

A Year of National Partnerships and Institutional Transformation



2025 Annual Report



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Center for Economic
and Civic Learning

Dear Friends and Partners,

In 2025, the Center for Economic and Civic Learning (CECL) accelerated its mission with new statewide initiatives, expanded academic programs, national partnerships, and measurable civic impact across communities.

This year, we launched CREATE250, a bold expansion of our U.S. Department of Education–funded CREATE initiative. What began as a focused partnership with Muncie Community Schools has grown into a statewide community of practice, preparing educators across Indiana to lead civic learning during America’s Semiquincentennial.

We advanced C4G—Cultivating Civic Character for the Common Good, a multi-year effort supported by the Educating Character Initiative at Wake Forest University, which positions Ball State as a national leader in character-infused civic education. This initiative strengthens the moral and civic foundation of our students through virtues such as courage, justice, gratitude, and civic responsibility.

Ball State also formally joined the American Democracy Project, reaffirming our institution’s commitment to civic responsibility and democratic engagement at a national level. CECL now serves as the coordinating home for ADP at Ball State.

Our academic footprint expanded through the new Civic Studies Minor, new courses in democratic leadership, and the development of immersive civic experiences—from field studies to the KIIS Netherlands program.

Finally, CECL contributed research leadership to the 2025 Indiana Civic Health Index, highlighting Indiana’s progress in voter registration and turnout, and identifying persistent gaps that require statewide action.

CECL’s work has never been more urgent. The challenges facing our democracy demand institutions that prepare students, educators, and communities with the knowledge, character, and agency to sustain civic life. In 2025, Ball State demonstrated that commitment with clarity and purpose.

Thank you for supporting our shared work to strengthen democracy, deepen civic learning, and build a more engaged Indiana.



David J. Roof, PhD
Director, Center for Economic and Civic Learning
Campus Director, American Democracy Project



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A TURNING POINT FOR CECL: FROM LOCAL IMPACT TO STATEWIDE RESPONSIBILITY

The year opened with momentum already in motion. The CREATE project had just finished documenting the strongest civic-learning gains ever recorded in a Title I Indiana district. Elementary civic proficiency numbers that once sat below 40 percent were now above 75 percent. Middle school students who entered sixth grade answering fewer than half of NAEP-aligned civics questions correctly were leaving eighth grade near the mid-seventies. High school performance rose as well, accompanied by measurable improvements in civic dispositions—students reporting greater intention to vote, stronger confidence in working with others, and greater belief in their ability to make a difference in their communities. Teachers, too, reported transformation: dramatically increased confidence in leading civic discussions, integrating primary sources, and building democratic competencies into everyday instruction.

These outcomes, rooted in three years of professional development totaling more than seven thousand documented hours, form the bedrock for the next phase: CREATE250.

The U.S. Department of Education's award of \$1.76 million in October marked a defining moment for CECL and Ball State. The selection placed the university among a small number of institutions charged with preparing the nation's teachers and students for America's Semiquincentennial. What made the award even more significant was that it rested on demonstrated evidence, the kind rarely seen at this scale in civic education: validated assessments, multi-year growth curves, documented teacher practice changes, and district-level transformation.

The project's letters of support—from statewide superintendents, national civic leaders, the Indiana Historical Society, Congresswoman Victoria Spartz, and U.S. Senator Todd Young—reflecting widespread recognition that CECL's approach to civic learning as rigorous, content-driven, and aligned with democratic values.

With CREATE250, CECL moved from being a successful academic center to becoming Indiana's primary institutional leader for statewide K–12 civic learning.

2025: A YEAR OF NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The story of 2025 at the Center for Economic and Civic Learning is the story of a center that grew from a local anchor into a statewide civic infrastructure. It is the story of faculty, students, and community partners whose work coalesced at a moment when Indiana -and the nation- face deep questions about civic trust, civic participation, and civic purpose.

Most importantly, it is the story of what happens when evidence, partnerships, and institutional commitment align.

