



Rutgers Democracy Lab
Eagleton Institute of Politics

invites you to our Inaugural Convening focusing on

**CENTERS, INSTITUTES, AND
LABS OF DEMOCRACY:
SUPPORTING CIVIC LEARNING
AND ENGAGEMENT ON COLLEGE
CAMPUSES AND BEYOND**

APRIL 23-25, 2026
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2026 // WELCOME RECEPTION

Time: 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Location: The Heldrich Hotel – New Brunswick, NJ

Program:

- Welcome Remarks
 - Conversation and Q&A: Setting the Framework for the Convening
- Participants:**
- Elizabeth C. Matto, Moderator*
Adam Gismondi
Nicholas V. Longo
Bobbie Laur
- Ice Breaker: Civic Love Toolkit Questions

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2026 // CONSORTIUM BUILDING CONVENING

Time: 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Location: Rutgers University Inn – New Brunswick, NJ

Note: Transportation provided from The Heldrich to the Rutgers University Inn

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM | Arrival & Breakfast

- Light breakfast and coffee
- Informal networking

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM | Opening Session: Welcome & Framing the Day

- Welcome remarks: Nicholas V. Longo

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM | Exploring the Ecosystem of Campus-Based Democracy Centers, Institutes & Labs

Panelists:

Tim Shaffer, Moderator
Elizabeth Matto
Shiri Spitz Siddiqi

Followed by: 15-minute Mapping Exercise to identify existing models, practices, and gaps

10:30 AM – 11:15 AM | Panel: Three Dimensions of Democracy Work

Experts will frame the current landscape of research and practice in each dimension. These experts will facilitate breakout groups and contribute to the post-convening white paper. Several overarching themes will cut across the sessions, including: 1) what's happening in this civic domain; 2) what are the tensions which arise in this civic domain / and across domains; 3) how might you re-imagine these efforts as part of a larger effort to strengthen democracy.

Timothy K. Eatman, Moderator

- **Civic Thought & Knowledge (Room A):** *Tom Schnaubelt* – Foundational knowledge, history, and curriculum
- **Civic Engagement (Room B):** *Allison Rank* – Student mobilization on and beyond election cycles
- **Civic Dialogue (Room C):** *Allison Briscoe-Smith* – Inclusive, respectful dialogue across differences

11:15 AM – 12:30 PM | Dimension-Based Interactive Breakouts

Participants will join one of the three dimensions based on the focus they selected during registration. Each group will be facilitated by the expert from the preceding panel and guided by a set of questions designed to surface shared tensions, highlight promising approaches, and identify opportunities for collaboration. Groups will develop a set of tensions and questions to bring to the other groups for the debrief after lunch.

Nicholas V. Longo and Timothy K. Eatman, Moderators

- **Civic Thought & Knowledge (Room A):** *Tom Schnaubelt* – Foundational knowledge, history, and curriculum
- **Civic Engagement (Room B):** *Allison Rank* – Student mobilization on and beyond election cycles
- **Civic Dialogue (Room C):** *Allison Briscoe-Smith* – Inclusive, respectful dialogue across differences

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Lunch Session: The Student Experience

Nyeema Watson, Moderator

Student Panel:

Mariela Flores
Andrew Hoover
Varshini Rajanikanth
Kaylei Voorhies

Topics include:

- Innovative campus-based civic learning models
- Student leadership and democratic practice

1:30 PM – 2:45 PM | Civic Dimensions Report-Outs

Nicholas V. Longo and Timothy K. Eatman, Moderators

Each group will post flip chart paper with tensions and questions for others to respond in this session. After a 3 minute-per group report out, participants will do a gallery walk around the room to respond to insights, tensions, and questions that arise with post-it notes. About 6 mixed groups will form for discussions and then move into large group report-outs. Ultimately, this session will focus on:

- Current initiatives
- Challenges & opportunities
- Collaborative ideas
- Key takeaways for the broader ecosystem

2:45 PM – 3:00 PM | Break Coffee, Tea, Snacks, and Informal Networking

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM | Mapping the Field & Building a Framework

Nicholas V. Longo and Matt Farley, Moderators

- Collective visioning session and planning session

4:00 PM – 4:15 PM | Reflections

Nicholas V. Longo and Matt Farley

- Summary of insights
- Priorities for post-convening work

4:30 PM | Transportation to Dinner at the Rutgers Club

5:00 PM – 7:00 PM | Dinner, Drinks & Conversation – Rutgers Club

- Welcome Remarks: Francine Conway
- Reflections on Democracy and Education: Lt. Governor Dale G. Caldwell, the State of New Jersey
- Keynote Address: Danielle Allen

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2026 // FAREWELL BREAKFAST

Time: 8:30 AM – 9:30 AM

Location: The Heldrich Hotel – New Brunswick, NJ

- A collaborative session to solidify:
- Action items
- White paper next steps
- Ongoing communication plans
- Opportunities for continued partnership

SPEAKERS, MODERATORS, AND FACILITATORS

- **Danielle Allen**, Harvard University
- **Allison Briscoe-Smith**, Soft River Consulting
- **Lt. Governor Dale G. Caldwell**, the State of New Jersey
- **Francine Conway**, Rutgers - New Brunswick
- **Timothy K. Eatman**, Rutgers - Newark
- **Matt Farley**, Campus Compact
- **Adam Gismondi**, The Democratic Knowledge Project
- **Bobbie Laur**, Campus Compact
- **Nicholas V. Longo**, Rutgers Democracy Lab
- **Ava Majlesi**, Rutgers Democracy Lab
- **Elizabeth C. Matto**, Eagleton Institute of Politics
- **Allison Rank**, University of Northern Iowa
- **Thomas Schnaubelt**, Center for Revitalizing American Institutions at the Hoover Institution
- **Timothy J. Shaffer**, University of Delaware
- **Shiri Spitz Siddiqi**, Heterodox Academy
- **Nyeema Watson**, Rutgers University--Camden

STUDENT SPEAKERS

- **Mariela Flores**, Middlesex College
- **Andrew Hoover**, Rutgers Democracy Lab/Rutgers University-Camden
- **Alvin Mak**, Rutgers Democracy Lab/Rutgers University New Brunswick
- **Varshini Rajanikanth**, Rutgers Democracy Lab/Rutgers University New Brunswick
- **Kaylei Voorhies**, University of Indiana

SPEAKER BIOS

Scan QR code or click on this link for full speaker bios:

<https://democracylab.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2026-04/Convening-Speakers.pdf>



FOR QUESTIONS OR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Allison Sargent Events at 973-783-5689 or info@allisonsargent.com