
GROWING DEMOCRACY PROJECT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

PRESENTED BY: ASHLEY NICKELS, CASEY BOYD-SWAN, AND DAVID JIRSA

Our Mission

The Growing Democracy Project is a collaborative effort to build civic capacity by bringing together diverse constituencies – community members, civic leaders, grassroots organizations, and universities. By sharing experiences and expertise, and learning from one another, we empower communities and facilitate social change.



OUR TEAM

- Casey Boyd-Swan, co-founder & Associate Professor, Economics
- Ashley Nickels, co-founder & Associate Professor, SPCS
- David Jirsa, podcast producer (former project manager; intern)
- Gheramy Demery, podcast editor
- Sabrina Nichol, summer intern

Thanks:

- Emily Murnane, Spring 2021 intern
- Benjamin Jakubowski, Spring 2021 intern
- Hannah Lebovits, former project manager
- Anna Hutcheson, former project manager

Advisory Collective:

- Craig Berger (Assistant Director, KSU Community Engaged Learning)
- Jacquelyn Bleak (KSY faculty, SPCS)
- Lawrence David Caswell (Cleveland Documenters, NeighborUp)
- Laura Mendez Carvajal (KSU PhD candidate, Political Science)
- Angela Cecys (Cleveland-based, social work practitioner)
- Gwen Fischer (local activist and retired Hiram professor)
- Eli Kalil (KSU alum, Ashtabula County Court of Common Pleas)
- Jennifer Lumpkin (Cleveland Votes)
- Jennifer Mapes (KSU faculty, Geography)
- Cassie Pegg-Kirby (Director, KSU Women's Center)
- Bill Shostrand (KSU student, MPA)
- Chrissy Stonebraker Martinez (Co-Director, IRTF Cleveland)

BACKGROUND: GROWING DEMOCRACY PROJECT

- Universities value civic learning and community-engaged scholarship
 - Few resources available to co-create this content and drive civic capacity – within the classroom and community.
- Unique approach to fill this gap and drive collaboration between community members, universities, and grassroots organizations.
- Workshops in Cleveland and Kent, Ohio that bring in community-engaged speakers to discuss some of the toughest issues our communities face and share tools/ skills to foster political efficacy
 - Speakers and participants learn from each other and gain new knowledge about the current state of several civic concerns and what each group can do to drive social change.
- Launched with funding from the American Political Science Association

WHAT MAKES GROWING DEMOCRACY UNIQUE?

- **Our Process: An emphasis on education, dialogues, and action** – We focus on co-creation! Workshops, podcasts, and our online blog and curriculum are co-created WITH community stakeholders; we host experts who are skilled in educating, facilitating dialogue, and promoting action
- **Our People: Bringing together practitioners, activists, university professors and students** – We collaborate with our stakeholders to ensure that all voices, especially those whose expertise and knowledge has been marginalized, are present; Our goal is to amplify the expertise of lived experience.
- **Our Place: Filling a gap in the Northeast Ohio region** – Bridging gaps throughout northeast Ohio; bringing together people from urban and rural, cities and towns, across the NEO region; and focusing on grassroots effort to promote *democracy*.