BUILDING CREATE250: INDIANA'S CIVIC LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AMERICA250

The launch year for CREATE250 focused on the architecture that will shape civic education across Indiana for the next decade. The proposal's central commitment, to build a statewide Community of Practice for Title I educators, guided the year's work. CECL developed the recruitment framework, finalizing an equity-based selection rubric that prioritizes districts with the fewest existing civic learning supports. It began designing the 2026 Summer Civic Learning Academy, an intensive professional program that will bring educators together for structured engagement with founding documents, primary sources, historical case studies, and field-based learning experiences.

The project's statewide partners prepared to support the effort, including the Indiana Historical Society, Community-Engaged Alliance, and district leaders across the state. The year's planning work also laid the foundation for student-facing components: civic showcases, historical field experiences, community projects tied to the Semiquincentennial, and public-history events that will culminate in 2026 and 2027.

If CREATE was the model, CREATE250 became the blueprint for scaling.

INDIANA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX: RESEARCH THAT SHAPES STATE POLICY

CECL contributed directly to the 2025 Indiana Civic Health Index, authoring the statewide analysis of voting and voter registration. The data highlighted a complicated trend: Indiana made significant gains between 2022 and 2024, improving its national ranking in registration and turnout. Yet structural disparities persisted, especially among younger voters, lower-income residents, and Hoosiers with less formal education.



The report's analysis offered policy-relevant insights on barriers, access, and the importance of information clarity. By contributing to the state's benchmark civic health report, CECL strengthened its role as both a research and policy leader.

C4G: CULTIVATING CIVIC CHARACTER FOR THE COMMON GOOD

A second major development reshaped CECL's identity in 2025: the launch of C4G, a three-year initiative supported by Wake Forest University's Educating Character Initiative, with funding from Lilly Endowment. While CREATE250 focuses on civic knowledge and teacher capacity, C4G centers civic virtue and moral formation across the university curriculum.

C4G advances the idea that civic knowledge alone is insufficient without the dispositions that sustain democratic life. The initiative is guided by virtues such as justice, civic courage, responsibility, gratitude, intellectual humility, and public-spiritedness. Throughout 2025, C4G implemented faculty development workshops, curricular redesigns, and campus-wide programming that reached hundreds of faculty and staff. These efforts support the launch of the Civic Studies Minor, an interdisciplinary program rooted in democratic thought, civic leadership, ethical reasoning, and public problem-solving.

The initiative's ambitions are institution-wide: to cultivate a culture where academic excellence, character formation, and civic engagement reinforce one another.

JOINING THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY PROJECT: NATIONAL NETWORK, NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ball State's membership in the American Democracy Project—formalized in 2025—placed the university inside the nation's most prominent public higher education civic learning network. CECL became the coordinating home for ADP at Ball State, representing the university at national convenings and supporting the development of new civic pathways, faculty resources, and student-engagement programs.

Participation in ADP reinforced the university's commitment to civic responsibility outlined in its strategic plan. It also linked Ball State's work to broader national conversations about democratic resilience, student agency, and the role of public universities in rebuilding civic trust.

TEACHING RFK AND DR. KING FOR AMERICA250: CIVIC INQUIRY THROUGH THE LEGACY OF APRIL 4, 1968

Through federal support from the Library of Congress, CECL led With Compassion Toward One Another, an inquiry-driven Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) initiative grounded in the civic and moral lessons of April 4, 1968—the night Robert F. Kennedy addressed audiences at Ball State University and in Indianapolis following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The project used these parallel historical moments to help teachers examine civic courage, ethical leadership, and the responsibilities of democratic communities.

During the July 2025 Summer Institute, Indiana teachers engaged deeply with Ball State’s archives, the Indiana Historical Society, and the Landmark for Peace Memorial. Across three days of immersive fieldwork, educators analyzed original documents, oral histories, photographs, and maps and applied TPS inquiry methods to develop classroom-ready lesson designs. Guided by structured analysis tools and facilitation, teachers built lessons that connect historical empathy to civic action—preparing students for America250 through evidence-based inquiry and reflection.

Participants reported significant growth in their understanding of RFK’s and MLK’s leadership, in their confidence using primary sources, and in their readiness to guide students through inquiry-based civic learning. The project’s outcomes strengthened TPS alignment statewide and positioned CECL as a leader in America250-focused teacher development.



**LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS**
**TEACHING
WITH PRIMARY
SOURCES**
Consortium Member

ART, CHARACTER, AND CIVIC IDENTITY: CECL'S 2025 CIVIC STUDIES CONFERENCE EXPANDS THE FIELD

The 2025 Conference on Civic Studies and Democracy—Character, Aesthetics, and Community: The Interplay Between Community, Art, Politics, and Civic Identity—brought together educators, scholars, artists, journalists, civic leaders, and students for three days of rigorous public scholarship and democratic dialogue. Hosted by CECL in partnership with the School of Art and the College of Fine Arts, the conference reinforced Ball State's growing leadership in civic studies.

President Geoffrey Mearns opened the event, followed by keynote speaker Michael Greer, who delivered the annual Fred Meyer Lecture on Cultural Policy and Arts Advocacy. An awards ceremony honored local and regional leaders whose work exemplifies civic innovation, public scholarship, cultural leadership, and community revitalization.

Over two days of panels, workshops, and performances, attendees explored themes such as civic murals, nostalgia and identity, rural democratic engagement, cultural mapping, media's role in civic identity, environmental democracy, misinformation and AI, and the role of arts in collective memory. Dr. Trygve Throntveit's keynote on William James and civic renewal highlighted Ball State's growing national presence through Third Way Civics.



The conference cemented CECL as a multidisciplinary convening hub—linking civic learning, community partnerships, and the arts in service of democratic life.

CLEAN ENERGY, CIVIC LITERACY, AND COMMUNITY VOICE: CECL'S NEW LUMINA-FUNDED STEM+CIVICS PILOT

CECL launched Clean Energy in My Community in 2025, a Lumina Foundation-funded initiative designed to help Muncie Community Schools students and teachers connect clean-energy literacy with real civic decision-making. The project integrates STEM learning with civic agency, ensuring students understand how energy choices shape community well-being, sustainability, and local policy.

Led by Provost Anand Marri and Institutional Coordinator David J. Roof, the initiative brings together Ball State University, Indiana University's Environmental Resilience Institute, and Educating for Environmental Change. Teachers receive paid professional development on climate science, solar energy, local governance, and community energy planning.



CECL oversees civic learning, teacher recruitment, evaluation, and local partnerships.

Students interact with Muncie's community-solar initiative and explore how municipal governments, utilities, and community stakeholders make decisions. They will produce real civic artifacts—public-comment statements, energy-design proposals, op-eds, or presentations—to strengthen their understanding of policy processes and community action.

This pilot strengthens BSU-MCS relationships, expands energy-career awareness, and positions Ball State as a statewide leader in practical, community-centered sustainability education.

2025 NEWS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

LAUNCHING INDIANA'S FIRST CIVIC STUDIES MINOR: BUILDING CIVIC AGENCY ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Ball State University launched the Civic Studies Minor in Fall 2025, establishing Indiana's first interdisciplinary academic program dedicated to civic responsibility, ethical leadership, and democratic engagement. Designed and coordinated by CECL, the minor equips students from any major with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for informed, community-centered citizenship.



Students begin with one of three foundational courses—HONR 390, POLS 300, or CVIC 200—which introduce civic identity, community engagement, leadership, and democratic practice. They then complete electives across journalism, philosophy, education, political science, communication, sociology, criminal justice, natural resources, and history.

The program includes campus-engagement requirements, community-based service, and a culminating capstone project or civic reflection. This blend of academic study and applied civic work reflects Ball State's commitment to preparing students for ethical leadership and democratic participation.

With its interdisciplinary structure and hands-on orientation, the Civic Studies Minor has become a cornerstone of CECL's academic mission and a signature contribution to civic learning at Ball State.

2025 NEWS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CECL'S EMILIE ALLEN JOINS NATIONAL COHORT OF NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOWS

Emilie Allen, an Honors College student, Whitinger Scholar, and staff member with the Center for Economic and Civic Learning (CECL), was named a 2025–2026 Newman Civic Fellow by Campus Compact. Nominated by President Geoffrey S. Mearns, Emilie was recognized for her leadership in advancing democratic participation through her work at CECL on policy briefs and public events, her internships with Christel House International and the Eiteljorg Museum, and her campus roles as Event Coordinator for the Honors Association for Community Engagement and Secretary for Academic Affairs in Student Government Association.



