



# A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES



## Results from the 2024 AmeriCorps Civic Engagement among Community Colleges Project (ACECCP)

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## Inside This Report

Ensuring that all citizens are prepared to engage in civic life is a fundamental purpose of higher education and key to preserving the social fabric of local communities and the nation. And, indeed, providing opportunities for civic learning and democratic engagement has been central to the community college mission for over 100 years. Yet despite widespread agreement among scholars about the importance of civic and community engagement within community colleges, the specific ways in which these institutions enact their civic mission is far less understood. Only a handful of studies have sought to identify how various curricular and co-curricular programs and structures support civic learning and community engagement, and even fewer have attempted to assess the prevalence of civic or community-minded programs and structures across the universe of American community colleges.

This study fills that gap in the scholarly literature. In particular, this report shares findings from the 2024 AmeriCorps Civic Engagement among Community Colleges Project (ACECCP), highlighting the ways and extent to which community colleges demonstrate an intentional commitment to civic and community engagement, illustrating how they incorporate this intentionality into curricular and co-curricular structures, and identifying the barriers and challenges that may preclude some colleges from engaging more fully in their civic mission. The report offers recommendations for future research on the positive impacts of community colleges in their local communities and for two- and four-year collaborative initiatives to expand civic engagement practices.

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## Key Findings

### *Institutional Intentionality Toward Civic and Community Engagement*

Most community colleges exhibit a substantial degree of intentionality toward civic and community engagement. In particular:

- **41%** of community colleges include community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, or service-learning in their mission statements.
- **77%** incorporate one or more of these priorities into their strategic plan.
- **53%** have a center or office to guide civic engagement.
- **35%** have a council or committee to coordinate civic and community engagement efforts.
- **60%** of community colleges support civic efforts, at least in part, through general fund allocations.

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### Faculty Focus on Civic or Community Engagement

Despite widespread institutional commitments to civic engagement, fewer colleges have incorporated a similar level of intentionality into faculty rewards and promotion processes. Indeed, among all community colleges responding to the ACECCP:

- **One-third** report including criteria related to community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, or service-learning in faculty advancement or tenure processes.
- **One in five** “always” or “often” offer faculty incentives such as stipends, release time, awards, or recognition for engaging in civic work. However, an additional **26%** of colleges offer incentives “sometimes.”
- The percentage of institutions incorporating civic engagement into faculty advancement or tenure processes and/or offering any type of incentives for civic work is **substantially higher than Kisker (2016)** reported a decade ago, indicating that a greater number of colleges are formalizing rewards and expectations for participation in civic activities.

### Curricular Focus on Civic or Community Engagement

Data from the ACECCP indicate there is a clear divide between colleges that have systematically incorporated comprehensive civic learning strategies and requirements across multiple programs and those that have not yet formalized these educational components across the curriculum. For example:

- Although only **5%** of community colleges require some sort of civic engagement course or activity for graduation, and **8%** offer a civic engagement credential, **37%** offer at least one program with a civic engagement requirement, and **15%** offer at least 5 such programs.
- More than **half** of all community colleges offer at least one course with a civic engagement designation and **nearly half (44%)** of all colleges offer at least one service-learning course. While most institutions with these types of courses offer only a handful of them, a small percentage of highly engaged colleges have incorporated **21 or more** civic engagement and/or service-learning courses across the curriculum.
- **Three-quarters** of community colleges offer community-based internship opportunities. Of those, roughly **one-third** offer between **1 and 5** internships; another third offer between **6 and 20**; and the **last third** have at least **21** internships available in community organizations.

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### *Co-Curricular Focus on Civic or Community Engagement*

ACECCP findings indicate that most community colleges offer numerous co-curricular opportunities for civic and community engagement, but once again, there is a notable bifurcation among institutions with multiple opportunities for students to civically engage outside the classroom and those with only a modest portfolio of civic and community-based activities.

Specifically:

- **92% and 76%** of community colleges, respectively, support student clubs or organizations focused on community service and civic engagement.
- **78%** of colleges engage in voter registration or education activities, **77%** offer deliberative dialogues or workshops on polarizing issues, and **77%** regularly hold forums on policy issues relevant to the public. However, the frequency with which community colleges undertake these activities varies greatly among institutions.
- **23%** of colleges host a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program, **12%** have a State or National AmeriCorps program on campus, and **2%** host a National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program, indicating that there remains significant potential for expanding the use of federal and state funds to support civic and community engagement.

### *Institutionalizing Civic and Community Engagement*

Results from the ACECCP reveal complex patterns in organizational capacity for civic and community engagement, barriers to the work, and strategic efforts to overcome challenges and enhance civic opportunities for students. In particular:

- There are notable gaps between institutional recognition of barriers to establishing civic and community engagement as a collegewide priority and the adoption of formalized, strategic efforts to move beyond them.
- Major barriers to greater institutionalization of civic and community engagement include financial constraints, infrastructure limitations, faculty and staff resistance, and lack of administrative support.
- Among community colleges taking active steps to address challenges related to civic and community engagement, there is strong emphasis on external partnership development, as well as the creation of internal structures to support civic engagement. Most colleges appear to prioritize structural solutions to civic challenges over academic modifications, citing lack of staff, scheduling conflicts, and difficulty implementing curricular requirements.

### *Key Implications*

Taken together, findings from the ACECCP indicate that although some community colleges have made major strides toward institutionalizing civic and community engagement across multiple curricular and co-curricular structures, there remains significant potential to expand the breadth and depth of civic initiatives at most institutions. Nonetheless, this study provides a clear snapshot of community college civic and community engagement in the first quarter of the twenty-first century and can be used as both a baseline and a blueprint for expanding opportunities for service, civic learning, and democratic engagement on community college campuses. ACECCP findings also point to areas of future research to expand the literature on civic engagement at community colleges.

## Introduction

The American community college emerged in the early years of the 20th century, during a period of tremendous expansion, both in the number of institutions of higher education and in the nation itself, as population growth and wealth generation led to new types of institutions, a new set of programmatic offerings, and new students “who in earlier times would not have considered education beyond the lower grades” (Kisker and Cohen, 2024, p. 111). Like nearly all colleges that had come before, these new institutions were developed with the explicit expectation that they would serve the public good, both through the creation of a more educated and engaged citizenry and by serving the needs of their local communities. Indeed, the 1947 Truman Commission coined the name *community colleges*, indicating that “intimate relations to the life of the community it serves” were to be the dominant features of these institutions (Zook, 1947, p. 5). Community colleges were also designed to perform a democratizing function, to expand access to higher education for the growing number of high school graduates and those who might not aspire immediately to the university, and to enable students to attend college in their hometowns. Thus, as Bernie Ronan (2012) argued, for over 100 years community colleges have both democratized opportunity and worked to intentionally “do the work of democracy” through curricular and co-curricular structures that prepare students for engagement in their communities and in a democratic society (p. 31).

The civic and (small-d) democratic mission of the community college—along with its proverbial *open door*—have long been defining and celebrated aspects of the institution, resulting in nicknames such as *Democracy’s College* and *The People’s College*. Kisker, Cohen, and Brawer (2024) describe civic learning and democratic engagement—along with critical thinking; service-learning; equity, inclusion, and belonging; and environmental stewardship—as central to an integrative education that leads to an improved “ability to attend, analyze, reflect, connect, and communicate on issues of importance” (Fischman & Gardner, 2022, p. xiii). To these scholars, work to endow students with skills that “are both relevant to the marketplace and critical for political participation” (Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2019, p. 276) is central to the community colleges’ mission to educate for citizenship.

Community colleges serve as stepping-stones to bachelor’s degrees through the transfer function, which enables students to transfer credits earned at community colleges to four-year colleges and universities. Indeed, the National Student Clearinghouse (2022) reports that 49% of all students who complete a bachelor’s degree at four-year institutions had been enrolled at a two-year public college at some point in the previous decade. Thus, the civic and community engagement skills students gain at community colleges translate directly into their ability to civically engage at universities.