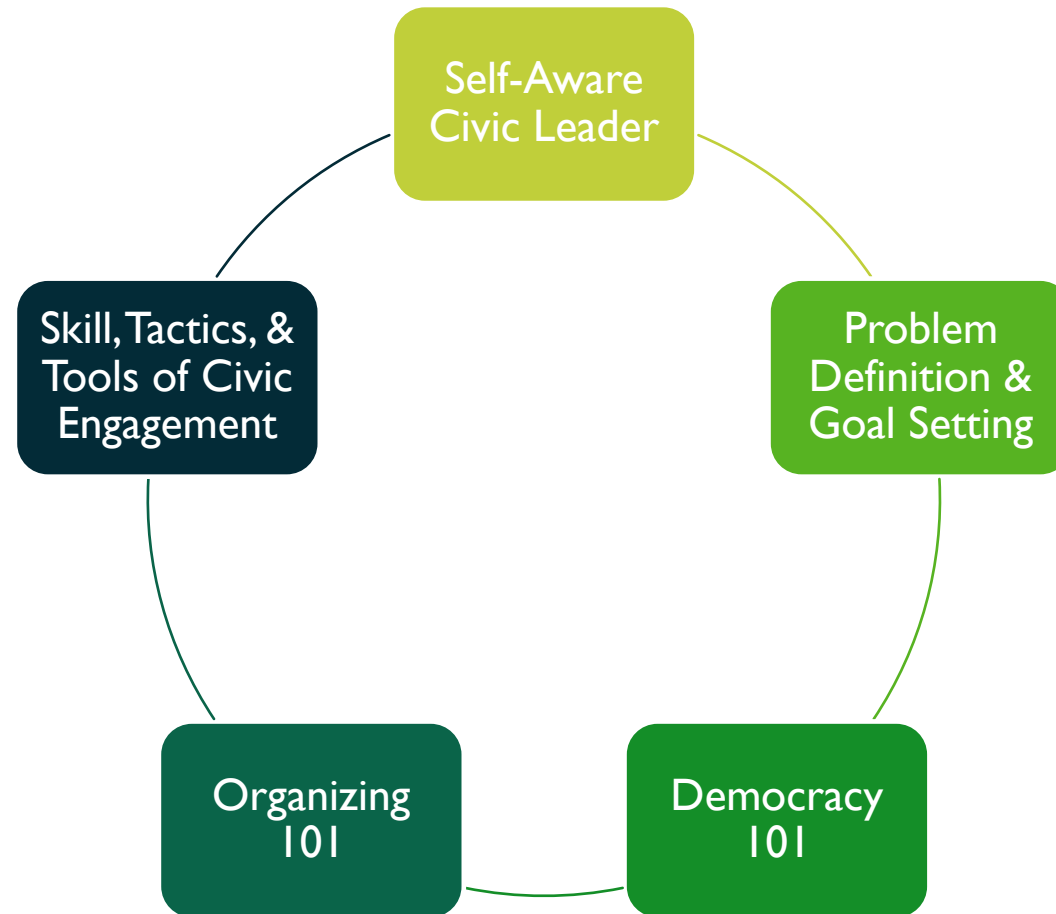


OUR PROCESS

CO-CREATING SPACES FOR LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT



CO-CREATING A CURRICULUM



CONCEPTS, EVENTS, AND PEOPLE

- Listed: 76
- Posted: 5
- Pending: ~10

- <https://growingdemocracyoh.org/concepts-events-people/>

Concepts, Events, & People

The Growing Democracy Project curriculum is co-created with activists, organizers, community leaders, residents, academics, students... throughout Northeast Ohio. We currently have a working list of key concepts, events, and people that are a part of our Growing Democracy Project curriculum & toolkit. If you are interested in contributing to curriculum development, including submitting a [contact us](#).

A

Accountability

activism/activist

Agency (Individual; change agent)

Alinsky, Saul

B

[Back of the Yards](#)

Baker, Ella

Boards/Commissions (special focus on citizen governance)

Brown v. Board of Education

Connect with Us



Join Our E-Mail List

Get advance notice of upcoming events, releases of podcast episodes and newly added online resources!

Email:

SIGN UP

DEMOCRACY BLOG

- Launched: February 2021
- 15 blog posts to date
- ~2-4 pending

- <https://growingdemocracyoh.org/blog/>

The Growing Democracy Project is excited to launch our **Democracy Blog!** Check out essays, reflections, and stories about local democracy, grassroots activism, civic engagement, and public service.

Are you interested in writing for the GDP? Let us know. Contact us and let us know what topics you are interested in writing about.

Blog Posts

[Community Development & Growing Democracy Series, Part 8](#). By Hannah Lebovits (posted May 5, 2021)



Collaborative community partnerships can generate long-term community development efforts. But, only when these partnerships maintain a governance structure that ensures voice, representation, justice, and inclusion for those who have been historically marginalized from this work. [\[read more\]](#)

[Community Development & Growing Democracy Series, Part 7](#). By Hannah Lebovits (posted Apr 27, 2021)



At the height of the Civil Rights era, universities were prime locations for activism efforts. Campuses erupted with demonstrations, sit-ins, teach-ins, protests and other organizing efforts. In cities where universities had a dominant presence, such as Berkeley CA, the university system became synonymous with local activism efforts. [\[read more\]](#)

[Community\]: the\] Heart & Soul \[of democracy\]](#). By Jen Mapes (Apr 3, 2021)



A few years ago, I got a call from two retired professors asking if I could prevent a Starbucks from being built across the street from their homes (spoiler alert: I couldn't). As I looked into the details, a lot hinged on the zoning of a lot that sat vacant for years, after a funeral home was demolished in the space. It was grass-covered, and surrounded by 100-year-old trees, but it was across the street from a busy college campus. Despite being mostly residential, it was on a main road and was zoned for commercial buildings. No one



OUR PEOPLE



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

- 11 interviews, June-September 2020 (Dave Jirsa, intern)
 - When defining the goals of the project, “blurs the line between the university and community through interaction and participation”.
 - Describing the objective, it “examines the ins and outs concerning democracy”.
 - The website was described as “pretty slick” and “robust”.
 - When describing the strengths of the project, “they practice what they preach”; they “walk the walk”; “comparable to infrastructure building.”
 - The podcasts were described as “conversational, real, and authentic”.
 - One reply to the workshops was “it was one of the greatest discussions I have had in an academic setting”.



