

Institute for Democracy and Higher Education

Theory of Change

(5-22-16)

Our Mission is to shift college and university priorities, practices, and culture to strengthen democracy and advance social and political equity. We focus explicitly on political learning and engagement.

Guiding Principles

- ❖ *We work for equitable social conditions and political systems for historically marginalized and currently underrepresented groups in society and higher education. Our work facilitates postsecondary teaching and learning for political agency that effectively addresses social and political injustices.*
- ❖ *We acknowledge that structural inequalities exist in both higher education and American society and that these inequalities threaten the health and future of democracy. We challenge colleges and universities to eliminate practices that reinforce disparities in power, access, and opportunity.*
- ❖ *We welcome diverse ideological perspectives on how to define and bring about a more just society.*
- ❖ *We believe that dissent and conflict are transformative agents and present an opportunity for reflection, study, growth, participation, action, and change. At the same time, we reject discrimination, coercion, intimidation, or other behaviors that restrict the free exchange of ideas and discourse.*
- ❖ *We model these democratic principles in our own workplace practices. We operate on a system of shared decision-making and collaboration. Our team members come from many walks of life culturally, geographically, and in terms of our lived experiences.*

Vision

We are united by an aspirational vision that colleges and universities educate for a democracy that is:

- ✓ *Participatory:* people engage in the shaping the political and social systems that affect their lives
- ✓ *Equitable and representational:* people have an equal opportunity for engagement in social, economic, and political systems, with equitable outcomes
- ✓ *Educated and informed:* people have equal access to quality public education and information
- ✓ *Effectively governed:* government systems are just, ethical, transparent, and accountable.

Strategies

We achieve our mission through these strategies:

- *Generate new and practical knowledge* about effective democratic learning and institutional engagement.
- *Link theory and practice by providing resources and technical assistance* to practitioners at institutions and higher education associations and consortia.
- *Advocate and provide thought-leadership* through strategic communications, partnerships, and convenings.

Intermediate Outcomes

We work toward these intermediate outcomes:

- ✓ *Demonstrable commitment* on the part of colleges and universities to serving as an agent for a strong and just democracy and to educating students for political agency and equity.
- ✓ *Increased institutional programs and practices* that foster healthy campus climates for political learning, participation, and equity.
- ✓ *Increased voting rates and political participation* among students from groups that have been historically marginalized in higher education and/or are underrepresented in American democracy.

Long-term Indicators of Success

We aspire to long-term indicators at the system, institutional, and individual levels, specifically:

- ✓ *Higher education as a system* serves as a catalyst for stronger and more equitable democracy.
- ✓ *Colleges and universities* support campus climates conducive to equitable political learning, discourse, and engagement.
- ✓ *College and university students and graduates* possess the knowledge, skills, values, and commitment needed to co-create a strong and equitable democracy.