Ensuring that all citizens are prepared to engage in civic life, including through volunteering, is essential to preserving the social fabric of local communities and the nation. Yet despite widespread agreement among scholars and the general public about the importance of civic and community engagement within community colleges, the specific ways in which these institutions enact their civic mission is far less understood. Only a handful of studies have sought to identify

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how various curricular and co-curricular programs and structures support civic learning and community engagement, and even fewer have attempted to assess the prevalence of civic- or community-minded programs across the universe of American community colleges. This study fills that gap in the literature.

This national examination of civic engagement among community colleges was generously funded by AmeriCorps, whose mission is to “make service to others an indispensable part of the American experience” (AmeriCorps, 2024). AmeriCorps broadly defines civic engagement to include actions that improve the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes (Ehrlich, 2000). In addition, AmeriCorps’s understanding of civic engagement aligns with measures of civic health, including rates of organizational volunteering, helping others informally, engagement with political processes, and other civic behaviors.

This study, titled the AmeriCorps Civic Engagement among Community Colleges Project (ACECCP), builds on previous work to offer a comprehensive overview of civic and community engagement practices across the universe of U.S. community colleges. In particular, the ACECCP utilizes a modified version of Kisker’s (2016) Higher Education Civic Outcomes Survey (HECOS) Institutional Questionnaire of community college civic programs and practices to identify the ways and extent to which community colleges provide their students—who are often from low-income backgrounds and/or are first in their families to attend college—with opportunities for volunteering, serving, and developing into civically-engaged citizens.

The 2016 HECOS Institutional Questionnaire highlighted the prevalence of civic engagement in mission statements and strategic plans, a varied level of institutional support and infrastructure, and diversity in academic and extracurricular civic activities. It also pointed to gaps in professional development, barriers to institutionalization, and the need for better assessment methods. This report presents preliminary findings from the 2024 ACECCP survey administration, focusing in particular on the extent to which responding colleges demonstrate an intentional commitment to civic and community engagement, as well as the ways in which they incorporate their civic mission into curricular and co-curricular structures. The report also examines how faculty are encouraged and supported in civic and community-based work, as well as the barriers and challenges that prohibit some colleges from engaging more fully in their civic mission. We conclude the report by discussing the implications of these findings, illustrating both the innovative ways community colleges are fostering civic engagement on their campuses and identifying areas for improvement and growth.

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## Literature on Community College Civic and Community Engagement

Literature related to the need for and effects of civic engagement programs in colleges and universities has grown in recent years. The following sections describe previous examinations of community college civic engagement programs and practices, as well as the literature related to how civic and community engagement contributes to student development in college.

### Prior Examinations of Community College Civic Engagement Programs and Practices

Prior to the ACECCP, only a handful of studies examined the ways in which community colleges offer opportunities for civic learning and community engagement. In 2016 Kisker examined the roughly 60 community colleges participating in what was then called The Democracy Commitment, a national initiative providing a platform for the development and expansion of civic engagement in community colleges (TDC is now part of Campus Compact). Survey questions focused on each institution's intentionality toward civic engagement, their level of academic and extra-curricular focus on civic learning, and on new program development related to civic engagement. Of the 60 TDC colleges surveyed, 23 filled out the inventory, and thus while Kisker's (2016) study was a useful starting point for understanding the scope and diversity of community college civic programs and practices, because the sample was small and limited to TDC colleges—arguably among the most committed to civic learning and democratic engagement in the country—the findings could not be easily generalized to the broader community college population.

Nonetheless, Kisker's (2016) inventory showed that the vast majority of TDC colleges included civic engagement in their mission statement, values, or strategic plan, and that most had a campuswide civic engagement program or initiative (nearly half participated in regional or national civic engagement organizations such as Campus Compact, Public Achievement, or Model United Nations). These attributes, Kisker (2016) concluded, demonstrated a high level of intentionality toward providing a civic-minded education. However, Kisker also found that less than half of TDC colleges had an established center or office to guide civic and community engagement, and that "staffing and levels of support for these centers varied widely" (p. 14). Furthermore, only a handful of responding colleges stated that their faculty tenure or advancement policies incorporated a civic requirement or incentive, although several others noted that such activities were considered informal expectations and roughly two-thirds reported recent professional development activities related to civic or community engagement.

Kisker's (2016) inventory also examined the ways in which TDC colleges incorporated civic and community engagement into their curriculum and extra-curriculum. While Kisker did not attempt to ascertain the percentage of colleges incorporating various approaches, the analysis provided a baseline understanding of the variety of ways in which community colleges expose students to civic learning and community engagement. In particular, Kisker (2016) found that nearly half of responding institutions had a specific designation for civic engagement and/or service-learning courses in their college catalog. Most offered at least one course with a service-learning component. A few offered a certificate or degree in civic engagement or related programs and/or had instituted a college-wide civic graduation requirement. Although all colleges surveyed sponsored student clubs or organizations involved in civic activities or events, there was a great variety of approaches to integrating civic engagement into the extra-curriculum. These included candidate or election-issue forums, forums or discussions on issues important to the community,

democracy walls, workshops for high school students, and deliberative dialogues. In addition, most of the colleges surveyed engaged in voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote events, especially in presidential election years.

Many of Kisker's (2016) findings were recently replicated in a 2024 *Community College and Civics Report* from the Annenberg Public Policy Center and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). The authors surveyed 964 two-year colleges about their civic and co-curricular practices. It should be noted the Annenberg study may not have included many baccalaureate-granting community colleges in its sample, as it only included institutions designated as two-year colleges in IPEDS. As such, it may have excluded some of the largest and most well-resourced community colleges in the country. Based on responses from 145 institutions across 42 states, the Annenberg report indicated that the vast majority (84%) of colleges offered some combination of civic learning courses, community-based engagement experiences for credit, and/or co-curricular community-based engagement opportunities. Only 15% of responding colleges did not offer any curricular or co-curricular civic opportunities, citing barriers such as lack of resources, other higher-priority curricular goals, or a lack of faculty who could offer these courses/experiences.

In particular, the 2024 *Community College and Civics Report* found that 72% of responding colleges offered at least one course that included civic learning (defined as "the acquisition of the knowledge, intellectual skills, and the applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civic and democratic life... [and/or] an understanding of the values that underlie democratic structures and practices" (p. 3). Furthermore, nearly all (92%) of responding community colleges offered community-based engagement experiences such as service-learning, internships, community-based research, or clinical fieldwork within the curriculum. As well, roughly three-quarters or respondents reported that civic learning was "very important" (34%) or "somewhat important" (49%) relative to other curricula, programs, and activities at their institution.

The Annenberg (2024) study also examined some of the same factors related to an institution's intent to support civic learning and community engagement as Kisker included in her 2016 inventory, although because the Annenberg report was not limited to TDC colleges, its findings indicated a substantially lower level of intentionality. Specifically, the report indicated that only 17% of community colleges had a center devoted to civic learning or community engagement, although this varied dramatically by size, with larger colleges much more likely to offer a civic center or office. In addition, roughly one-third of colleges offered professional development for faculty and staff aiming to integrate civic learning and community-based experiences into the classroom. As is clear from both Kisker's (2016) inventory and the more recent Annenberg (2024) report, the majority of community colleges offer at least some opportunities for civic learning and community engagement, although many fewer are "intentional in communicating the purpose of the civic learning and community-based experiences offered" (Annenberg, 2024, p. 24). ACECCP results, discussed later in this paper, shed additional light on institutions' intentionality around civic learning and community engagement.

