

## Civic Spirit's Response to COVID-19

### Virtual & National Pivot

Over the past year, the Civic Spirit team has responded to the evolving needs of educators as they navigate the academic challenges of a public health crisis and a period of political and social unrest. The transition to virtual learning brought about by the pandemic has opened geographic doors, allowing Civic Spirit to educate teachers throughout the U.S. and explore approaches to strengthening civic education on a broader scale. With the generosity of an anonymous foundation, we developed a virtual civics symposium to meet the following objectives:

1. Expand the reach of Civic Spirit's offerings to 150 educators.
2. Enable secondary school educators to learn from scholars & practitioners through text-based seminars.
3. Develop relationships with educators and schools to recruit for future programming.

During a year in which teaching demands have increased considerably, we designed the symposium to appeal to overwhelmed educators. We titled the symposium "**We the Educators**" to convey the centrality of teachers in democratic life and created a content-rich and flexible program to allow for varying levels of engagement.

To introduce a broader audience to Civic Spirit, we curated a schedule of sessions that aligned with Civic Spirit's 3-pillar methodology, offering thirteen 90-minute sessions over the course of three weeks in late winter 2021. We engaged leading scholars of American history and political science, faith leaders, and experts in civil dialogue, social studies education, and media literacy. [\[Presenter bios and session descriptions\]](#)

We worked with presenters to design sessions that combined lecture and discussion, facilitating high-caliber study with time for participants to connect with fellow educators and explore how to integrate their learning in the school setting. To reach a wide audience, we marketed through school network agencies, civic education organizations, social media, and direct outreach to schools. To encourage engagement, we provided an incentive of \$150 to educators who participated in at least three sessions.

### Symposium Results

*By the Numbers:* Participation in **We the Educators** was distinct and consistent. **156** individuals registered through the Civic Spirit website, and **31** registered through the event platform, totaling **187** individuals who engaged with the program. Of those, **91** individuals participated in multiple sessions throughout the symposium.

When planning the symposium, we had expected that most participants would attend between 1-3 sessions given the time constraints that educators experience in general and particularly during COVID. We were wonderfully surprised to find that symposium participants (**100%** of whom indicated they work in education) engaged more deeply in the program than we anticipated, with **54%** of participants attending **three or more sessions**. Registrants were from **27** states, and over half of participants live in the Northeast. We were pleased with the diversity and caliber of educators who joined the symposium in terms of subject area, grade level, and geography.

We are currently surveying individuals who registered for the program but did not participate to ascertain if there are additional steps we can take in the future to close that gap. We assume that scheduling conflicts and overall "Zoom burnout" were likely significant factors, yet we will continue to explore if there are marketing, logistic, or communication strategies we can employ to encourage more registrants to attend.

Graph: [We the Educators Registrants by State](#)

## Participant Response

We surveyed participants after each session, and at the end of the program to capture comprehensive feedback about the symposium. The end-of-program evaluation had a 40% response rate, with 36 participants sharing feedback. Below are key findings from the evaluation:

1. **100%** of respondents were highly satisfied (78%) or satisfied (22%) with the symposium.
2. **100%** of respondents identified something that they learned at the symposium which they plan to bring to their classroom or educational setting.
3. **97%** of respondents reported the symposium as beneficial for their professional work.
4. **95%** of respondents across all post-session surveys indicated favorably towards their likelihood of using the studied texts and frameworks in their professional work.

## Qualitative Analysis

When asked to identify valued aspects of the symposium, respondents' answers fell into four common categories:

1. **Rich Content:** The study of primary sources with historical context and exploration of ideas.

*"I particularly enjoyed the session with Lucas Morel. The text study allowed participants to connect while working together in break out rooms. The text was interesting, raised important and relevant questions. I shared it with several people afterwards."*

*"The first three classes (Tocqueville, Douglass, and "Parties and American Democracy") brought insight and background knowledge for me to use when talking about civics and history with my students."*

2. **Relevant Pedagogy:** Effective new approaches and key educational resources for integrating civic content.

*"I learned about many different strategies for analyzing images from the session on Teaching How to Think: Using Art to Encourage Intentional Thought in the Civics Classroom."*

3. **New Connections:** Bonds formed between educators, the small group learning, and diversity of the participants.

*"I valued the camaraderie, being with other educators who want to share their time to keep improving their craft, skills and talents."*

4. **Religion and Civics:** Exploration of civic responsibility through religious texts and the role of the First Amendment's establishment clause within academic settings.

*"The conversation brought to the fore the ability we have to [discuss] the intersection of faith, values, and civics."*

## Constructive Feedback

The evaluation affirmed that we were successful in achieving the educational goals of the symposium and providing an exemplary learning experience that powerfully expanded Civic Spirit's reach. Below are areas for improvement conveyed in the participant responses.

1. More time for interaction between educators to discuss strategies for introducing new texts and approaches.
2. Extending the symposium dates so that two sessions are not offered at the same time.
3. More information made available about each session including target audience and session format.