interested in exploring or advancing Postsecondary Civic Liaison Networks are invited to connect, share perspectives, and consider opportunities for collaboration.

Dr. Alex Kappus

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Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Appendix A: Participant Project Overview

Advancing State-Based Postsecondary Civic Education and Voter Engagement
Alex Kappus, Ph.D.
Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) Fellow, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Project Description:

Despite decades of civic engagement efforts, young adults ages 18 to 29 still vote at the lowest rates of any age cohort, and broader civic indicators reveal declining trust in government and increased disillusionment with politics altogether. These trends are consistent among college students, particularly in non-presidential election years and in moments of conflict and controversy. Beyond voting, the effects of growing up in a screen-driven and increasingly AI-augmented attention economy have weakened students' capacities for critical thinking and constructive dialogue across differences. Despite higher education's stated civic mission, evidence suggests colleges and universities are struggling to prepare students with the skills necessary to foster a healthy democracy. Across the country, however, there are promising examples of state-based efforts to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and local election officials in their state.

This project seeks to examine the scope of the challenge, highlight promising practices from across the country, and propose a national model for establishing a research-informed collaboration between election officials and postsecondary institutions. With more than 3,600 nonprofit public and private colleges and universities nationwide, coordinated practices could expand trusted nonpartisan civic education, motivate postsecondary action, reduce concerns about political indoctrination, and revitalize town–gown relationships by positioning campuses as hubs for cross-ideological civic engagement and learning.

Facilitator Bio:

Alex Kappus, Ph.D. *Senior Director, Client Success at Carnegie & Fellow with Harvard's Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP)*

As Senior Director for Client Success at Carnegie, Alex Kappus builds transformative partnerships with college and university leaders to advance institutional strategy and student success. In addition to his work at Carnegie, he brings 15 years of campus-based leadership experience across public and private, two- and four-year institutions in four different states. An advocate for civic learning as a high-impact practice, Alex regularly researches, writes, and presents on student civic engagement. His applied research includes a recent fellowship with the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement, where he studied the implementation of the California Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (A.B. 963). Alex now serves as a Fellow with the Democratic Knowledge Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and affiliated with the Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation.

He received a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education from Michigan State University, an M.Ed. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of Georgia, and a B.A. in Political Science from Emory University. More About Dr. Kappus.

Appendix B: Participant FAQs

FAQS: Convening on Advancing Postsecondary Civic Education & Voter Engagement

Why was I invited?

You were invited because of the perspective and experience you bring to the table. The group intentionally includes a range of roles and viewpoints, including scholars, election officials, nonprofit leaders, student leaders, higher education administrators, and others who will engage this convening from different angles.

Some participants have spent decades focused on civic education and voter engagement. Others work in or adjacent to higher education and bring a newer perspective to this conversation. That diversity is intentional. The goal is not consensus for its own sake, but thoughtful exchange across experience and ideology to inform credible, research-informed recommendations.

Is this group nonpartisan?

The output of the project will be explicitly nonpartisan. The aim is to identify practices and principles that can be supported across the political spectrum and that respect legal and institutional boundaries.

The group membership is cross-ideological, meaning I intentionally sought to assemble people with views that span the political spectrum. This is intentional. This will mean coming into a space where you may disagree with people about some fundamental ideas. The convening is not an advocacy effort. It is a research-informed exploration of how states and postsecondary institutions might strengthen collaboration in ways that are lawful, constructive, and broadly credible.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the project is to explore ways to strengthen the relationship between postsecondary education and Secretaries of State and other election officials to advance civic education and voter engagement. Beyond exploration, this cross-ideological group will contribute to tangible recommendations to achieve this purpose.

Is this a working group?

This is a facilitated convening structured in a focus-group style format. Participants are not expected to co-author documents or complete work outside the sessions.

My role is to facilitate discussion, introduce relevant research where helpful, and synthesize insights into practical guidance. The expertise resides in the group.

Will I be required to do work outside of the meeting?

No. Optional pre-reading may be shared for those who are interested. The only expectation is attendance and active participation in the three scheduled sessions, and that you do your best to show up and participate fully during the allotted time.

Will the meetings be recorded? What will you do with the contents of these convenings?

Yes. Sessions will be recorded. Audio will be transcribed and de-identified (removing names and other identifiers).

All participants will be assigned pseudonyms and institutional aliases before analysis. De-identified transcripts will be stored securely and analyzed using qualitative research methods.

Insights will be synthesized into broader themes and recommendations. Individual remarks will not be attributed without explicit permission.

Will my ideas be attributed to me? How will you ensure data integrity?

Not without your permission.

The deliverable will synthesize themes across participants. If attributing a specific idea would strengthen clarity or credibility, I will request your consent before doing so.

Participants will be acknowledged collectively unless they request otherwise during the review period.

What will the project's outcome be?

The project will produce a practical resource that outlines recommended practices, illustrative examples, and guiding considerations for states, election officials, postsecondary leaders, and civic organizations. The goal is utility. Recommendations will recognize that state structures, laws, and institutional contexts differ. The intent is not a one-size-fits-all model, but adaptable guidance.

What if I disagree with the findings produced as a result of this convening?

You will receive a draft of the deliverable prior to public distribution and have an opportunity to provide feedback. If you ultimately prefer not to be acknowledged in the final document, you may request removal of your name or organization.

May I suggest additional participants?

If you believe someone's perspective is missing, you are welcome to share their name and contact information. Invitations may be extended as capacity allows.

What if I must miss a session?

If you are unable to attend a session, please notify me as soon as possible. When feasible, I will help you identify an alternative session within another track.

Do I have to attend all three sessions in the same track?

Yes, participants are asked to attend three sessions, ideally within the same track to maintain continuity. If scheduling adjustments are needed, please communicate directly.

Is this affiliated with Harvard in an official capacity?

The project is conducted as part of a fellowship with the Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP), housed within the Harvard Graduate School of Education (GSE). The views and recommendations produced are limited to this fellowship project and do not represent official positions of Harvard, the GSE, or DKP.

Does participation create any political or legal obligation?