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## Student Development through Civic and Community Engagement

Whether incorporated into the curriculum or offered as a co-curricular activity, the purpose of all collegiate opportunities for civic learning and community engagement is the same: to develop students as scholars, citizens, and informed participants in our democracy. And indeed, although comparatively few studies have examined the outcomes of community colleges, there is a plethora of research showing its positive impact on students at four-year institutions, much of it synthesized in Finley (2011), as well as a recent meta-analysis of the outcomes of civic or community-based engagement in college (Chittum, Enke, & Finley, 2022). In both analyses, most studies focused on the impact of service-learning, although the latter also examined the outcomes of community-based engagement, global learning such as study abroad, and to a lesser degree, internships and field experiences—all considered High Impact Practices (HIPs). Through this meta-analysis, Chittum, Enke, and Finley (2022) identified six major ways in which college-based civic learning and engagement affects students. In particular, four-year college students exposed to civic learning and/or community-based engagement are more likely to exhibit positive outcomes related to graduation, retention, learning, and career preparation, among others (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Student Outcomes Associated with Civic Learning and/or Community-Based Engagement**

<b>Graduation &amp; Retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduate</li> <li>• Earn more credits</li> <li>• Re-enroll in subsequent terms</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Gains</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have higher grades</li> <li>• Have higher test scores</li> <li>• Self-report general learning gains</li> </ul>
<b>Intellectual &amp; Practical Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhibit greater problem-solving and critical thinking skills</li> <li>• Demonstrate improved interpersonal skills, such as communication, collaboration, and teamwork</li> <li>• Show improved research, writing, and mathematical analysis capabilities</li> </ul>
<b>Mindsets &amp; Dispositions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate an increased openness to and understanding of diversity</li> <li>• Exhibit increased awareness of social issues and social justice</li> <li>• Demonstrate increased adaptability</li> <li>• Have a more positive self-perception of socially responsible leadership</li> <li>• Have more positive attitudes toward school and employment</li> <li>• Have greater enjoyment of challenging tasks</li> <li>• Exhibit increased self-efficacy</li> <li>• Have a greater sense of belonging</li> </ul>
<b>Personal &amp; Social Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are more civic minded</li> <li>• Demonstrate increased levels of civic and community engagement after college</li> <li>• Have greater perceived civic and social responsibility</li> <li>• Are better able to demonstrate moral and ethical reasoning and actions</li> </ul>
<b>Career Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate better career exploration skills</li> <li>• Have higher levels of career-related knowledge</li> <li>• Consider careers in a field related to public service</li> </ul>

Source: Chittum, Enke, and Finley (2022)

Indeed, Chittum, Enke, and Finley's (2022) analysis indicated that the academic and practical learning gains associated with service-learning and involvement in community-based projects were substantially higher than those associated with any other HIP, including research, culminating experience or capstone, learning community, internship, or study abroad. Furthermore, they found that participation in civic learning or community engagement tended to improve outcomes among all students, including those from historically underserved backgrounds. Additional research has extended the positive outcomes of civic engagement to volunteering, which has been found to develop students' confidence, empathy, sense of purpose, communication, and active listening skills (Finkelstein & Orr, 2021; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; Parravicini, et al., 2021; Primavera, 2014). Similarly, Kim and Morgul (2017) found that noncompulsory volunteering while in college had positive long-term effects on civic engagement as an adult. These studies illustrate the link between volunteering and students' sense of connectedness and civic responsibility, which ultimately reinforces the notion that service during the college years contributes to a long-term engaged citizenry.

### *Effects of Civic and Community-Based Engagement by Institutional Type*

It is tempting to assume, as many educators do, that the positive outcomes of volunteering and civic and community engagement can be generalized to all types of institutions, even though nearly all the studies included in Finley's (2011) and Chittum, Enke, and Finley's (2022) analyses were conducted at four-year institutions. However, there is substantial evidence that this may not be true. For example, Evans and colleagues (2019) found that four-year residential colleges are twice as likely as commuter schools to emphasize civic engagement and support related activities. Lopez and Brown (2006) showed that community college students were more likely than high school graduates—but less likely than four-year college students—to vote or obtain daily news. Similarly, Newell (2014) concluded that community college students were more civically engaged than high school graduates, but less engaged than those who attended four-year institutions. This finding was confirmed by Cutler White and King's (2024) recent analysis of the U.S. Census Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement data, which revealed a "stair step effect" in which every consecutive level of college attendance and completion (high school, some college, an associate or bachelor's degree) led to incrementally higher levels of volunteering and civic participation. Notably, Cutler White and King (2024) found that in the workplace, especially in service-oriented industries, those who held an associate as their highest degree were no less civically engaged than those with bachelor's degrees.

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Several studies have shown that community college service-learning leads to gains in academic knowledge and personal growth, as well as greater critical thinking and writing skills (AACC, 2012; Ash & Clayton, 2009; Lizzul et al., 2015). Community college students who participated in service-learning were also better able to apply course content to real-world challenges, felt better prepared for the workplace, and were more likely to persist at their institution (AACC, 2012; Banda-Ralph,

2006, Hayward, 2014). Other research has associated similar outcomes with dialogue and deliberation experiences (Mair, 2016) and co-curricular civic presentations or forums (Hoffman, 2016), although the majority of these were single-institution studies and thus may not be generalizable across the universe of community colleges.

### *The Higher Education Civic Outcomes Survey*

In 2015 the Center for the Study of Community Colleges developed the Higher Education Civic Outcomes Survey (HECOS), a 25-question instrument consisting of questions assessing students' civic agency, capacity, behavior, and knowledge after at least one year of community college attendance, as well as questions related to student demographics, enrollment patterns and certain pre-college civic behaviors. Administered each year from 2015 through 2018 in conjunction with a modified version of Kisker's (2016) Institutional Questionnaire, results from the HECOS showed that controlling for student characteristics and pre-college civic behaviors, certain institutional characteristics and student experiences while in college contribute to greater civic outcomes. For example, Kisker, Weintraub, and Newell (2016) found that when community colleges make visible and meaningful institutional commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement—by including these goals in mission statements and strategic plans and by incorporating civic engagement into faculty professional development and tenure reviews—students are more likely to demonstrate increased civic capacity, knowledge and behavior.

Additional analyses of HECOS data provide evidence that certain curricular and co-curricular activities or behaviors at community colleges were even stronger predictors of students' civic outcomes. Indeed, in an analysis of several years of HECOS data, Kisker, Weintraub, and Newell (2022) found that the following student actions contributed to greater civic capacity, agency, knowledge, and behavior, and some—including participating in a deliberative dialogue and obtaining news regularly—took on added predictive power in major election years:

- Interacting with a professor
- Attending religious services
- Participating in a racial/ethnic organization
- Participating in a deliberative dialogue
- Voting in a national, state, or local election
- Studying for class
- Obtaining news regularly
- Acting as a tutor, mentor, or coach
- Registering to vote
- Voting in a student election.

Another study based on HECOS data examined the effects of taking at least one political science course on students' civic behavior and knowledge. Fernandez (2021) found that compared to students who did not take any political science courses, those who did had approximately 9% higher probability of registering to vote and roughly 8% higher probability of voting. Importantly, Fernandez (2021) also found that—controlling for students' incoming characteristics and pre-college civic behaviors—taking at least one political science course resulted in a 9% greater probability of knowing that the Supreme Court (not the president) interprets the constitutionality of laws and a 17% greater probability of knowing that Congress requires a two-thirds supermajority of both houses to override a presidential veto. (Correctly answering both questions is an indication that a student is an *informed voter*, and thus better able to vote for candidates and issues that represent their preferences; Fowler & Margolis, 2014).

