



# Gephardt Institute *for* Civic and Community Engagement Strategic Plan

CONDENSED VERSION | ESTABLISHED MARCH 2021





# OUR MISSION

The Gephardt Institute fosters a vibrant culture of civic engagement throughout Washington University, realized by engaged citizens, scholarship, and partnerships that advance the collective good.

## OUR VISION

### **We envision civic health.**

All people actively engage in the progress and vitality of their communities.

## OUR GOALS

**Educate students** for lifelong engaged citizenship

**Catalyze partnerships** that respond to community needs and priorities

**Infuse civic engagement** throughout the Washington University experience

## OUR CONTEXT

Because Washington University is located in and responsible to St. Louis, the Gephardt Institute focuses on the St. Louis region. And, as the university's reach spans from local to global, it is vital that we equip the Washington University community for lifelong engagement at local, national, and international levels.

## OUR VALUES

The following values will guide the Gephardt Institute as an organization and will serve as a shared compass for civic and community engagement at Washington University. Although each value can function independently, they are intentionally organized as a continuous cycle that starts with inquiry and empathy before ultimately arriving at action—mirroring the process of engagement.

These values will be applied and detailed in contexts such as staff recruitment and training, curriculum development, practical guidelines for effective community engagement, and program selection criteria.

### **Inquiry**

We believe that humility, intellectual curiosity, and reasoning form the foundation of informed and responsible civic engagement.

### **Empathy**

We believe that seeking and considering multiple perspectives transforms how individuals and communities engage with one another.

### **Collaboration**

We believe that partnerships are most impactful when rooted in shared goals and decision-making.

### **Integrity**

We believe that upholding ethical behavior, respecting others, and honoring commitments are cornerstones of trusting and reciprocal partnerships.

### **Equity**

We believe that effective civic engagement fosters access, opportunity, and dignity for all, and addresses structural and power imbalances.

### **Action**

We believe that effective civic engagement is an active process requiring courage, dedication, and participation.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement is at a watershed moment. We face a national civic crisis and urgent challenges locally, nationally, and globally. We embrace a resurgence of civic engagement, particularly among youth, and burgeoning interest in St. Louis community engagement among our students, faculty, and staff. We are challenged to reinvigorate the public relevance of higher education and to deepen the St. Louis community's trust in Washington University as a substantial partner for regional progress.

As an “action tank” grounded in the education and skills necessary for effective civic engagement, the Gephardt Institute has laid a strong foundation in our first 15 years. We will build on this success through our **mission to foster a thriving culture of civic engagement throughout Washington University, realized by engaged citizens, scholarship, and partnerships that advance the collective good.**

**To achieve this bold mission, we will:**

## **EDUCATE STUDENTS FOR LIFELONG ENGAGED CITIZENSHIP**

We envision that Washington University students will become alumni who apply a civic lens to their professional, academic, and personal lives, actively engaging in the progress and vitality of their communities.

## **CATALYZE THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ENGAGED CITIZEN IN ST. LOUIS**

We envision that Washington University—through our students, faculty, staff, and alumni—will play an active and substantial role as a partner with St. Louis community organizations, addressing regional priorities to advance a thriving St. Louis.

Through this strategic plan, the Gephardt Institute will provide coordination, infrastructure, and support to our students, faculty, staff, community partners, and alumni through partnership, course, and program development. We envision that civic engagement will be found “in place” at Washington University: in majors, departments, and schools; in faculty teaching and research; and in the co-curricular life of students. Our goal is not simply the addition of new initiatives. Rather, we are intently focused on high quality initiatives, measurable impact, coordinated and community-driven efforts, seamless civic education, and focused attention on the greatest challenges facing St. Louis.

**We will accomplish this through the following priorities:**

- **Student Pathways:** Develop and foster pathways for civic engagement education and involvement for all Washington University students.
- **Community Partnerships:** Build the infrastructure to support university and regional organizations in developing and advancing mutually beneficial community partnerships.
- **Academic Integration:** Bolster resources for faculty and departments to integrate civic and community engagement into teaching.
- **Investment in Current Initiatives:** Solidify and advance current initiatives within three categories: Engage Democracy, St. Louis Engagement, and Civic Agency.

**We will measure our success by:**

- **Broad student engagement in civic life,** defined by metrics of students' civic knowledge and skills, participation levels in academic and co-curricular opportunities, and commitment to civic engagement post-graduation.
- **Cultivation of substantial university–community partnerships,** defined by metrics of quality and quantity of partnerships, sustained positive impact on consequential St. Louis community priorities, and community organizations' satisfaction and trust in Washington University partnerships.
- **Growth of civic and community engaged courses,** defined by metrics of quality, quantity, and diversity of courses; student learning; advancement of community partner missions; and faculty scholarship.