As a Newman Civic Fellow, Emilie joins a national cohort of student leaders from across the United States and Mexico for a year of advanced civic-leadership development, including mentorship, skill-building workshops, and opportunities to design and implement community impact projects. Her selection highlights both her own commitment to public service and CECL's growing role in preparing Ball State students to lead in civic and community life.

CECL's commitment to student leadership reflects its belief that democratic renewal must be cultivated both in classrooms and through lived civic experience.

TRYGVE THRONTVEIT NAMED ONE OF FOUR STANFORD NATIONAL CIVIC FELLOWS

The Center for Revitalizing American Institutions at Stanford University's Hoover Institution has named Trygve Throntveit a National Civics Fellow. Dr. Throntveit is among four individuals selected to inaugurate the new fellowship, which he will hold during the 2025-26 and 2026-27 academic years. The fellowship is designed to identify researchers and practitioners in the field of civic learning whose work is well advanced and deserves amplification. Dr. Throntveit was selected on the basis of his theoretical and practical contributions to undergraduate civic learning via the Third Way Civics initiative. He and the rest of the inaugural cohort will also be involved in shaping the structure of the fellowship for future cohorts.



2026 AND BEYOND

FROM MOMENTUM TO INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

In 2025, CECL focused on building the foundations for high-quality civic learning: statewide partnerships, faculty-development pathways, evaluation frameworks, and public-facing scholarship. In 2026 and beyond, we believe this foundation will enable CECL to expand its reach, strengthen civic learning across Ball State University and throughout our region.

Scaling CREATE250 Statewide (2026–2028)

CREATE250 extends CECL's successful district-based work into a statewide community of practice for Title I educators. Beginning in 2026, CECL will convene teachers through summer academies, ongoing professional learning, and shared curricular resources aligned with the Semiquincentennial. The focus is replication with integrity, supporting teachers not only with materials, but with the pedagogical tools and the confidence needed to sustain rigorous civic learning across diverse local contexts. Student-facing civic learning tied to CREATE250 will expand in parallel through America250 public showcases, historical inquiry, and community-based projects.

Deepening Character-Infused Civic Learning Through C4G

This project will strengthen the ethical foundations of civic life and character across our State. In 2026, CECL's focus shifts from initial faculty engagement to diffusion across the curriculum. Faculty development will emphasize integrating civic virtues, such as justice, responsibility, intellectual humility, and civic courage, into course design, reflection, and applied learning. Over time, civic character formation will become a more visible and coherent dimension of Ball State's educational culture.

Launching and Stabilizing the Civic Studies Minor

The minor will formalize civic learning as an academic pathway grounded in citizenship, community, and leadership. In 2026 and beyond, CECL will strengthen the Minor through targeted recruitment, advising, and curricular coherence, ensuring students graduate with both civic knowledge and the capacity for responsible public action. The Minor also serves as a model for embedding civic studies across disciplines.

2026 AND BEYOND

FROM MOMENTUM TO INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Expanding Ball State's National Civic Profile Through ADP and Public Scholarship

Through Ball State's participation in the American Democracy Project, CECL will continue coordinating democratic engagement across campus. The emphasis moving forward is coherence and visibility, connecting faculty initiatives, student programs, and public events into a more legible civic ecosystem, while contributing to national conversations on the democratic responsibilities of public universities.



Strengthening CECL's Role as a Research-to-Policy Leader

CECL's contribution to the Indiana Civic Health Index positions the Center as a bridge between research and practice. In the coming years, CECL will expand its capacity to translate civic data into actionable strategies with partners, informing policy, reducing

barriers to participation, and strengthening democratic resilience at local and state levels.

Cardinals Vote! and the 2026 Election Cycle

The 2026 elections present a critical opportunity for nonpartisan student civic engagement. Through Cardinals Vote!, CECL will focus on increasing voter registration, turnout, and informed participation while reinforcing norms of pluralism, democratic reciprocity, and civic responsibility. Rather than simple mobilization, this work emphasizes sustained engagement through peer-to-peer outreach, and structured opportunities for dialogue during a consequential election cycle.