Taken together, studies based on HECOS data provide evidence that many of the programs and practices that are intended to develop students' civic learning and democratic engagement at community colleges—such as courses focused on government, politics, or inequality; deliberative dialogues; policy issue forums; student elections; and so forth—are effective in doing so. In short, institutional emphasis on civic learning and community engagement does indeed lead to the development of more civically engaged and informed citizens. The more community colleges can provide opportunities for students to engage with one another in discussions tackling thorny political, social, and community issues, as well as experience the community through service-learning and volunteering, the more their students will develop the agency, capacity, and civic experience necessary to participate meaningfully in a democratic society.

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## Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to assess how community colleges create opportunities for civic learning and community engagement. Kisker's (2016) survey provided a robust foundation, identifying key areas in which civic engagement is prevalent across the curriculum and co-curriculum, yet it also highlighted gaps in our knowledge and areas for further exploration. Thus, the ACECCP utilized a modified version of Kisker's survey to address those gaps and capture a more comprehensive picture of the current state of civic engagement across a diverse range of community colleges. In developing the ACECCP survey, our primary objectives were to enhance the granularity and scope of data collected and to capture additional data of interest to AmeriCorps' research priorities (including rates of service and other forms of volunteering). To that end, many of the supplementary survey questions in the ACECCP investigate challenges community colleges face in embedding civic engagement into their institutional structures, assessment methods, and the availability of funding for civic programming. In addition, based on Kisker's (2016) finding that many colleges faced challenges in institutionalizing civic programs and practices, the ACECCP survey includes new questions aimed at understanding the professional development opportunities related to civic engagement for faculty and staff and barriers to institutionalizing civic engagement, including financial constraints and faculty resistance.

The ACECCP survey also added new topics specifically of interest to AmeriCorps, such as participation in on- and off-campus volunteering, as well as Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and AmeriCorps State and National programs. By expanding on Kisker's (2016) civic inventory, the ACECCP provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the current landscape of civic engagement opportunities at community colleges, paying particular attention to the institutional factors that facilitate or impede such efforts.

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## Survey Distribution and Data Collection

The universe of 1,001 community colleges selected for inclusion in the ACECCP was derived from a 2021 inventory of public two-year colleges from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and Phi Theta Kappa's list of public community colleges. The ACECCP survey was distributed electronically to each institution's president and their designated executive assistant and asked that the college president identify one staff member to respond on behalf of the institution. Several reminder emails were sent to nonresponding colleges to increase the response rate, and project staff conducted additional outreach through key community college networks such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Campus Compact, the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) coalition, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). These partnerships were instrumental in lending legitimacy to the survey and ensuring a diverse and representative sample of institutions, although it may have led to an oversampling of institutions from these member organizations (who are likely to be among the most civically engaged in the country). ACECCP data were collected over a period of 7 months in 2024, during which time responses were monitored and logged into a secure database for subsequent analysis. The extended data collection period allowed for the accommodation of institutions' varying academic calendars, holidays, and campus breaks.

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*The ACECCP provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of the current landscape of civic engagement opportunities at community colleges, paying particular attention to the institutional factors that facilitate or impede such efforts.*

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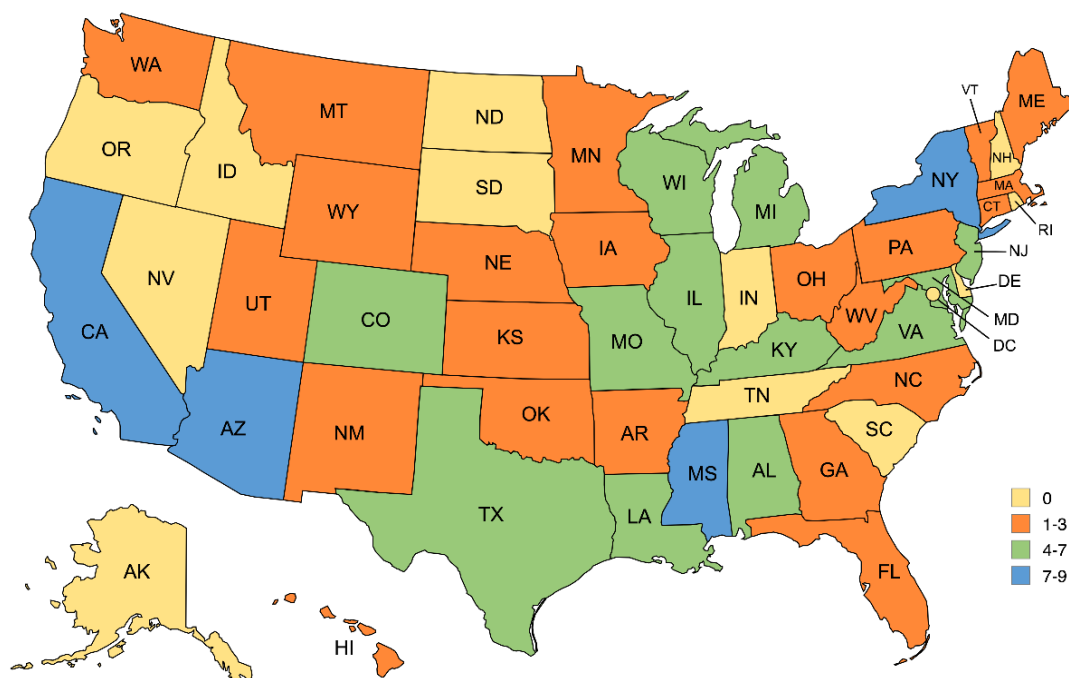
Out of the 1,001 community colleges on our list, 128 institutions across 38 states responded to the ACECCP, resulting in a preliminary response rate of 13%. Responding institutions varied widely in size, geographic location, and student demographics, providing a comprehensive view of civic engagement practices across the community college landscape (see Figure 1). A list of all 128 respondents by state is available in Appendix A.

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*Out of the 1,001 community colleges on our list, 128 institutions across 38 states responded to the ACECCP.*

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Figure 1: Responses to the 2024 ACECCP Survey by State



### Data Analysis and Limitations

In this preliminary examination of ACECCP data, we utilized descriptive statistics and frequency tables to summarize key characteristics of the sample. Several steps were taken to ensure data accuracy, validity, and reliability. In a few cases, more than one person from the same college submitted the survey. To ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness, responses from multiple individuals within the same institution were consolidated. Priority was given to the more detailed answers, based on the assumption that certain respondents might have a broader or more in-depth understanding of their institution's civic engagement activities. For "select all that apply" questions, responses were merged to ensure that the full range of activities and perspectives was captured, as each participant might have knowledge of different aspects of the institution's efforts. These methods provided a clear overview of how the range of community colleges in our sample are engaged in civic activities, the institutional support available, and the challenges they face.

Given that only 13% of American community colleges participated in the ACECCP so far, we must consider the limitations of the sample size. In particular, findings from this preliminary study may not fully reflect the diversity of institutions across different regions and contexts. In addition, because the ACECCP survey was distributed through email and professional networks, colleges already active in civic engagement—such as those affiliated with NASPA or the CLDE coalition—



may have been more likely to participate. This could lead to an overrepresentation of institutions that prioritize civic activities in the dataset. In recognition of the potential for bias, we utilized statistical tests to ascertain if certain types of colleges were more likely to respond. Indeed, colleges with the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, which recognizes institutions with a strong commitment to community involvement, were more likely to take part in the survey. However, no significant patterns were found when looking at other factors such as the type of institution (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities), degree offerings, location (urban or rural), size, or NASPA affiliation.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides valuable insights into civic learning and engagement at responding community colleges. Descriptive statistics and frequency tables provide a comprehensive view of the landscape of community college civic and community engagement, though caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to all community colleges. Broader participation in future studies will be necessary to confirm these findings and further explore civic engagement programs and practices.