No. Participation is voluntary and does not bind you or your organization to any policy position, partnership, or public endorsement.

Is there funding attached to participation?

There is no funding requirement or financial obligation associated with participation.

How will differences in state law be handled?

Recommendations will explicitly acknowledge that election law, higher education governance structures, and civic education policies vary by state. The goal is adaptable guidance, not prescriptive mandates.

Other questions? Please contact Alex Kappus at alex.kappus@gmail.com, or the project advisor, Adam Gismondi, at adam_gismondi@gse.harvard.edu.

Appendix C: Convening Bios

Michael Adams
Frankfort, KY
Secretary of State
Office of the Secretary of State
Inaugurated in 2020, Michael used emergency powers to conduct safe and secure elections that became a model for other states. Having expanded voter access while also tightening election integrity, in 2021 Adams presented his state's most ambitious election reform plan since 1891, and it passed both legislative chambers with near-unanimous support. Michael's work in making it easy to vote and hard to cheat has earned praise throughout America and across party lines. In 2024, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation presented Michael the JFK Profile in Courage Award.

Abdullah Aljanabi
Detroit, Michigan
Democracy Fellow and Wayne State Student Senator
Campus Vote Project and Wayne State Student Senate
Abdullah Aljanabi, a Political Science major at Wayne State University, is a six-term Democracy Fellow with the Campus Vote Project, where he leads civic engagement efforts on campus. He formerly served on the Michigan Collegiate Student Advisory Board after being appointed by Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson to lead statewide campus voter advocacy and to research legislative recommendations related to student voting.
In September 2024, he was recognized by the White House as a Youth Voting Leader and received the Campus Vote Project's inaugural Michigan Student Impact Award for Outstanding Commitment to Civic Engagement and Leadership in October 2025.

Saanvi Arora
Berkeley, California
Executive Director, Youth Power Project | Student @ UC Berkeley
Youth Power Project, University of California Student Association
Saanvi Arora is a leading youth advocate and policy expert, as well as the Executive Director of the Youth Power Project, a youth-led organization that empowers young people under 25 to inform local, state, and federal policymaking based on their own experiences and has introduced/passed over a dozen state and federal policies. She is focused on understanding the intersection between public policy, technology, and community attitudes towards health, and published a paper in the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in 2020 regarding the potential for the Internet of Medical Things to reduce costs and barriers associated with healthcare. She has also been recognized for her contributions to key policies improving access to reproductive, sexual, and mental healthcare for young people, and has written and/or advised numerous state and federal policies/initiatives on the subject matters. Recently, she drove the youth-led

effort to write, introduce, and pass S.Res.769, declaring an adolescent mental health emergency & advancing experience-informed recommendations for state and local actors to respond, unanimously through the U.S. Senate. Overall, she is invested in bridging gaps between successful policymaking and younger generations by advocating for cultural, educational, and institutional improvements that encourage youth civic engagement and promote free expression. She is currently an undergraduate at UC Berkeley completing simultaneous Bachelors' Degrees in Computer Science and Legal Studies, with a minor in public policy.

Mary Aviles
Bloomfield Hills, MI
Consultant (and qualitative researcher)
Mary Aviles LLC and the Constructive Dialogue Institute
With over two decades of experience, Mary Aviles is a seasoned leader in insights-driven strategy and mixed methods research. Her expertise spans strategic understanding, UX research, and cross-functional collaboration, making her a valuable asset in navigating complexity and fostering aligned systems. At CDI, Mary has participated in critical research initiatives, including collaborations with the Kern National Network and the Aspen Institute, and authored or contributed to influential thought leadership resources for higher education. Her background includes executive roles at two boutique consultancies and at TechTown Detroit, where she led high-impact projects for diverse clients, from Fortune 500 companies to community-based organizations. Mary's work has amplified thousands of academic, community, consumer, professional, and patient voices to drive innovation and advocacy for the people within the systems that impact them. She received her Bachelor's from the University of Michigan.

Kevin Brandt
Sacramento, CA
Students Vote Project Coordinator
California Secretary of State
Kevin Brandt, California Secretary of State Students Vote Project Coordinator. The program is a statewide nonpartisan program that amplifies college student voices and promotes civic engagement efforts to build a more inclusive democracy.

Cristin Brawner
Nashville, TN
Executive Director
National Issues Forums Institute
Cristin F. Brawner leads the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization dedicated to equipping, empowering, and mobilizing people to use deliberation to take action for the public good. Her career has focused on helping

communities and our democracy thrive by building partnerships, designing programs, and strengthening the civic infrastructure that enables people to talk, decide, and act together. Before joining NIFI, Brawner served as Executive Director of the David Mathews Center for Civic Life in Alabama. Brawner also founded the Southern Deliberative Democracy Network and is a former Associate with the Kettering Foundation.

Mike Burns
Washington, D.C.
Lawyer and Student Voting Rights Advocate
Michael Burns most recently served as the National Director for Fair Elections Center's Campus Vote Project. He spent over five years working in electoral politics prior to law school, including two years as the Executive Director of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee. During law school Mike was enrolled in CUA's Law and Public Policy Certificate program and was awarded a Dulin-Haynes fellowship upon completion. For over the last ten years Mike has worked with various kinds of institutions of higher education from across the country to help them understand the effects different election administration systems have on their campus community and how they can help their students register and vote. He has a J.D. from The Catholic University of America and a B.S. in political science with a minor in history from Longwood University. He is a member of the D.C. Bar.

Spencer Burrows
Carlsbad, CA
High School Civics Teacher / Administrator
Pacific Ridge School; iCivics; Street Law
Spencer Burrows is the Equity and Civic Engagement Coordinator and 11th Grade Dean at Pacific Ridge School in Carlsbad, CA, where he also instructs AP US Government and Politics, US History, and Economics. He also serves as Planning Commissioner at the City of Carlsbad, and consults for iCivics, Street Law, Gilder Lehrman, and Bill of Rights Institute. Lastly, he is a former Visiting Scholar at CSEE, focusing on civic education. He earned his B.A. from UCLA, and J.D. from University of California, College of the Law, San Francisco.

