

# Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Collaborative National Projects

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## A Brief History of Shared Work

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2011: The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) was the official author of *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*. The name was chosen to synthesize the overarching goal of the national CLDE roundtables held in 2011: exploring ways to strengthen all students' civic learning and democracy engagement. CLDE also was the acronym given the project that organized the roundtables and the *Crucible* report.

2012: AAC&U's senior vice president, Caryn McTighe Musil, who had led the CLDE initiative, organized a CLDE Action Network with 14 organizations<sup>1</sup> that agreed to work collaboratively on the *Crucible* vision and recommendations. The CLDE Action Network was announced in 2013, and Musil convened it several times each year by phone and in person through 2019.

2012: NASPA formed a self-supported LEAD CLDE initiative to engage student affairs staff with making CLDE part of each students' college experience. Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement continue to be NASPA "focus area" priorities to the present time.

2013: AAC&U's quarterly journal, *Diversity and Democracy* (D&D) became a shared communication space for the CLDE Action Network – providing public announcements about the CLDE Action Network and partners' events in every D&D issue from 2013 through 2019 until D&D ceased to be published. Over the course of this time, four members of the CLDE Action Network (NASPA, The Bonner Foundation, Imagining America, and the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education) partnered with AAC&U to co-sponsor a theme-focused issue of *Diversity and Democracy*.

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<sup>1</sup> American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Anchor Institutions Task Force, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Bonner Foundation, Bringing Theory to Practice, Campus Compact, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Imagining America, the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, the Interfaith Youth Corps, the Kettering Foundation, and NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. The Democracy Commitment, another member, has since merged with Campus Compact while the 14<sup>th</sup> member, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education has closed. AAC&U became the American Association of Colleges and Universities in 2022.

- 2013: The Robert M. McCormick Foundation funded the CLDE Action Collaborative, a Chicago-based series of AAC&U-led workshops to help institutions in that metropolitan area expand upon efforts individually and collectively to foster a civic ethos and advance students' civic and democracy learning across-the-curriculum. AAC&U involved two CLDE Action Network partners in the work: The Interfaith Youth Corps and Illinois Campus Compact.
- 2013: AAC&U created a section in its monthly electronic AAC&U Newsletter specifically to highlight the publications, conferences, and research from CLDE Action Network organizational members to the 7,000 AAC&U institutional members that received the newsletter. Musil and her staff wrote text each month highlighting CLDE AN partners.
- 2015: The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) decided to re-brand its signature American Democracy Project summer conference as a CLDE conference, co-sponsored and planned with NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and, for a time, with The Democracy Commitment (200 community colleges) as well. Both AASCU and NASPA were active members of the CLDE Action Network, and their decision was encouraged and publicized through *D&D* by the CLDE Action Network. Many of the Action Network partners had sessions in the initial 2015 CLDE meeting and Musil convened the Action Network at the CLDE conference through 2019.
- 2018: The Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, a member of the CLDE Action Network, spearheaded a joint project that led to the publication of [\*Election Imperatives: Ten Recommendations to Increase College Student Voting and Improve Political Learning and Engagement in Democracy\*](#). It was reissued in 2019 and every CLDE AN member except the Kettering Foundation, which does not involve itself in voting projects, reviewed, contributed resources to, and/or promoted as a co-sponsor.

The CLDE Action Network partners led numerous additional civic learning collaborative projects from 2013 to 2019.

For a description of these projects, see Carol Geary Schneider, *Making Liberal Education Inclusive* (AAC&U, 2021), Chapter 7, pp. 130-133.

The CLDE Coalition – formed in 2021 – builds on earlier CLDE work while setting new policy and educational priorities for students’ civic learning and democracy engagement.

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After Caryn McTighe Musil retired from AAC&U in July 2020, the CLDE Action Network became inactive.

In 2021-22, AAC&U, College Promise, Campus Connect, Complete College America, and the State Higher Education Executives Association (SHEEO) agreed that it was time to form a new Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement coalition and set new goals for a new era with a strong focus on reversing the inequities that still pervade students’ participation in college-level civic learning.

You can follow the CLDE Coalition’s work—with numerous organization and campus partners—at their website, [www.collegeciviclearning.org](http://www.collegeciviclearning.org).

The CLDE coalition’s work is indebted to those who helped shape the vision set forth in *A Crucible Moment* and to the countless educators who, through earlier CLDE collaborations and beyond, have found creative ways to advance civic ethos in colleges, community colleges, and universities, and make civic inquiry transformative for diverse postsecondary learners.

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