## Findings

Preliminary findings from the ACECCP reveal the extent to which community colleges act intentionally to foster civic learning and community engagement, illustrate how these practices are incorporated into faculty professional development and advancement policies, and show how community colleges promote civic learning and community engagement within their curriculum and co-curriculum. In addition, findings provide information about barriers to institutionalization and assessment of civic learning and community engagement on community college campuses. The findings are divided into five areas of emphasis: institutional intentionality, faculty focus, academic focus, co-curricular focus, and institutionalizing civic and community engagement.

### Institutional Intentionality Toward Civic and Community Engagement

Institutional intentionality toward civic and community engagement may be reflected in mission statements and strategic plans, volunteering and community outreach efforts, financial support for civic programming or infrastructure, and evaluation of the effectiveness of efforts. Out of all responding community colleges, 41% reported that community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, or service-learning was mentioned in their mission statement, and 77% had incorporated one or more of these priorities into their strategic plan (see Figure 2). These results mirrored Kisker's (2016) study, which found that among colleges participating in The Democracy Commitment, nearly all mentioned civic engagement either explicitly or implicitly in their mission statements, values, and/or strategic plans.

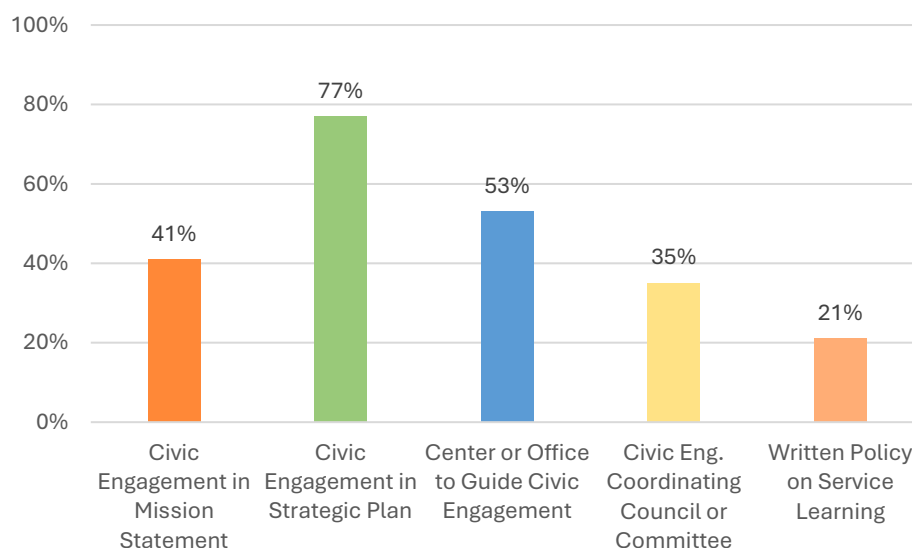
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*A great many community colleges have enacted structures and policies to support their stated intentions around civic learning and community engagement.*

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In addition, as Figure 2 illustrates, 53% of responding colleges had a center or office to guide civic or community engagement, 35% had a coordinating council or committee focused on these efforts (with 40% having a council or committee dedicated to voting efforts), and 21% had a written policy about service-learning. These findings indicate that civic and community engagement may be more intentionally integrated into U.S. community colleges than previous thought. In particular, roughly a decade ago Kisker (2016) estimated that less than half of community colleges had a center or office to guide civic work on campus, and among colleges responding to the Annenberg (2024) survey, that number was even lower, at 17%. However, unlike the ACECCP, the Annenberg study likely excluded bachelor's degree-granting community colleges, which tend to be larger and thus more likely to have the human and financial resources to support a civic center or office. Future analyses of ACECCP data may help to clarify the percentage of large and small community colleges with centers or offices to guide civic activities. Nonetheless, these findings indicate that a great many community colleges have enacted structures and policies to support their stated intentions around civic learning and community engagement.

**Figure 2: Institutional Intentionality Toward Civic and Community Engagement**

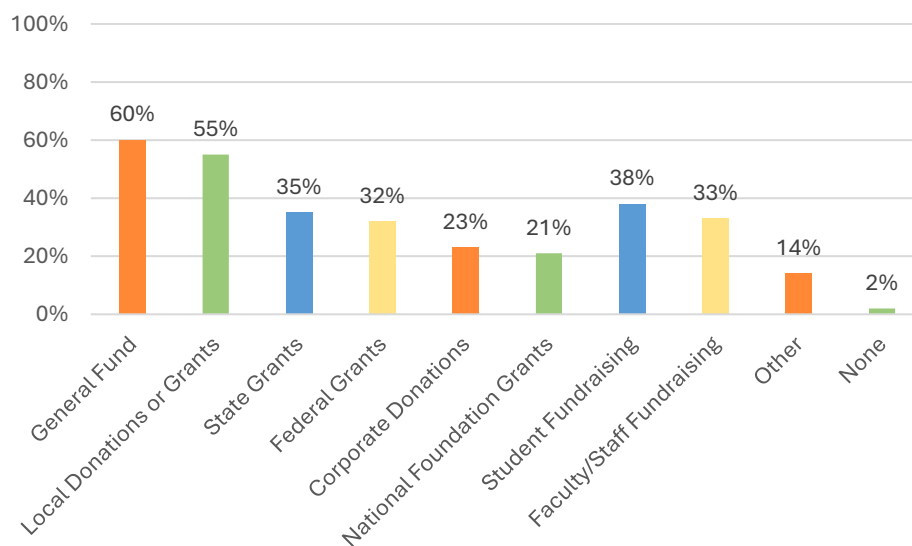


The ACECCP also asked respondents about faculty and students' involvement in community service or volunteering, finding that most community colleges provide opportunities for faculty, students, and other college stakeholders to volunteer or engage in their communities. In many cases, the colleges partner with business or community organizations to offer volunteer opportunities. For example, more than 80% of responding colleges provide opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to volunteer in food banks; nearly two-thirds offer opportunities to volunteer through tutoring and clothing drives, and over half of all responding colleges provide opportunities for volunteer mentoring. Several institutions indicated that they give faculty and other employees time off each year to enable them to volunteer at the college or in the community.

Community colleges financially support their civic and community engagement in a multitude of ways. A majority (60%) use general fund dollars, although a great many also utilize governmental, corporate, and/or philanthropic grants and donations (see Figure 3). A substantial percentage of

institutions also utilize student or faculty/staff fundraising to support or augment civic and community engagement, and 14% rely on other funding mechanisms, including (primarily) student activity fees. Only 2% of responding colleges indicated that they did not provide any financial support for community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, or service-learning.

**Figure 3: Sources of Financial Support for Civic and Community Engagement**



Means of evaluating the effectiveness of civic and community engagement efforts varied among institutions, although the vast majority of institutions responding to the ACECCP—like those responding to the 2024 Annenberg survey—indicated that they regularly assess the effectiveness of civic and community-based engagement experiences. Most (71%) sought feedback from stakeholders on the effectiveness of civic or community engagement activities, and 63% utilized internal measures or indicators. Over one-half (55%) relied on faculty or staff evaluations of outcomes, the majority of which are reported to the college and not just utilized by the individuals collecting the data. Roughly 16% of colleges responding to the ACECCP participated in studies to assess the impact of civic engagement on student outcomes, while 8% did not appear to assess civic engagement programs or activities at all. When colleges were asked about their plans to measure the effectiveness of civic programs and practices in the future, results were similar.