Cathy Copeland
Harrisonburg, Virginia
Director of Campuswide Immersion
The Institute for Citizens & Scholars
Cathy Copeland is the Director of the College Presidents for Civic Preparedness Campuswide Immersion Program at the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, where she partners with colleges and universities to build, assess, and strengthen their approaches to civil dialogue, media literacy, and collaborative problem-solving. Before joining Citizens & Scholars, Cathy directed AASCU's American Democracy Project; taught writing, rhetoric,

and literature courses at several universities; and developed multidisciplinary collaborative problem-solving courses.
Outside of work, Cathy can be found reading, cross-stitching, or decorating birthday cakes. A passionate supporter of public education and the arts in her community, she enjoys exploring national parks with her husband, two children, and two dogs.

Janett I. Cordovés
Miami, Florida
Vice President of Civic Activations
Elevate Cities
Janett I. Cordovés, EdD is a civic scholar-practitioner whose work focuses on democratic learning, pluralism, and engagement across difference in higher education. She designs and leads faculty development initiatives, curricular frameworks, and community-engaged learning experiences that cultivate democratic dispositions such as intellectual humility, deliberative dialogue, and shared responsibility. Her work bridges theory and practice, translating research on polarization, civic formation, and belonging into scalable institutional models. Janett's scholarship-informed practice centers on how colleges and universities can strengthen democratic participation through teaching, learning, and institutional culture.

Jen Daulby
Washington, DC
CEO
Congressional Management Foundation
Former Capitol Hill staffer with 25 years of experience in Washington. I have held every position in Congress from intern to staff director including working for four Members of Congress and covering subject matter for five committees. I am the current CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation that is the premier bipartisan foundation dedicated to strengthening the First Branch of government through congressional programing.

Rashawn A Davis
Newark, NJ
Founder and Principal
Courageous Strategies
Rashawn Davis is a nonprofit leader, writer, and public speaker focused on strengthening democracy, advancing civic technology, and inspiring public leadership. A Newark native, he made history at 21 years old as one of the youngest candidates to qualify for the city's municipal election ballot. Rashawn has led national initiatives at The Andrew Goodman Foundation and Change.org. He has served on Newark's Police Review Board and speaks regularly at universities, public agencies, and private companies. Rashawn holds degrees

from Georgetown University and New York University's Wagner School and serves on the Board of Directors for the W\.E.B. DuBois Scholars Institute.

Shruti Desai
Durham, NC
Chief of Staff
The Hunt Institute
Dr. Shruti Desai (she, her, hers) currently serves Chief of Staff at The Hunt Institute. Previously she served as Associate Vice President of Student Affairs for Campus Life. She also worked as Chief of Staff for the Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement at Washington University in St. Louis. She has also served as the Assistant Vice President at McKendree University in Lebanon, IL where she oversaw Title IX, Counseling Services, and Residential Life. Shruti held professional roles in Residence Life at Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Kansas, and Texas Tech University.

Michelle N. Deutchman
Los Angeles, California
Executive Director
UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement
Michelle N. Deutchman is the inaugural executive director of the UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement (Center). In this role, she oversees the Center's operations, programming and research including its multidisciplinary national fellowship program. Deutchman facilitates workshops for staff, students, administrators and law enforcement on First Amendment principles, academic freedom and how to safeguard free speech at universities while simultaneously maintaining a safe and inclusive campus climate. Her work to study and shape the national discourse on expression and engagement touches all 10 UC campuses as well as higher education institutions across the county.

Daniel DiSalvo
Chapel Hill, NC
Professor and Associate Dean
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Daniel DiSalvo is professor and associate dean of the School of Civic Life and Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. His scholarship focuses on American political parties, elections, labor unions, state government, and public policy. He is the author of Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868–2010 (Oxford 2012) and Government Against Itself: Public Union Power and Its Consequences (Oxford 2015). His articles have appeared in Political Science Quarterly, Political Research Quarterly, Policy Studies Journal, and American Political Thought among others. DiSalvo also writes frequently for popular publications, including

The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Atlantic Monthly, National Affairs, City Journal, Los Angeles Times, and the New York Daily News. He was previously the co-editor of The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics and serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Policy History. He has held visiting appointments at Princeton University's James Madison Program, the CUNY Graduate Center, and the Universidad de Los Andes (Colombia).

Ryan Drysdale
Washington, DC
Senior Director of Impact & State Networks
ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge
Ryan Drysdale is the senior director of impact and state networks for the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge at Civic Nation and has over 15 years of experience in community and civic engagement. Ryan has supported the launch of 20 state campus voting challenges, including 11 with Secretaries of State.

Dave Dulio
Rochester, MI
Distinguished Professor, Political Science; Director, Center for Civic Engagement
Oakland University
Dulio is also Distinguished Professor of Political Science Department and Director of the Center for Civic Engagement. He has published sixteen books, with two of his most recent being Congress and Religion: The Intersection of Faith and Politics and Campaigns and Elections American Style: The Changing Landscape of Political Campaigns. He has written dozens of articles and book chapters on subjects ranging from the role of professional consultants in U.S. elections to campaign finance. Since its founding in 2018, Dulio has led OU's Center for Civic Engagement with the intent on making OU known as a convener of conversations about issues of public importance.

Jill Dunlap
Chicago, IL
AVP for Civic Engagement, Policy Research, and Advocacy
NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
Dr. Jill Dunlap is the Assistant Vice President for Civic Engagement, Policy Research and Advocacy at NASPA. Prior to her current role, Jill worked at three different campuses over a span of 15 years. Jill's primary background is in equity and justice work, including increasing student civic engagement. Jill also teaches Political Science at both St. Xavier University and DePaul University in Chicago. She completed her PhD in Political Science and Public Administration at Northern Illinois University. Jill's research has centered on the experiences of college students and student affairs professionals, and includes a range of topics from interpersonal violence, to advancing racial justice on campus.

