



## National Conference on Citizenship

*Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.*

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your participation in the **Exploring Civic Learning as a Pathway to Equity and Opportunity** dinner salon discussion at the NCoC Conference on October 19. We appreciate your input on leveraging civic learning as a pathway to increased equity and opportunity for students, institutions, and communities. PACE and NCoC have received positive response and interest from partners and participants. Below is a summary of the discussion from the conference and an update on what's next for this work.

### Recap

The session kicked off with a reflection from student Maya Branch, about how her civic learning experiences empowered her to find her voice. Maya challenged the adults in the audience to think about what young people are capable of, reminding us that our youth are not just the future; they are the present too. Maya set the stage for our panelists, Rebecca Burgess, Decker Ngongang, Verdis Robinson, and Robert Sainz, to discuss how civic learning supports vibrant communities and makes engaging civic life possible. Whether civic education takes place in classrooms or through experiential learning programs, on community college campuses, or in political rallies and discussions, young people shape their identities through civic experiences.

Civic learning also teaches us that systems and institutions can either reinforce inequities or foster greater opportunity, but it is up to us to create the conditions for young people to become active citizens by empowering and supporting them. In order for young people to enact their civic rights and voices we must understand and embrace both individual and collective responsibility. While the panelists agreed civic learning is ripe with the potential to do this, the conversation raised several challenges, including the role adults play in facilitating or sometimes hampering youth engagement, the polarized and inequitable environment in our education system, and a fear of what it means to be political during these divisive times.

In addition to the panel, we also heard from those of you in the room about how to strengthen communities by facilitating civic learning both inside and outside of the classroom. When young people are equipped with the skills to discuss and analyze controversial issues, learn about the history and systemic causes of inequities, and are invited to be part of solutions, they have the opportunity to find their voice, to become a part of something bigger than themselves, and become forces for good. We closed the session with observations from Keesha Gaskins-Nathan on the honesty, urgency, creativity, and imagination required to do this work. Civic learning has the power to address hard questions about racial and economic inequities in our society, and to create better opportunities for all people.

## **What's Next**

PACE and NCoC share a vision of informed, engaged, and resilient communities, and are committed to supporting civic learning as a part of the pathway for our nation to experience equity and opportunity, and to be a part of the solutions to the challenges facing our nation and our democracy.

The learnings from this discussion will be released in a white paper in early 2018. We will also hold a working session on March 1 which will be focused on turning those learnings into concrete and tangible recommendations for our field. Due to space constraints, invitations are limited but please contact our project manager, Amber Cruz Mohring ([amber@createconnectconvene.com](mailto:amber@createconnectconvene.com)), if you have any questions or suggestions on valuable contributors to this meeting.

Wishing you a joyous holiday season and continued conversations on this work together in the new year!

Sincerely,

Sally Prouty and Kristen Cambell