



# Civic Spirit Educators Cohort Summer Institute 2021

*E Pluribus Unum: Exploring Unity and Difference in America*

## Evaluation Report

### Program Overview

The annual Civic Spirit Summer Institute ran virtually this year from August 2nd through August 5th. As usual, the program included four days of text-based learning with scholars, skill-focused workshops with field experts, dialogue on difficult issues, introduction to Civic Spirit's methodology, and cohort-building exercises. [See Summer Institute agenda.](#) Specifically, this year's institute was designed to initiate participants into Civic Spirit's year-long [Educators Cohort](#). Twenty-one educators from 12 schools and 9 states were accepted into Civic Spirit's 3rd cohort. These educators have committed the next 12 months to high-level scholarship and professional development for learning new ways to foster civic knowledge, responsibility, and agency in their students. [See participants bios.](#)

The four overarching goals of the Summer Institute were for participants to:

1. Develop an understanding of Civic Spirit's unique approach to civic education
2. Feel inspired and enriched through text-based learning with scholars on pivotal American texts
3. Gain new skills and resources for implementing civic learning in their setting
4. Build connections with peer educators

The 2021 Summer Institute was designed around a core theme, *E Pluribus Unum: Exploring Unity and Difference in America*. This theme will be integrated in all seminars and learning gatherings during the school year. Explanation of this year's theme:

The United States adopted the phrase "E Pluribus Unum" as its official motto in 1782. A Latin phrase meaning "Out of Many, One," the motto captured the founders' determination to establish a single nation from a group of states and individuals from numerous origins. Over time, "E Pluribus Unum" has reflected America's ongoing project of forging a unified nation of diverse individuals and communities. The challenge of honoring differences while seeking unity has played a complicated, yet central role in shaping American history, literature, arts, and character. In a time of increased polarization, this motto challenges us to consider the aspirations and tensions that this concept has reflected, and the values, virtues, and skills we need to imagine and realize its potential. Throughout the year, we will explore "E Pluribus Unum" through multiple lenses—such as race, religion, and immigration--and reflect on how this idea can inform the ways we bring civic learning into our schools.

## Outcomes

At the completion of the Summer Institute, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative data collection. 78% of participants responded to the questionnaire.

### Key Findings

To gather quick quantitative data, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with four statements:



Qualitatively, feedback was collected from participants regarding each individual session or workshop offered at the Summer Institute. Responses indicated a high level of satisfaction across the board on the quality of the presenters and content. Participants were asked to provide recommendations for improvement the Summer Institute; suggestions included:

- Building in more breaks
- More opportunities for teachers to socialize and connect informally
- Scheduling the Institute earlier in the summer (July rather than August)
- More opportunities for discussing classroom application of learning session

Participants were also asked an open-ended question to identify a specific objective or action they will try as a result of attending the Summer Institute. Responses included using more primary sources in the classroom, presenting new ideas for civic learning to department administration and colleagues, creating connections with other communities, and brainstorming for the Civic Spirit core project.

## Reflection

Participation responses indicate that the Summer Institute was successful in achieving the core goals outlined above. Specifically, feedback suggests that the institute presented the right balance of learning experiences, skill development, and new content introduced across Civic Spirit's [three pillars](#).

Review of survey responses and the Civic Spirit team's own internal evaluation indicated three key opportunities for improvement of future summer institutes and for Educator Cohort programming which will be offered during the 2021-2022 school year.

- Tech issues associated with broken links, restricted access to documents, and breakout room delay were a distraction and should be avoided at all costs. In addition, as a trial exercise, Civic Spirit students were hired to serve as tech coordinators for the Summer Institute; unfortunately, their lack of experience proved to be a challenge to the program and this dynamic will not be implemented in future programs.
- The Summer Institute was designed to use time effectively and thus focus was on structured, scholarly learning sessions and facilitated workshops; however, opportunity for informal discussion was noted to be of value among the educators, and so future programming will seek to establish a greater balance between structured and informal formats.
- Based on mixed responses among participants regarding the goals of the Summer Institute, it is evident that greater clarity must be articulated regarding the function of the institute within the arc of the year-long Educators Cohort program. Specifically, the institute is an opportunity for educators to deep dive into pivotal texts and study political philosophy, historical events, and contemporary ideas as learners, while ongoing gatherings and workshops throughout the school year will focus on exploring the application of such learning with students in the classroom and related settings.