Alex Edgar
Washington, DC
Youth Engagement Manager
Made By Us
Alex Edgar is a Gen Z civic leader reimagining how institutions share power across generations, building the trust, structures, and skills that allow every generation to thrive together. As co-founder of Youth250 at Made By Us, he has helped position young people as central leaders in shaping the U.S. 250th anniversary, reaching more than 2.5 million people and engaging 7,500 organizations nationwide. His work has been recognized through Forbes 30 Under 30 and numerous advisory and board roles including with the American Association of Colleges & Universities, U.S. Census Bureau, and Points of Light.

Frank Fernandez
Madison, WI
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Frank Fernandez is an associate professor of educational leadership and policy analysis. He uses multiple research methods to write about education policy and equity issues, including civic engagement, voter turnout, and academic freedom. Dr. Fernandez has served as a fellow with the University of California Center for Free Speech & Civic Engagement, Salzburg Global Seminar, and Scholars at Risk.

Jodi Fisler
Williamsburg, VA
Applied Learning Program Director
College of William & Mary
Dr. Jodi Fisler currently directs the applied learning program at William & Mary. She previously served for ten years at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, where (among other things) she supported Virginia's 2- and 4-year colleges and universities in their efforts to promote civic engagement and civil discourse among their undergraduates. She has participated in both professional and volunteer capacities in local, state, and national initiatives related to civic learning, democratic engagement, free expression, and civic renewal.

Heather Ford
Washington, DC
Special Counsel, U.S. Election Assistance Commission
Special Counsel to Commissioners at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Lindsey Forson
Washington, DC
Deputy Executive Director
National Association of Secretaries of State
Lindsey Forson is the Deputy Executive Director for NASS. She works with members and their staff to ensure a robust exchange of ideas across the states and maintains relationships with key external organizations. Lindsey staffs the NASS Technology & Security Committee and NASS State Records & Archives Committee in addition to collaboration groups for Deputy Secretaries and IT leaders. Lindsey has a PhD in public administration and public policy from Auburn University where she focused on intergovernmental relations, security, and emergency management issues within US election administration. She has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on US election policy, administration, and security at Auburn University.

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Wendy Galvan
Sacramento, California
Students Vote Project Coordinator, California Secretary of State
Wendy Galvan serves as the California Secretary of State Students Vote Project Coordinator. Her work includes implementing the Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act, developing statewide guidance for California's public higher education systems, and leading initiatives such as the California University and College Ballot Bowl and Engage the Vote Championship, supporting participation across 234 campuses.

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Yewoinhareg Kebede
Washington, DC
Public Affairs Specialist, DC Board of Elections
Yewoinhareg Kebede serves as a Public Affairs Specialist in the Voter Education and Outreach Division (VEOD) at the District of Columbia Board of Elections. She builds strategic external partnerships, represents the agency at community events, and leads outreach initiatives across diverse populations with a focus on college students and members of the Ethiopian and Francophone community. She is a passionate advocate for civic engagement, who brings a level of empathy in her work to diligently ensure that all DC residents are informed about their rights and empowered to participate in the electoral process.

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Leslie Garvin
Elon, North Carolina
Executive Director
North Carolina Campus Engagement
Leslie Garvin is Executive Director of North Carolina Campus Engagement, a statewide network of 38 colleges and universities advancing civic learning, community partnerships,

and democratic engagement. A civic builder, dialogue facilitator, and frequent speaker, she serves on the boards of You Can Vote, HandsOn Northwest NC, and the National Issues Forums Institute, and on advisory bodies for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, guides.vote, and the Caring Out Loud Fellowship. She serves on the NC Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, works as Chief Election Judge in Guilford County, volunteers in her faith community, and holds an MSW from Washington University in St. Louis.

Vanessa Diaz Gaumond
Augusta, Maine
Youth and Civic Engagement Coordinator
Maine Department of Secretary of State
Vanessa Diaz Gaumond is the youth and civic engagement coordinator for the Maine Department of Secretary of State. Her work aims to increase access to nonpartisan civic education and create a more civically engaged citizenry. Vanessa believes that civic engagement does not start or end with voting, but that getting citizens to the polls can catalyze other forms of community engagement which promote democratic ideals.

Adam Gismondi
Wakefield, MA
Senior Director, Democratic Knowledge Project
Harvard University
Adam Gismondi is the Senior Director of the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP Learn), where he leads various initiatives aimed at enhancing civic education. His research focuses on the intersections of democracy, digital platforms, and education, with extensive experience examining how college student social media use impacts civic learning and engagement. Before transitioning to research, Gismondi spent six years as a student affairs administrator at both the University of Florida and Florida State University. He earned his B.A. in sociology from William & Mary, an M.Ed. in student personnel in higher education from the University of Florida, and a Ph.D. in higher education from Boston College.

Abraham Goldberg
Harrisonburg, Virginia
Professor, Political Science
James Madison University
Abraham (Abe) Goldberg is a professor of Political Science at James Madison University with scholarly interests in civic engagement, community placemaking and higher education. He previously served as director of the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement at JMU and as director of the Office of Service-Learning at the University of South Carolina Upstate.

Abe is a co-editor of Leaning Into Politics (2024) and recent scholarship is in the Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, Research and Practice in Assessment, and PS: Political Science and Politics. He is currently developing new research on free speech attitudes among college students.

Rolland Grady
Gainesville, FL
PhD Student in Political Science
University of Florida
Rolland Grady is a first year Political Science PhD student at the University of Florida, where she studies American elections, political behavior, and public opinion. Previously, she worked closely with the Andrew Goodman Foundation to promote student voting and served as a Research Intern for the Crossroads Civic Engagement Center. Rolland served on the 2024 Advisory Board for the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition and was invited by the Biden White House to come speak at a Roundtable for Youth Civic Engagement, where she shared her experiences organizing and advocating for student voters in the south.

Trey Grayson
Walton, KY
Former Kentucky Secretary of State, Currently a partner at FBT Gibbons
FBT Gibbons
Trey Grayson is a partner in the Florence, Kentucky office of the law firm FBT Gibbons. He is a former two-term Kentucky Secretary of State. During his tenure he led both the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Republican Association of Secretaries of State. Trey also served as the Director of the Institute of Politics at the Harvard Kennedy School.

