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**American Commonwealth Partnership**

The American Commonwealth Partnership (ACP) was launched at the White House on January 10th, the start of the 150th anniversary year of the Morrill Act, signed by President Lincoln in 1862, a time of crisis in the nation. The White House meeting, “For Democracy’s Future – Education Reclaims Our Civic Mission,” marked a new stage of coordinated effort to bring about a commitment to civic education and education as a public good not simply a private benefit. It was organized in partnership with the White House Office of Public Engagement, the Department of Education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of the Schools.

At the event, the Department of Education released its Road Map and Call to Action on civic learning and democratic engagement, described in [remarks](http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-democracys-future-forum-white-house) by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement released [*A Crucible Moment*](http://www.aacu.org/civic_learning/crucible/)*,* a report to the nation on the need for a shift in civic learning from “partial” to “pervasive.” ACP highlighted institutions which have taken steps toward becoming “democracy colleges,” including community colleges, liberal arts colleges, state colleges and universities, and research institutions. Democracy colleges, a term out of community college and land grant history, are institutions strongly connected to their communities where students learn critical thinking, application of knowledge to real world problems, and skills of collaborative work across differences. A [report](http://democracyu.wordpress.com/2012/01/12/for-democracys-future-education-reclaims-our-civic-mission-event-reinforces-the-need-for-civic-education/) on the meeting can be found on the ACP web site DemocracyU, with links to the YouTube videos of the event.

ACP is an alliance of community colleges, colleges and universities, P-12 schools and others dedicated to the democracy college ideal for all higher education. ACP promotes several initiatives including:

**The Deliberative Dialogue Initiative**, in partnership with the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), is organizing a discussion in campuses and communities on higher education’s role in America’s future. It will be complemented by a communications effort to convey higher education’s potential to help teach skills of work across differences on public problems. Despite two decades of important public work in higher education, research by NIFI suggests that the public is largely unaware of higher education’s contributions to such skill development – seen as an urgent need by citizens of many views and backgrounds.

**Citizen Alum Initiative**, directed by Julie Ellison, is an effort to change the framework of alumni relations, partnering with alumni as "do-ers" as well as "donors." Citizen Alum aims to find the hidden treasure—the creative, civic, intellectual, and social capital of alumni, especially recent "gap alums" and alums who opt out of conventional roles, supporting them as contributors to their home communities and as allies in education.

**Student Organizing Initiative** is a campaign to deepen the civic identity of college students, develop skills of deliberative public work, and strengthen the DemocracyU social media campaign as resources for students to share their stories and address their concerns for our democracy.

**Pedagogies of Empowerment and Engagement Initiative**, an organizing effort spearheaded by Blase Scarnati of Northern Arizona University, will identity and collect the details of effective pedagogies of empowerment and engagement across the country that teach skills of work across differences, recruiting new sites and partners.

**Public Scholarship Initiative** organized by Tim Eatman of Imagining America at Syracuse University and John Saltmarsh of NERCHE (UMASS Boston) is undertaking a participatory research project with different institutions, on the nature of democracy colleges in the 21st century.

**Civic Health Initiative**, coordinated by the American Democracy Project in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, is developing ways to assess the impact of colleges and universities on community and campus civic health.

**Civic Science Initiative** is organized by John Spencer at the at the University of Iowa, Scott Peters at Cornell, Molly Jahn at the University of Wisconsin, Rom Coles at Northern Arizona University, and Harry Boyte at Augsburg College and the Humphrey School. Civic science is a framework for understanding scientists as citizens, working with other citizens in ways that respect different ways of knowing, deepen collective wisdom on public questions, and develop civic agency.

**ACP Policy Initiative**, building on policy discussions with the Department of Education in 2011, will include focus on state level policies strengthening engagement, and is consulting with the Department of Education on an ongoing basis about policies to strengthen engagement.

The ACP Presidents’ Advisory Group is co-chaired by Nancy Cantor, Chancellor, Syracuse University, and Brian Murphy, President, DeAnza College, and includes M. Christopher Brown, President, Alcorn State University; Thomas Ehrlich, President Emeritus, Indiana University; Freeman Hrabowski, President, University of Maryland Baltimore County; David Mathews, President Emeritus, University of Alabama; Paul Pribbenow, President, Augsburg College; and Judith Ramaley, President, Winona State University.

Augsburg College serves as the inaugural host institution for the American Commonwealth Partnership. Harry Boyte, Director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College and a Senior Fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, is National Coordinator.