



**Request for Proposals  
Education for American Civic Life  
Revised Fall 2020**

The Education for American Civic Life initiative supports efforts to prepare students to become informed and engaged participants in the civic life of their local and national communities. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from \$100,000-\$300,000 over a 24-36 month period, will be made to each funded project participating in this initiative. The size of the grant will be based on the scope of the project. We expect this grant program will remain open for approximately three to five years.

**Goals**

The mission of the Teagle Foundation is “to support and strengthen liberal arts education, which we see as fundamental to meaningful work, effective citizenship, and a fulfilling life.” Civic education entails an understanding of American history and the ways our society has met or failed to meet the standard of its own democratic principles. When viewed expansively, this knowledge can guide students to recognize how communities are formed and continually reformed, and can lead students to consider their responsibilities beyond themselves. Civic knowledge lays the groundwork for members of a shared community to appreciate and grapple with their differences, and to build a mutually respectful collective civil life.

Colleges and universities often assume that their incoming students have received prior preparation on fundamental topics such as the formation of the American republic or the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, contention over its meaning, and its amendment over time. On this assumption, they miss critical opportunities to help undergraduates develop a mature understanding of the history and fragility of democracy. We encourage institutions to embed these themes across their curriculum and to invite deeper academic inquiry on critical issues that vex our local and national communities.

Through Education for American Civic Life, the Foundation seeks to elevate the civic objectives of liberal arts education by partnering with institutions offering bold and coherent initiatives that endow students with the content, skills, and sensibility to participate in a political system designed for self-governance. While progress has been made at many institutions of higher education to promote civic action and various forms of community service as part of the undergraduate experience, the Foundation is especially concerned with grounding such action and service in comprehensive civic knowledge through teaching, reading, debate, and discussion centered in the curriculum.

## **Criteria for Project Proposals**

The Teagle Foundation welcomes the participation of a diverse array of institutions—community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive and research universities—in this initiative. Grants of varying amounts, ranging from \$100,000-\$300,000 over a 24-36-month period, will be made to each funded project participating in this initiative. Requests from both single institutions and multiple institutions partnering together will be considered. The size of the grant will be based on the scope of the project. Proposals for planning grants in the range of \$25,000 over 6-12 months are strongly encouraged.

Through this initiative, the Foundation seeks ambitious projects that confront gaps in undergraduates' civic knowledge and prepare them for the intellectual demands of democratic participation. Successful proposals will seek to promote learning about the formation of the American republic, the crafting of its Constitution, the history of contention over the interpretation of the Constitution, the development of representative political structures, and the principles of democracy. Civic education is strongest when it is not treated as a theoretical or abstract subject but when it becomes part of the lived experience of students and links their work across disciplines. For this reason, the majority of our grants go to institutions that give students an opportunity to connect big questions in areas like governance, history, and law, to the local history and current conditions of the community outside the campus gates.

## **Specific Areas of Interest**

The Education for American Civic Life Initiative is focused on funding in two particular areas: (1) anchoring significant questions in democratic thought in local history and community and (2) strengthening preparation for public service.

- **Anchor Significant Civic Questions of Democracy in Local History**

Projects are anchored by a significant question concerning the past and present challenges of democracy in the community in which the college or university is located—whether this is a metropolitan center such as Newark, New Jersey, with a long history of successive migrations into and out of the city, or rural Virginia, site of a major Civil War campaign and the struggle over segregation and civil rights. Some of our partner institutions design first-year core curricula while others work within divisions such as an honors college or a pre-professional program. In both cases, faculty design a series of courses to ensure that students are prepared to be informed and engaged civic participants in their local and national communities. These programs explicitly help students grasp the lived experience—past and present—of their neighbors outside the campus gates as a valuable aspect of a civic education that builds on their education in areas like governance, history, literature, and law.

- **Strengthen Preparation for Public Service**

The Foundation is committed to giving students the education they need to participate in public service, whether by formal post-college employment in the public sector or as public-minded participants in civic life. In addition to valuable curricular interventions, the Foundation supports

programs that explicitly offer students a supported pathway to public service. Typically, Teagle-funded programs offer foundational courses in civic education followed by opportunities to learn about and work in public service. Strong initiatives have taken students through rigorous humanities seminars in democratic theory followed by opportunities to solve significant civic challenges and participate in public service internships.

**Regardless of curricular approach, all successful proposals are expected to address the following:**

- **Invest in Faculty Leadership and Learning**

The Foundation believes in faculty leadership. All grants should name the faculty members that will lead the planning and implementation process. As colleges and universities work to deepen civic education, they come to recognize that faculty, who are often educated in a single specialized discipline, are likely to need their own learning opportunities to ensure that they become better equipped to teach the variety of texts presented and discussed in a strong civic curriculum. The Foundation is therefore invested in building learning opportunities for faculty focused on the knowledge and skills they need to give undergraduates a comprehensive civic education.

- **Focus on Undergraduate Education**

All Teagle grantees are able to explain how their work reaches undergraduate students in the classroom. Successful proposals will seek to promote learning about the formation of the American republic, the crafting of its Constitution, the history of contention over the interpretation of the Constitution, the development of representative political structures, and the principles of democracy. We give priority to proposals designed to reach a significant proportion, if not all, of the undergraduate student body and that infuse civic education in and across the curriculum.

- **Sustainability**

Successful applicants will clearly articulate how proposed programs are aligned with institutional priorities; how they will be enacted, as appropriate, through institutional governance structures; and how they will be sustained beyond the life of the grant. Projects are expected to move beyond additions to course catalogs and reflect content integration to support civic learning outcomes. Grants from the Teagle Foundation are made in the expectation that once the formal grant period ends, should the piloted efforts be successful, the costs associated with supporting the work will be absorbed by the participating institution(s).

- **Assessment**

Proposals must provide clearly articulated goals for undergraduate civic learning and how they will be measured. The Teagle Foundation may wish to collaborate with grantees in an external evaluation to assess the short- and longer-term outcomes of funded projects, including follow-up studies three to five years after the conclusion of the funded projects.

- **Dissemination**

Active dissemination efforts will be important to spread the knowledge and practices developed by grantees to higher education stakeholders. Dissemination might take the form of publicly available instructional materials; action-oriented toolkits or other publications; webinars; websites and blogs; and conference presentations and workshops.

### **Submission Process**

Requests for grant support will be considered following our two-stage application process. First, we ask that prospective grantees share brief (3-5 page) concept papers. After review of the concept papers, a limited number of applicants will then be invited to submit full proposals. For complete details on the submission process, please refer to information on [how we grant](#).

We encourage interested institutions to submit a concept paper that names all the campus partners and sketches the project description, with an eye towards meeting the criteria discussed above. The guiding question to keep in mind while developing your concept paper (and if invited, your proposal) is: in what ways will your curricula be substantively different as a result of a grant? And how will those curricular innovations be sustained beyond the life of a grant?

We consider concept papers on a rolling basis. The Teagle Foundation's fiscal year begins on July 1 and its Board of Directors reviews all grant requests when it meets in November, February, and May. If a proposal is invited, program staff will confer with applicants to determine the appropriate timeline for submitting a full proposal in line for potential review by the board. All concept papers should be submitted electronically at [proposals@teagle.org](mailto:proposals@teagle.org). If invited, full proposals will be submitted through the Foundation's online application system.

**FOUNDATION CONTACT:** Please contact Tamara Mann Tweel, program director for civic initiatives, at [ttweel@teagle.org](mailto:ttweel@teagle.org) if you have questions about Education for American Civic Life.