A. Jackson Harris
Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Assistant Professor
The University of Alabama, Honors College
Dr. A. Jackson Harris is an Assistant Professor at The University of Alabama Honors College. Prior to his faculty role, he served in several professional staff roles at UA, focused on community engagement and leadership development. His scholarship focuses on civic learning and the polarization of public spheres. He earned a BA in interdisciplinary studies with an emphasis in community development, an MA in communication studies with a focus in rhetoric and political discourse and a PhD in communication and information sciences.

Ashley Hunt Esquivel
Des Moines, IA
Director of Communications
IA Secretary of State
Director of Communications for the Iowa Secretary of State's office

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Caleb Hays
Alexandria, VA
Election Attorney
Section 4 Strategies
Caleb J. Hays serves as Chief Counsel & Principal for Section 4 Strategies, an election law firm headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, with additional offices in Kansas City and New York. As part of his practice, Caleb is Chief Policy Counsel for the Center for Election Confidence, Special Counsel for Elections for the Republican National Lawyers Association, and outside general counsel to Congressional Management Foundation. Previously, Caleb served as General Counsel/Deputy Staff Director for the Committee on House Administration and as Staff Director for its Elections Subcommittee.

Chad Hoggan
Raleigh, NC
Professor, Adult & Lifelong Education
NC State University
Chad Hoggan is a Professor of Adult & Lifelong Education at NC State University, Co-director of the Institute of Civic Studies and Learning for Democracy, and an inducted member of the International Adult & Continuing Education Hall of Fame. Dr. Hoggan's research focuses on the dual areas of transformative and civic learning. He has published 6 books, including: Transformative Civic Education in Democratic Societies (2023), Learning for Democracy: A Framework for Adult Civic Learning (2025), and Teaching the Human Side of Migration (2026).

Matt Johnson
Mount Pleasant, MI
Professor of Higher Education
Central Michigan University
Dr. Matt Johnson is a professor of higher education at Central Michigan University and a nationally engaged scholar dedicated to advancing student success and improving college student learning. His work integrates research, teaching, and leadership to strengthen students' capacities in working across difference toward social change.

Brandon W. Kliewer
Knoxville, TN
Associate Professor of Civic & Organizational Leadership & Interim Faculty Director of the Jones Center for Leadership and Service
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Brandon W. Kliewer, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Civic and Organizational Leadership in Leadership Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Currently, he is serving as the Interim Faculty Director of the Jones Center for Leadership and Service. He studies and develops leadership in organizations and civic contexts through the lens of Leadership-as-Practice and Complex Adaptive Systems change. Brandon holds a Ph.D. from the University of Georgia in Political Science and a Master's degree in Political Science from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Bobby Kunstman
Durham, NC
Assistant Vice President for Campus Life
Duke University
Dr. Bobby Kunstman serves as Assistant Vice President for Campus Life at Duke University, where he provides executive leadership for campus life operations that include auxiliary and revenue-generating services, university events, venue and production management, and student affairs technology. With more than two decades in higher education, he advances student engagement, organizational strategy, and operational excellence. In his previous role at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he co-led civic engagement initiatives, convening students and launching a departmental civic engagement team to strengthen democratic participation and campus community partnerships. He brings a collaborative, implementation-focused approach to institutional work.

Keith Lanser
Cincinnati, OH
Associate Director, Doctoral Candidate
University of Cincinnati
Keith is a higher education professional with over twelve years of experience in facilitating nonpartisan civic engagement programs, including: democratic engagement, civil dialogue, social change leadership development, student philanthropy, and service-learning. Keith currently work as the Associate Director of the Center for Community Engagement at the University of Cincinnati, where he oversees the university's nonpartisan democratic engagement program, UC Votes. Keith is also a doctoral candidate in the Urban Educational Leadership EdD program at the University of Cincinnati. Keith's research centers the stories of college students who have experienced significant voting barriers.

Michael Lee
Charleston, SC
Director of the Civility Initiative / Professor of Communication
College of Charleston
Michael J. Lee is the director of the Civility Initiative and a professor of communication at the College of Charleston. The Civility Initiative teaches healthy disagreement and dialogue across differences. He hosts When We Disagree, a podcast about the role of conflict in all of our lives. His research focuses on political identity in American politics. His research has earned over a dozen awards including five national book awards for his first book, Creating Conservatism: Postwar Words that Made an American Movement. His latest book is We Are Not One People: Separatism and Secession in American Politics Since 1776.

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Elizabeth C. Matto
New Brunswick, NJ
Director, Eagleton Institute of Politics
Rutgers University
Elizabeth C. Matto serves as the Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. Matto earned her Ph.D. in American Politics from George Washington University. In 2022, Matto was invited to serve on a Presidential Task Force for the American Political Science Association focused on rethinking the political science major. She also served as the lead editor on APSA publications Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines and Teaching Civic Engagement. For Rutgers, Matto served as the co-chair of the Presidential Task Force on Civic Engagement and Public Service. She is the author of Citizen Now: Engaging in Politics and Democracy and To Keep the Republic: Thinking, Talking, and Acting Like a Democratic Citizen.

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Cate Mayer
Charleston, SC
Founder & Director
Be The Ones
Cate Mayer is an organizer, connector, and creative strategist building community and shifting power. She's the Founder & Director of Be The Ones, a grassroots organization reimagining civic participation as a cultural and creative force shaping healthier, more connected communities across South Carolina. Through art, imagination, and creativity, Cate leads initiatives that make civic life more accessible, joyful, and community-centered. Her work across sectors advances justice and equity by centering lived experiences and building power through relationships. Cate serves on the Southern Coalition for Social Justice SOLVE Leadership Council, the 4-H Pinckney Leadership Program Advisory Council, and member of Future Bound Justice Design Lab.