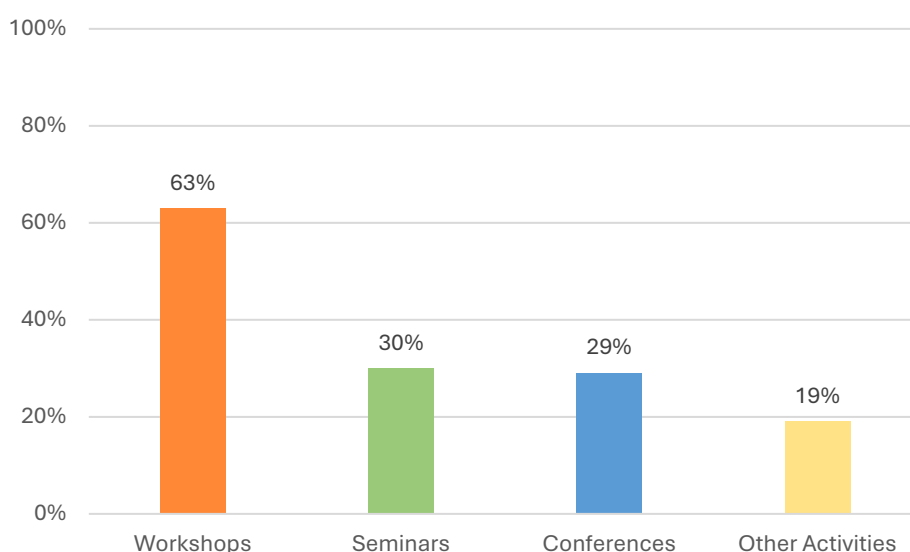
### Faculty Focus on Civic and Community Engagement

A faculty focus on civic and community engagement may be reflected in advancement and tenure processes, incentives for participation, and opportunities for professional development. Of all 128 institutions that responded to the ACECCP, roughly one-third report having faculty advancement or tenure processes that include criteria for community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, or service-learning. Similarly, one in five colleges “often” or “always” offer incentives (e.g., stipends, release time, awards, or recognition) for civic or community engagement, and an additional 26% offer incentives “sometimes.” More than 45% “never” or “rarely” offer incentives. The percentage of institutions incorporating civic engagement into faculty advancement or tenure processes and/or offering incentives for such work is substantially higher than Kisker (2016) reported roughly a

decade ago, indicating that a greater number of colleges are formalizing rewards and expectations for participation in civic activities.

In addition, the ACECCP found that 17% of colleges “always”—and an additional 36% of colleges “sometimes”—offer or support professional development related to civic or community engagement, although a full 47% of responding colleges “rarely” or “never” do. These numbers are somewhat higher than those in the Annenberg (2024) report, which estimated that only one-third of community colleges offer civic-related professional development opportunities, but lower than Kisker’s (2016) finding that civic-related professional development was available at two-thirds of colleges (Kisker’s numbers were likely skewed upward by the fact that her sample consisted entirely of institutions participating in The Democracy Commitment). As Figure 4 illustrates, among community colleges that offer or support professional development related to civic or community engagement, the vast majority offer workshops, with smaller percentages offering or supporting participation in seminars, conferences, or other activities.

**Figure 4: Prevalence of Civic-Related Professional Development Opportunities Offered or Supported by Responding Colleges**

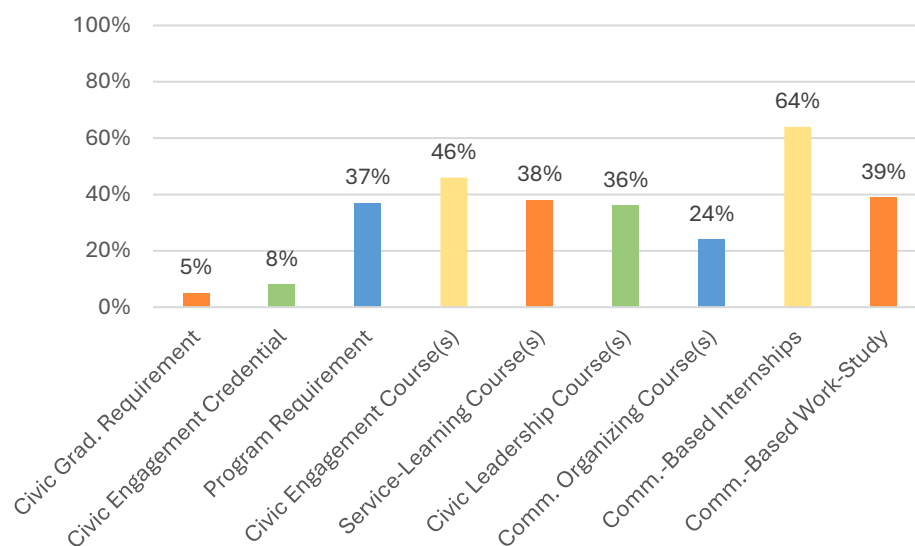


### Academic Focus on Civic and Community Engagement

An academic focus on civic and community engagement may be reflected in graduation requirements, courses and degrees, internships, and federal Work-Study opportunities. While only 5% of community colleges responding to the ACECCP require a civic or service-learning course or activity as a general graduation requirement, and a mere 8% offer one more certificates, degrees, or other credentials in civic engagement or service-learning, many of the responding institutions incorporate civic requirements into specific degree or certificate programs, offer service-learning or other civic or community-based courses throughout the curriculum, or provide opportunities for internships or federal Work-Study placements in community organizations. Figure 5 illustrates the prevalence of these approaches to integrating civic or community engagement into the curriculum, indicating that while community colleges tend to offer numerous curricular pathways for students to develop civic leadership or engage in their communities, few require them for graduation or

program completion. In this way, ACECCP results mirror those in the 2024 Annenberg report, which stated that although most community colleges offer “courses aimed at increasing civic knowledge and understanding, very few report that they require students to take these courses” (p. 10).

**Figure 5: Prevalence of Various Approaches to Curricular Integration of Civic or Community Engagement**



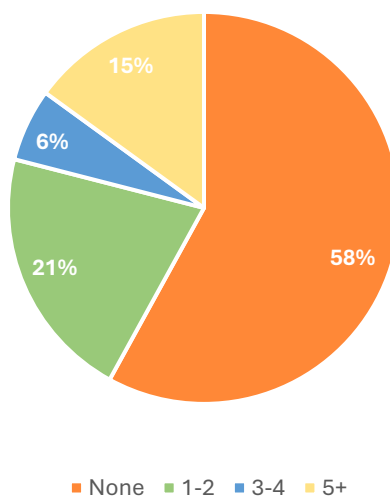
Our analysis reveals distinct patterns in how institutions have integrated civic engagement into their curriculum. In particular, there is a clear divide between colleges that have systematically incorporated comprehensive civic learning strategies and requirements across multiple programs and those that have not yet formalized these educational components across the curriculum. For example, more than 4 in 10 responding colleges offer programs in which service-learning or civic engagement is required for graduation (see Figure 6). Of these, half offer only 1 or 2 such programs, but 6% of colleges have 3 or 4 programs with a service-learning or civic engagement requirement, and 15% of respondents have 5 or more programs with such a requirement. Although institutional size likely dictates, to some extent, the number of programs with a civic requirement a college can offer, it is clear from these data that some community colleges have gone much further than others to align institutional aspirations for civic learning with formal academic pathways across the curriculum.