To achieve our aspirations, we will need to both enhance and secure our resources. This will include an expanded staff and operating budget, substantial Civic Engagement Fund, sophisticated technology infrastructure, continued investment in Stix House, and robust endowment to sustain our efforts.

The opportunity is before us to elevate the Gephardt Institute's role as a vital engine for civic engagement throughout Washington University, resulting in consequential impact on the civic health of our communities—starting in St. Louis and extending into the world.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## INVESTMENT IN CURRENT INITIATIVES

**Solidify and advance current initiatives through strategic growth, development, and continuous assessment for measurable impact.**

## PATHWAYS FOR ALL STUDENTS

**Develop and foster pathways for civic engagement education and involvement for all Washington University students.**

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

**Build the infrastructure to support university and regional organizations in developing and advancing mutually beneficial community partnerships.**

## ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

**Bolster resources for faculty and departments to integrate civic and community engagement into teaching and scholarship.**

### **Engage Democracy:**

Students will graduate with the knowledge, skills, and commitment to actively engage in the process of democracy through political participation, public problem-solving, and civic dialogue.

### **St. Louis Engagement:**

Students will embrace St. Louis as a vital part of their education and apply their talents to affect positive change in St. Louis.

### **Civic Agency:**

Students will have robust opportunities to develop the capacity to act on their civic responsibility and integrate it into their lives as alumni.

Establish a student pathways working group to identify core civic competencies, outline the key civic engagement pathways that meet those competencies, and create a pathway navigation structure.

Build and sustain campus partnerships that foster student engagement in key pathways.

Strengthen capacity building role to support growth of current St. Louis partnerships and establishment of new St. Louis partnerships that are stewarded by faculty, staff, departments, and student organizations.

Expand the Civic Engagement Fund to support development, operations, and evaluation of Community Engaged Courses and community partnerships in the St. Louis region.

Increase faculty interest, ease, and knowledge to design and implement Community Engaged Courses.

Create and implement infrastructure for Community Engaged Course designation and evaluation.

Establish the Gephardt Institute as a nexus to activate and coordinate civic and community engagement among students, faculty, staff, community partners, and alumni.

# IMAGINE THE FUTURE WITH US

## **IMAGINE *the future of civic health.***

Communities organize to define and address public problems. All people have the will and the skills to engage in public life<sup>14</sup> through civic dialogue, community service, collective action, and philanthropy. People engage with their governments as voters; interact with elected officials; and participate in public dialogue, processes, and decision-making. Strong social ties and networks connect people. We see high confidence in institutions, trust in neighbors, expression of political opinion, and interactions among neighbors and groups.

The Gephardt Institute envisions civic health: All people actively engage in the progress and vitality of their communities.

## **IMAGINE *the future of St. Louis.***

St. Louis is a thriving metropolitan region redefined by its assets, progress, and vitality, and its reputation has advanced beyond a deficit-based mindset. Education, health, safety, and economic outcomes are equitable across race, culture, zip codes, city/county lines, and other social categories. Nonprofit and community leaders rely on Washington University as a trusted and reliable partner to advance regional priorities. Community-university partnerships are proactive, robust, sustainable, and focused on consequential initiatives aligned with regional priorities and data-informed practice. These partnerships are based in shared planning, decision-making, and expertise—resulting in measurable positive community outcomes centered on regional priorities.

## **IMAGINE *the future of Washington University.***

Civic engagement is found everywhere—in classes and research, in academic schools and departments, in co-curricular life and in residence halls, in the spirit of civic dialogue among people with divergent perspectives. Just as we are known and respected for our excellence in teaching, research, and patient care, we are known and respected in higher education as a leader in civic engagement, and in the St. Louis region as an institution that effectively and reliably partners with the community for sustained and mutually desired positive change. Our success is measured not just by our quantity and breadth of opportunities, but more critically by the quality of our impact in the following areas:

- Student civic learning, inside and outside the classroom—and the lifelong commitment to engaged citizenship
- St. Louis community impact that is positive, consequential, and sustained
- The integration of civic and community engagement into the very fabric of Washington University

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**To access our complete Strategic Plan, visit:**  
[gephardtinstitute.wustl.edu/strategicplan](http://gephardtinstitute.wustl.edu/strategicplan)