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Jairo McMican
Fuquay Varina, NC
Associate Director of Equitable Programming & Holistic Student Supports/Adjunct Professor
Achieving the Dream/National Louis University
Dr. Jairo McMican (we/he) is Associate Director of Equitable Programming and Holistic Student Supports at Achieving the Dream. A first-generation college graduate, he brings 19+ years of higher education leadership across North Carolina institutions, including roles at community colleges and the NC Student Success Center. McMican serves as Vice Chair of North Carolina's Education and Workforce Innovation Commission (gubernatorial appointment) and chairs NACADA's DEI Educational Advisory Board. His scholarship centers educational equity and access. He holds an Ed.D. from NC State University and believes in education's power to transform families and communities.

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Gregory McNeill
Frankfort, KY
Senior Advisor (at the time of participation)
KY Secretary of State's Office
Greg has served as a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Secretary of State since 2022. In that role, he authored the office's 2023 Kentucky Civic Health Assessment, examining trends in civic participation across the Commonwealth. He previously spent 17 years in the U.S. Senate, ultimately serving as a Subcommittee Staff Director. Greg is pursuing a doctorate in Public Administration, with research interests at the intersection of public administration and political science, particularly how legislative institutions function as both political and administrative organizations. He adjuncts at a local college, teaching public administration, state government, and public opinion.

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Demetri L. Morgan
Ypsilanti, MI
Associate Professor of Higher Education | Co-Director
University of Michigan; Center for Strategic & Inclusive Governance
Demetri L. Morgan is an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan's Marsal Family School of Education (Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education) and co-director of the Center for Strategic & Inclusive Governance (U-M and UC Riverside). His scholarship examines how colleges and universities strengthen democratic participation through civic learning, political engagement, and governance, with particular attention to how decisions get made top-down (boards and executives), bottom-up (student activism and community pressure), and middle-out (faculty and staff translating values into practice). His work informs efforts to build durable partnerships between higher education institutions and state and local civic infrastructure.

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Carah Ong Whaley
Charlottesville, VA
Lecturer, UVA Department of Politics; APSA Civic Education Committee member; Executive Director, Better Choices for Democracy
University of Virginia, APSA, Better Choices for Democracy
Carah Ong Whaley is the Executive Director of Better Choices for Democracy, an instructor in the Department of Politics at the University of Virginia and a leading scholar-practitioner working at the intersection of civic engagement, democratic innovation, and education. She also serves as a member of the American Political Science Association's Civic Education Committee. Previously directed civic engagement and public policy programs at the University of Virginia's Center for Politics and at James Madison University's Center for Civic Engagement, where she was recognized nationally for her leadership in student and community democratic participation initiatives. Carah's work focuses on bridging research, practice, and reform, helping institutions and citizens reimagine how democracy can function more inclusively and effectively. She has authored and co-authored numerous books, articles and podcasts, on civic learning, political participation, and democratic renewal.

Donald Palmer
Washington, DC
Commissioner (2019 – 2026)
U.S. Election Assistance Commission
At the time of his participation, Donald Palmer served as Commissioner of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. Mr. Palmer is a former Secretary of the Virginia State Board of Elections and served as the Commonwealth's Chief Election Official. He has also served as Florida's Director of Elections. Prior to his work in election administration, he served as a trial attorney with the Voting Section in the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, where he enforced the nation's voting laws. Finally, Palmer is a military veteran, retiring from the U.S. Navy after two decades as an intelligence officer and judge advocate general.

Julia Pedroza
Des Moines, IA
Program Specialist
Iowa Secretary of State Office
Oversees civic engagement efforts within the Iowa Secretary of State Office.

Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill
Washington, DC
Senior Director, Civic Learning and Free Expression Projects
Council of Independent Colleges

Jacqueline Pfeffer Merrill is Senior Director of the Civic Learning and Free Expression Projects at the Council of Independent Colleges. An expert on free expression, academic freedom, and collegiate civics, she advises college presidents, administrators, and faculty on policy, programs, and curricula. She served on the faculties of the College of William & Mary and St. John's College. Dr. Pfeffer Merrill serves as vice president of the Association for Core Texts & Courses and on the Virginia 250 Education Steering Committee. She earned her B.A. (First Class Honours) at the University of Calgary and M.A. and Ph.D. from Duke University.

Sadie Polen
San Diego, CA
Senior Director of Programs
Democracy House, DKP Fellow
As the Senior Director of Programs, Sadie is responsible for implementing, executing, and scaling programs that help prepare the next generation of leaders to strengthen American democracy. Before joining Democracy House, Sadie spent over ten years in higher education, working at the Harvard Kennedy School where she directed career and internship programs for the Institute of Politics. Sadie earned her B.S. from the University of California - Davis, and her M.Ed. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Allison Rank
Cedar Falls, IA
Director, Center for Civic Education; Professor, Political Science
University of Northern Iowa
Dr. Allison Rank is the inaugural director of the Center for Civic Education and professor of Political Science at the University of Northern Iowa. Her current research examines career competencies and learning outcomes associated with participation in campus-based voter engagement programs. Her research on the pedagogical value of civic engagement programming can be found in the Journal of Political Science Education and Journal of General Education, among others. She is the co-editor, along with Carah Ong Whaley and Lauren C. Bell, of Civic Pedagogy: Teaching Engagement in an Era of Divisive Politics, which is part of Palgrave's Political Pedagogies series.

Arielle Mizrahi
Denver, Colorado
Director of Partnerships
Unify America
Arielle Mizrahi is the Director of Partnerships with Unify America. In her role, she works with faculty and staff at 200+ colleges and universities to strategize and implement civic dialogue into curriculum, co-curricular programming, and across institutions. Prior to joining Unify, Arielle was the Florida State Coordinator with the Fair Elections Center's

Campus Vote Project, where she worked to institutionalize voting reforms on 30+ college and university campuses in collaboration with faculty, administrators, election officials, and student leaders.

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LaTonya "LT" Robinson
San Antonio, Texas
Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Students
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Dr. LaTonya (LT) Robinson serves as Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), where she leads divisional and institutional efforts that shape the student experience. As a first-generation college graduate, she is deeply committed to expanding access, strengthening collaboration, and supporting student growth across academic and co-curricular experiences. Dr. Robinson believes student success is grounded in care, connection, and opportunity, and she works to ensure every Roadrunner feels seen, supported, and empowered to achieve their goals.

