

## NEWS RELEASE

**Release date:** September 25, 2018

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### **Citizen University announces winners of “Joy of Voting” Initiative in four US Cities**

*Akron, OH; Charlotte, NC; Grand Forks, ND; and West Palm Beach, FL  
to implement joyful projects that encourage civic participation*

SEATTLE – September 25, 2018 – Parades, street theater, open-air debates, festivals: These were once part of America’s culture of voting, and Seattle nonprofit Citizen University aims to revive them. Citizen University and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation are thrilled to announce the winners of an open call for projects that will generate creative celebrations and joyful public rituals that encourage people to vote. The “Joy of Voting” project aims to address a decades-long trend of lower voter turnout and lack of civic participation by encouraging neighbors to come together for vibrant, community-building initiatives centered around civic participation.

Launched two years ago with [Knight Foundation support](#), Citizen University piloted its Joy of Voting program in four cities for the November 2016 general election, continuing in three other cities for local elections in 2017. The project returns in 2018 with activities in Akron, Charlotte, Grand Forks, and West Palm Beach, where CU is partnering with activists, artists, organizers and citizens to generate localized, action-oriented projects that foster a stronger culture of voting on the ground.

Following an open submission period, Citizen University and city partners selected up to six projects in each city to receive \$3,600 each to execute their projects. This year’s projects must be implemented in advance of the November 2018 midterm elections.

“Over the last two years of this project, it’s been so fun to see the diversity and creativity of what our local partners have come up with,” said Ben Phillips, senior program manager at Citizen University and director of the Joy of Voting project. “During last year’s election cycle, we saw such hunger and excitement around these innovative, fun, in-person activities.”

“This project isn’t just about frivolity,” said Phillips. “This is about bringing together communities to see and be with each other face-to-face in joyful ways. That’s where power, and participation, and real bottom-up change begins. We can’t wait to see what sort of creativity is unleashed in these communities in the coming months.”

“Democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged,” said Lilian Coral, Director of National Strategy and Technology Innovation at Knight Foundation. “The Joy of Voting project creates a culture of joyful and active participation in voting that draws communities together and fosters a lasting desire for civic participation.”

This year’s 22 projects range from a student voting festival to a Zumba extravaganza to a party bus to the polls.

In West Palm Beach, the Afrique Ngozi Dance and Drum collective will share information about the history and importance of voting using art from the West African tradition, while the Flamingo Clay Studio creates jumping jack puppets -- at two-times life-size scale -- that will work with human youths to get people registered and help them get to the polls on Election Day.

In Akron, the Wandering Aesthetics theatre company will host a battle royale for the heart of democracy, featuring hour-long comedic adventures debating the question: “Should I vote?”

At the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, the Digital Press is collecting voters most joyful memories from the polls and sharing them via its interactive platform.

In Charlotte, voters can attend the “Vote So Hard” Open Mic experience and celebrate voting through live performances that span the artistic spectrum, from visual to performance culinary — all by local creatives and all centered around the theme of civic engagement.

For more information on the all the projects and events, visit: [www.joyofvoting.us](http://www.joyofvoting.us).

The Joy of Voting project derives its vision from an [article in The Atlantic](#) written by Citizen University founder and CEO Eric Liu, in which he argues that it’s possible to revive 18th and 19th century practices of raucous, participatory activity and pageantry around elections.

“Instead of ‘eat your vegetables’ or ‘do your duty,’ voting should feel more like ‘join the club,’” said Liu. “Or, better yet, ‘join the party.’”

Visit [www.joyofvoting.us](http://www.joyofvoting.us) to learn more about the activities in Akron, Charlotte, Grand Forks, and West Palm Beach.

### **About Citizen University**

Citizen University is a national nonprofit based in Seattle that promotes and teaches the art of powerful citizenship. In addition to the Joy of Voting, programs and initiatives include the Civic Collaboratory, a civic leadership network; Sworn-Again America, a project on civic rituals; the Citizen University National Conference; and programs and resources to teach civic power. For more, visit [citizenuniversity.us](http://citizenuniversity.us)

### **About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more, visit [knightfoundation.org](http://knightfoundation.org).