

## NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Anusha Alikhan, Knight Foundation, 305-908-2646, [media@knightfoundation.org](mailto:media@knightfoundation.org)

Ben Phillips, Senior Program Manager, Citizen University, 360-305-8568, [ben@citizenuniversity.us](mailto:ben@citizenuniversity.us).

### **Citizen University launches open calls for ideas to make local voting more 'joyful' in four U.S. cities**

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

SEATTLE – June 27, 2018 – National nonprofit Citizen University is launching an open call for residents in four U.S. cities to share ideas that help reinvigorate a culture of voting in their communities. Supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, 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.

The project, implemented in seven cities over the last two years, returns in 2018 with activities in Akron, Charlotte, Grand Forks, and West Palm Beach. Residents are encouraged to attend local kickoff events and brainstorm ideas for localized, action-oriented projects that generate creative celebrations and joyful public rituals encouraging people to vote. To submit an idea and attend a community event visit: <https://www.citizenuniversity.us/joy-of-voting-submit/>

The kickoff convenings in each city, taking place throughout summer 2018, will develop ideas and build teams of practitioners on the ground to execute the projects. This year's projects must be implemented in advance of the November 2018 midterm elections.

To generate projects relevant to each city, Citizen University will partner with local organizations to host ideation sessions with a diverse group of artists, active citizens, educators, and neighbors. Following an open submission period, Citizen University and city partners will select five projects in each city to receive \$3,600 each to execute their projects.

Residents of Akron, Charlotte, Grand Forks, and West Palm Beach can submit project proposals at [www.joyofvoting.us](http://www.joyofvoting.us).

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. Projects included interactive art installations, voting-themed plays and performances, festive block parties, and other citizen-generated activities centered around engaging peers. In October 2017, Citizen University announced the expansion of the project to four new cities with [additional funding](#) from Knight Foundation.

“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.”

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).