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Patty Robinson
Lebec, CA
Faculty Director, Civic and Community Engagement (Emerita)
College of the Canyons
Retired from College of the Canyons (COC) after 26 years, Patty served as sociology professor, department chair, and dean and led the campus-wide initiative on democratic participation as faculty director, civic and community engagement. Completing seven Bringing Theory to Practice) grants, including The Way Forward grant, and participating in the Mellon Foundation Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators grant, Civic Dialogues, a state-wide virtual speakers' series was launched. Patty spearheaded COC's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation and has published articles addressing the "civic mission" of community colleges. She serves on the Board of Directors, National Issues Forums Institute.

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Steven David Santoyo
Austin, Texas
Educator & Non-Profit Board Member
Hillcrest High School Community Foundation (HHSCF)
Steven Santoyo is a Texas education policy leader and former classroom teacher dedicated to strengthening public schools. He currently serves as Director of Advocacy for a Texas public policy firm, following roles with the Texas Senate Education Committee and leading public affairs firms. A Teach For America alum, Steven taught in Dallas ISD and holds degrees from UT Austin and SMU. His work spans school finance, teacher preparation, and legislative strategy. Passionate about building coalitions across educators, lawmakers, and

community leaders, Steven brings a classroom-to-Capitol perspective to advancing opportunity for all Texas students.

Brett Sawyer
Sacramento, CA
Student Life Supervisor; CCCSAA President-Elect
American River College, California Community College Student Affairs Association
Brett Sawyer is a student services leader and educator committed to advancing civic engagement, student success, and educational access in higher education. He currently serves at American River College, where he leads student development initiatives, supports student government, and advances programs that promote leadership, equity, and civic participation. He will also serve as the President of the California Community College Student Affairs Association (CCCSAA) beginning in July 2026. His professional experience includes program development across Student Life, MESA, and Athletics, as well as prior experience in K–12 education teaching World History, Government and Economics. He received both a BA in History and a M.Ed. from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Jennifer Scutchfield
Lexington KY
Assistant Secretary of State
Kentucky Secretary of State
Jennifer Schwartz Scutchfield currently serves as Deputy Secretary of State and General Counsel for Michael G. Adams, Kentucky's Secretary of State. Jenni was appointed to the position on January 6, 2020. By statute, in the absence or disability of the Secretary of State, she may conduct the business of the Office.
Prior to her appointment by the Secretary of State, she served as Assistant Director and General Counsel for the Kentucky State Board of Elections. She previously was the 7th District Council Member in Lexington and was in private law practice. Jenni has worked for non-profits and educational institutions and has served as an Assistant County Attorney. In 2024, Jenni was named as a Henry Toll Fellow by the Council for State Governments and graduated from the Election Center CERA Program. In 2022, the Kentucky Gazette recognized Jenni as one of their Notable Women in Kentucky Politics and Government. Jenni is proud to be included in the 2011 Class of Leadership Kentucky. Jenni attended the University of Kentucky where she received both her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology and Juris Doctorate.

Kelly B Shaw
Ames, Iowa
Co-Director, Center for Cyclone Civics; Teaching Professor, Political Science
Iowa State University

Kelly B. Shaw has been a teaching professor at Iowa State University since 2011, as well as serving as the department's internship coordinator since 2022. He was named Associate Director for Cyclone Civics in 2024 and Co-Director of the Center for Cyclone Civics in 2025. He teaches courses in public policy and public administration, comparative politics, and American and state politics. Shaw served as a Lecturer and the Director of the Des Moines Internship Program for the Department of Political Science at the University of Iowa from 2012 – 2020, and was a Visiting Assistant Professor of politics and international relations at Drake University. Prior to his academic roles he served as the Associate Director of the European Union Center at the University of Missouri where he coordinated policy-related outreach for the European Commission in the Midwestern United States. Shaw is a former two-term mayor of Indianola, Iowa, and worked briefly in Washington, D.C. for Iowa Congressman Jim Lightfoot.

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Kevin Winchell
Crozet, VA
Executive Director
Democracy Strategies
Kevin Winchell is a civic, community, and political engagement strategist who has worked to advance democracy and help people turn their passions into progress through higher ed, nonprofits, and political campaigns. He has served as a director of civic and community engagement and as an adjunct faculty member, as a nonprofit executive director, and as a political campaign trainer and consultant.

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Michelle Sobel
Denver, CO
President
Unify America
Michelle Sobel is President of Unify America, where she leads the Civic Gym, a national initiative that equips college students with structured practice in engaging across differences. Since 2021, more than 40,000 students from 280 colleges and universities have participated in one on one, cross partisan dialogue sessions embedded in required coursework. Michelle focuses on scaling measurable civic skill development through technology enabled infrastructure that supports faculty and reaches students beyond the already engaged. She works with institutional leaders to position civil dialogue as both a workforce competency and a core component of higher education's civic mission.

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Sarah Spikes
Tumwater, WA
Voter Education and Outreach Specialist
Washington Office of the Secretary of State - Elections

Sarah Spikes is a Voter Education and Outreach Specialist at the Washington Office of the Secretary of State. Specializing in college outreach, she manages the Washington Campus Voting Challenge (Part of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge) and supports Washingtonians wanting to get more civically engaged. She is also part of the team responsible for putting together the Washington State Voters' Pamphlet, an informational guide printed and sent out every October to all Washington residences.

Rachel Stephenson
New York, NY
Chief Transformation Officer
The City University of New York
Rachel Stephenson is CUNY's inaugural Chief Transformation Officer, leading the University's efforts to accelerate strategic, cross-campus initiatives. In this role, she guides work that strengthens collaboration, advances institutional priorities, and fosters a culture of equity, empathy, and inclusive excellence. Her portfolio spans projects that improve student experience, support campus climate, and promote systemwide innovation. Previously, she held senior leadership roles in academic strategy and operations, where she advanced major University-wide initiatives and partnered closely with academic and administrative leaders across CUNY. Her work reflects a commitment to aligning people, processes, and purpose to drive lasting organizational progress.