OUR PLACE

NORTHEAST OHIO & VIRTUAL



GROWING DEMOCRACY

PATHWAYS: IN-PERSON AND ONLINE

- Events in Cleveland and Kent
 - Local insight and local attendees
- Nationally-recognized speakers invited from institutions across the country
- Roundtable discussions with stakeholders
-Fall 2020, three-part *virtual* series, teach-in/workshop

- Growing Democracy Podcast

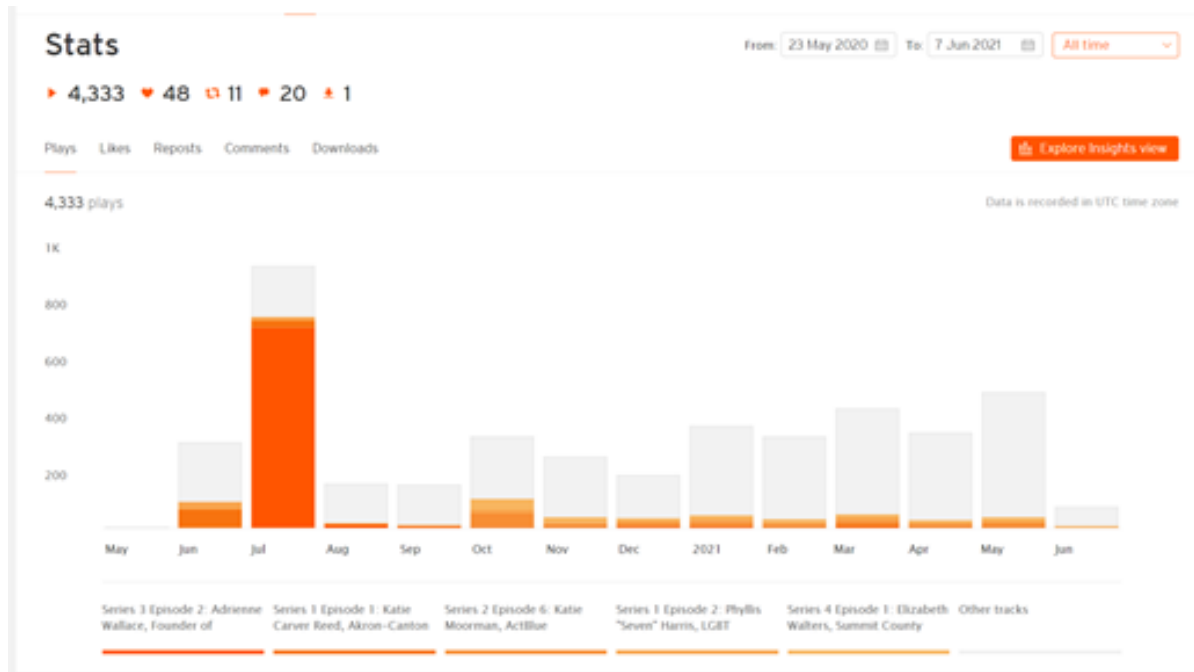


THREE PART VIRTUAL WORKSHOP SERIES, FALL 2020

- *History and Use of the Op-Ed for Social Action*, October 23, 2020, Barb Hipsman Springer and Bob Springer
 - 31 registered, 22 attended
- *Grassroots Democracy: Beyond the General Election*, November 20, 2020, Facilitated by Erica Brown and Tony Vento
 - 23 registered, 15 attended
- *Organizers Organize Organizations*, December 18, 2020, Facilitated by Phyllis Harris
 - 11 registered, 9 attended



PODCAST



- 54 podcast episodes released, since June 1, 2020
- 5 concurrent series:
 - Governing During Pandemic;
 - Power of Civic and Political Engagement;
 - Filling the Gap
 - Serving the Public Interest

Coming Soon:

- Demystifying Policy (sponsored by SSN-NEO)
- Race & Democracy in NEO (collab with CPAC, SPCS, with funding from Mark Lewine)

Pending:

- Kent State focused (in negotiations)



THE FUTURE OF GROWING DEMOCRACY PROJECT



WHERE TO WE GO FROM HERE?



DEMOCRACY

THANK YOU!