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*It is clear from these data that some community colleges have gone much further than others to align institutional aspirations for civic learning with formal academic pathways across the curriculum.*

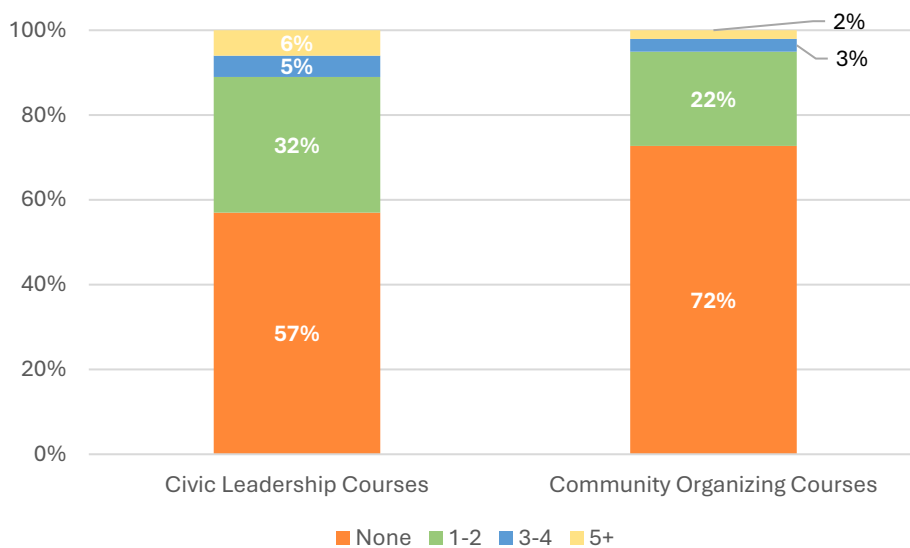
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**Figure 6: Number of Programs with a Civic Engagement Requirement Offered by Community Colleges**



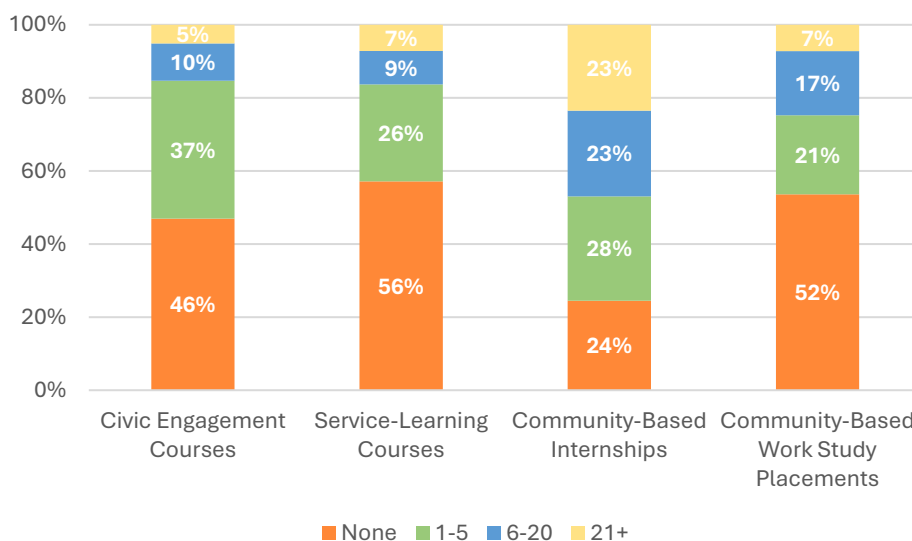
ACECCP data also reveal distinct patterns in how community colleges structure and implement civic engagement opportunities across their curricula, with a notable bifurcation among institutions. For example, Figure 7 illustrates the percentage of responding community colleges that offer civic leadership and/or community organizing courses (and how many). As these data make clear, just over one-third and one-quarter of community colleges, respectively, offer civic leadership or community organizing courses at all, and the vast majority of those that do offer only 1 or 2 classes that focus on these skills and capabilities. These findings confirm Kisker's (2016) assertion that while some community colleges are actively integrating courses in civic leadership and/or community organizing into their curriculum, it is not a major focus for most institutions.

**Figure 7: Number of Civic Leadership and Community Organizing Courses Offered by Community Colleges**



Similarly, while slightly more than half (54%) of responding community colleges offer courses with a specific civic engagement designation, the depth of implementation varies substantially; 37% offer between 1 and 5 civic courses, while 15% offer 6 or more civic engagement courses across the curriculum (see Figure 8). These findings indicate that a substantially higher proportion of community colleges specifically designate courses with a civic or community-based component in their catalog than previously thought. For example, while 72% of respondents to the Annenberg (2024) study indicated that their college offers courses that include a civic component, only 18% of their respondents indicated that their college specifically designates these courses as civic learning. Similarly, preliminary results from the ACECCP indicate that just under half of responding institutions offer formal service-learning courses. However, 26% offer between 1 and 5 such courses, 9% offer between 6 and 20 service-learning classes, and 7% have integrated service-learning into 21 or more courses.

**Figure 8: Number of Civic Engagement and Service-Learning Courses, Community-Based Internships, and Community-Based Federal Work-Study Placements Offered by Community Colleges**



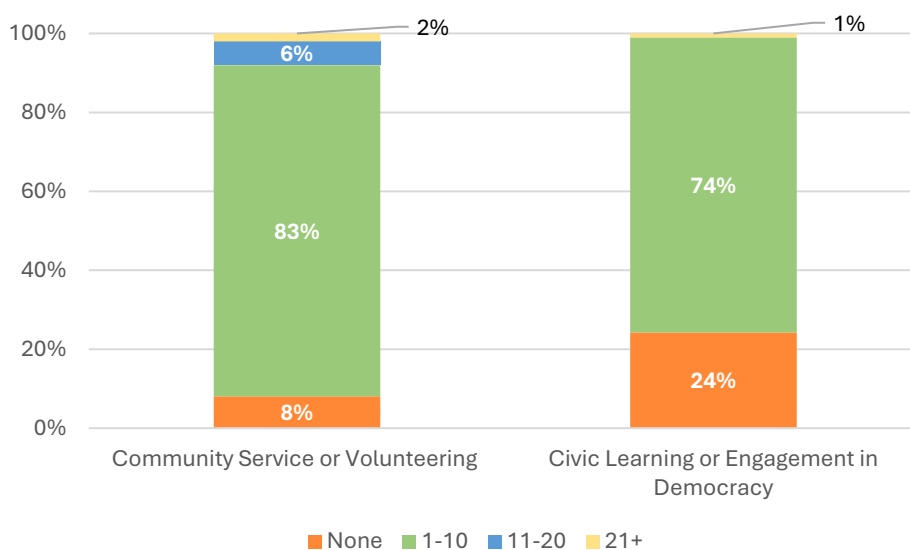
As Figure 8 illustrates, community colleges are more likely to offer community-based internships and/or community-based work-study placement than civic engagement or service-learning courses, a finding mirrored in both Kisker (2016) and the Annenberg (2024) study. Yet the distribution of internship offerings suggests a polarized landscape: while one-quarter of community colleges report no structured community-based internship programs, another 28% offer between 1 and 5, 23% offer between 6 and 20, and an additional 23% facilitate more than 21 internships in community-based organizations. Just under one-quarter of responding colleges (23%) support internships in political campaigns. Similarly, although fewer than half of responding institutions offer work-study placements in community-based organizations—indicating a potential gap between federal policy intentions and institutional implementation—and a substantial number offer between 1 and 5 such placements, 17% of community colleges offer between 6 and 20 work-study placements in community organizations and a full 7% facilitate 21 or more community-based federal Work-Study placements each year. Furthermore, 23% of all responding colleges support work-study placements in advocacy organizations, suggesting targeted efforts to connect students

with policy-oriented civic experiences. These patterns indicate varying levels of institutional capacity and commitment to providing experiential civic learning opportunities. In addition, they may indicate a significant underutilization of federal funding for work-study placements as a mechanism for community-engaged learning at most institutions.

### Co-Curricular Focus on Civic and Community Engagement

Our analyses reveal distinct patterns in how community colleges structure co-curricular opportunities for civic and community engagement. For example, while most colleges provide institutional support for student organizations and clubs focused on community service or volunteering (92%) and/or civic learning and engagement in democracy (76%), most institutions maintain only a modest portfolio of between 1 and 10 service or civic-focused groups (see Figure 9). Nonetheless, these numbers are somewhat higher than those cited in the Annenberg (2024) report, which estimated that 72% of community colleges provide support for civic-oriented student clubs or organizations and 67% offer opportunities to volunteer off-campus.