J. Cherie Strachan
Akron, Ohio
Professor, Political Science & Director, Bliss Institute of Applied Politics
The University of Akron
J. Cherie Strachan is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron. Strachan's applied research focuses on civic learning in campus deliberative forums and student organizations, as well as on increasing scholarly rigor through multi-campus collaboration. Strachan currently serves on boards for organizations focused on promoting healthy democracies, including the National Issue Forum Institute (NIFI); Unify Akron, a local initiative of Unify America; and the American Political Science Association (APSA). She is currently Chair of APSA's Teaching and Learning Program Committee and incoming Chair of APSA's Political Science Education Section.

Terri Taylor
Washington, DC, and Paris, France
Strategy Director for Innovation and Discovery
Lumina Foundation
Terri Taylor is strategy director for innovation and discovery at Lumina Foundation where she connects Lumina's mission with addressing complex public problems such as

strengthening democracy, addressing climate change, and navigating the impacts of artificial intelligence. She has also led portfolios on postsecondary affordability and finance, federal policy, and quality assurance. Terri earned a bachelor's degree, with distinction, from the University of Virginia and a law degree from Georgetown. She started her career as a Peace Corps volunteer, teaching English as a second language in Kyrgyzstan.

Mason Thomas
Columbia, SC
Director of Legislative Oversight
South Carolina Senate
A 20 year veteran in SC state government, I have extensive experience in state policymaking principles and practices. I have a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in public administration, both from the University of South Carolina. Outside of my professional career, I am an Eagle Scout and active volunteer and board member in Scouting America.

Nancy Thomas
Senior Advisor to the President for Democracy Initiatives &
Executive Director, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education
American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
Nancy Thomas is executive director of the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, which transitioned to AAC&U Tufts University in 2023, and the senior advisor to the president for democracy initiatives. IDHE is an applied research center that studies campus climates for political learning; dialogue and discussion teaching on campus; speech, inclusion and academic freedom; and higher education's role in a democracy in question. While at Tufts (2012–2023), she also designed and directed the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, the nation's largest study of college student voting rates and patterns, reaching 1,250 campuses and serving 11.5 million students nationwide. Previously, Thomas co-founded and directed the Democracy Imperative, a national network of educators and dialogue practitioners dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy on college campuses and in local communities (2006–2013).
Dr. Thomas has authored and edited many articles, book chapters, special issues of journals, discussion guides, and a guide for training facilitators to manage politically charged discussions, as well as the monograph, Educating for Deliberative Democracy, part of Jossey-Bass New Directions for Higher Education series.

Clarissa Unger
Washington, DC
Executive Director
Students Learn Students Vote Coalition

Clarissa Unger is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition. She cares deeply about empowering local leaders to foster change in their own communities and the networks that support them in doing so. Clarissa has a background in advocacy, communications, fundraising, and political campaigns, with experience both in the United States and abroad. Prior to founding the SLSV Coalition, she worked at the nonpartisan Robert. J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas, also her alma mater, where she helped to promote civic and electoral engagement on campus.

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Jason Vadnos
Nashville, TN
Undergraduate Student; Civic Impact Assistant
Vanderbilt University; Project Pericles
Jason Vadnos is a junior at Vanderbilt University studying Human & Organizational Development and Culture, Advocacy, & Leadership with a minor in Business. Originally from South Florida, Jason is deeply passionate about catalyzing youth civic engagement, reducing political polarization, and creating a more just democracy for all, and hopes to pursue a career at the intersection of nonprofit management and higher education. Jason is a 2025-2027 Obama-Chesky Voyager Scholar for Public Service and a 2025 Riley's Way Call for Kindness Fellow, and has previously worked with the Institute for Democracy in Higher Education, the National Humanities Leadership Council, and Every Vote Counts.

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Brian Von Herbulis
Eagle, ID
Vice President of Programs
The Brickyard
Brian Von Herbulis serves as Vice President of Programs at The Brickyard, a national civic and service nonprofit that brings people together to strengthen communities and national cohesion through social gatherings, service, and civic connection. Brian is a retired U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel who led special operations and reconnaissance units and was among the original members of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Hampden-Sydney College, an MBA from Boise State University, and an executive leadership coaching certificate from Georgetown University. He is also a George W. Bush Institute Veteran Leadership Scholar.

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Michael Wall
Saint Paul, Minnesota
Youth Voter Outreach Specialist
Office of MN Secretary of State
Michael came to youth voter outreach work with a history of classroom teaching and relationship development work in secondary and post-secondary institutions (think alumni

and development work). His work with the Minnesota Secretary of State's office supports campus vote coordinators (required of every MN college and university), student work in secondary and post-secondary, and provides and facilitates voter education of young voters and pre-voting populations.

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Scott Warren
Washington, DC
Fellow
SNF Agora Institute, Johns Hopkins
Scott Warren is a fellow at the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University. He is currently leading an initiative focused on exploring, researching, and convening a pro-democracy conservative agenda in the US, organizing convenings focused on bridging long-term and short-term fixes for democratic reform, and supporting cities in efforts to promote civic participation and democratic engagement.

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Lamont Anthony Wells
Philadelphia, PA
Executive Director
Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities
Lamont Anthony Wells is the Executive Director, Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). He is also the immediate past national President of the ELCA's African Descent Lutheran Association representing the denomination's 50,000+ members of African Heritage. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Arcadia University. Previously, he earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion and Sociology at Morehouse College and earned a Master of Arts in Education and a Master of Divinity degree in Pastoral Counseling and Liturgical Worship from the Interdenominational Theological Center/Johnson C. Smith Seminary. Pastor Wells has studied various disciplines at Harvard Divinity School, Cornell, Princeton, and University of Pennsylvania. He was named an Inaugural Clergy Fellow of the Chautauqua Institute and has been a United Nations Fellow since 2021.