**Figure 9: Number of Student Clubs or Organizations Focused on Community Service or Volunteering and/or Civic Learning and Engagement in Democracy Offered by Community Colleges**



In addition, nearly half of all responding colleges have established formal partnerships or infrastructure to support democratic participation. These structural commitments manifest primarily through collaborations with voter mobilization organizations such as Rock the Vote or Campus Vote Project (44% of all responding colleges) and the designation of physical spaces for democratic expression, such as Free Speech Zones or Democracy Walls (41%). As well, more than three-quarters of all responding community colleges undertake voter registration or education activities; engage in deliberative dialogues with students or offer workshops to discuss politics or other potentially polarizing issues; and sponsor forums for students and/or the community on issues relevant to the public. Figure 10 illustrates the frequency with which community colleges engage students in these types of co-curricular civic activities. Clearly, for most colleges, voter

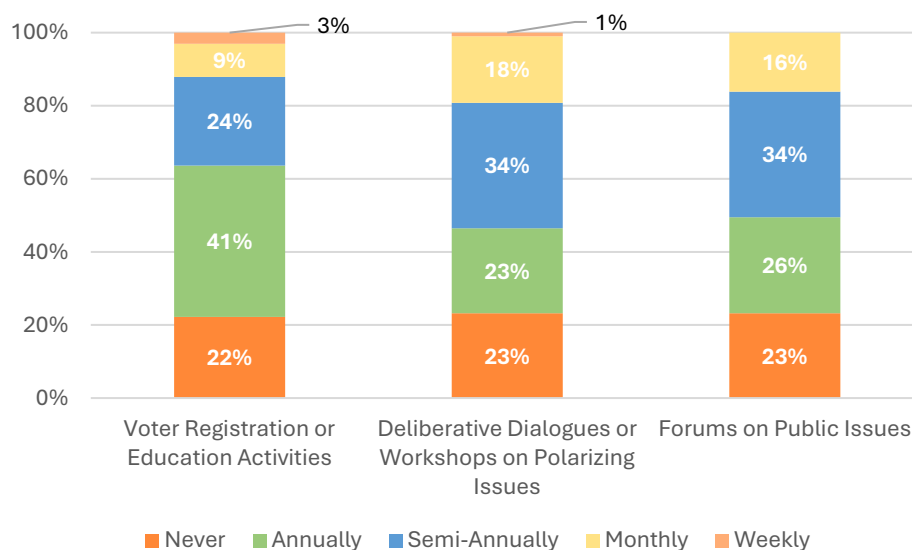


*Community colleges offer opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular programming related to community service or volunteering at slightly higher frequencies than other forms of civic programming.*

registration activities, deliberative dialogues, or public issue forums are sponsored on an annual or semi-annual basis. However, a substantial percentage of responding institutions civically engage students in these ways at least monthly, thus demonstrating high levels of institutional commitment across multiple dimensions of civic participation. These findings stand in

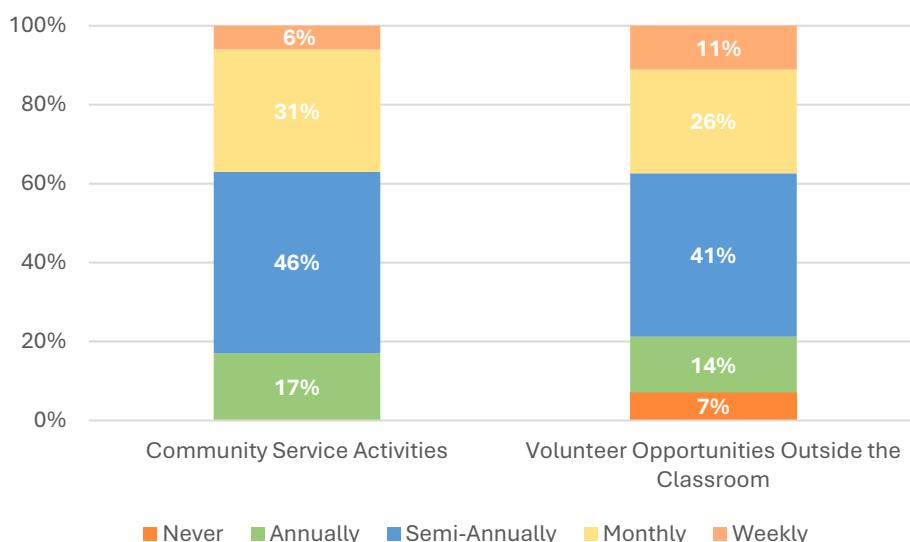
some contrast to those in the Annenberg (2024) report, which indicated that only 37% and 28% of responding colleges, respectively, engage students in social justice or community activism and one in five colleges offers civil dialogue programs. It is possible that the Annenberg (2024) study's lack of specificity about what constitutes a social justice, community activism, or civil dialogue program contributed to the relatively low percentage of colleges indicating such offerings.

**Figure 10: Frequency with which Community Colleges Host Various Co-Curricular Civic Activities**



Results from the ACECCP indicate that community colleges offer opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular programming related to community service or volunteering at slightly higher frequencies than other forms of civic programming. In particular, the predominant pattern for both community service activities and opportunities to engage outside the classroom is semi-annual, although more than one-third of responding institutions organize these types of service activities at least monthly (see Figure 11). These findings suggest that while institutions have established numerous co-curricular opportunities for civic and community engagement, there remains significant variation in both the frequency and depth of implementation. The predominance of semi-annual or annual programming cycles indicates the potential for institutions to develop more frequent or sustained strategies to engage students in civic learning, deliberative dialogues, democratic participation, and community service.

**Figure 11: Frequency with which Community Colleges Provide Community Service or Volunteer Opportunities for Students**



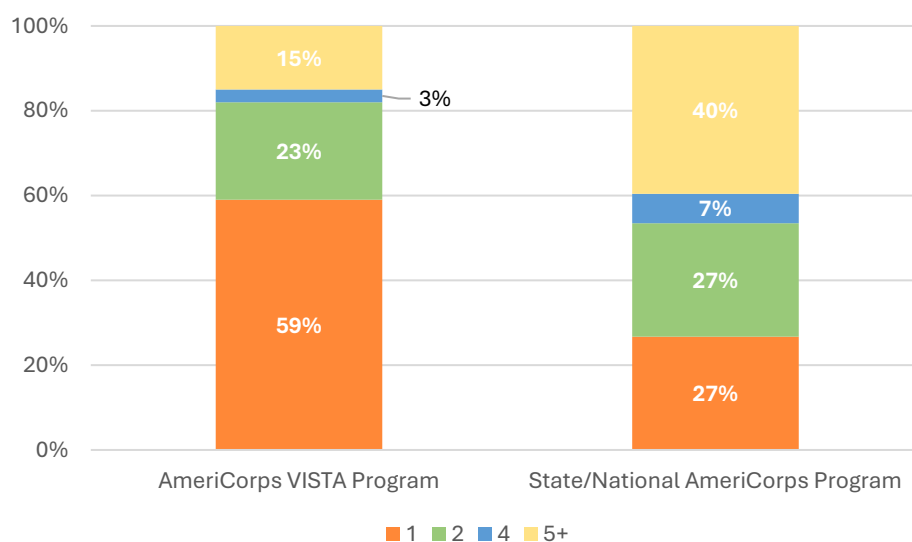
Another approach to engaging students in service to local communities is to host an AmeriCorps VISTA program, an AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program, or an AmeriCorps State or National program on campus. Indeed, hosting one of these AmeriCorps programs represents a strategic approach to enhancing an institution's civic engagement capacity, as it brings in federal or state funds to support civic and community engagement. Nearly one-quarter of all responding community colleges (23%) host a VISTA program, 12% have a State or National AmeriCorps program on campus, and 2% host an NCCC program. As Figure 12 illustrates, among institutions hosting AmeriCorps programs, there is considerable variation in the number of members hosted each year as is the case with the types of AmeriCorps programs represented.

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*Hosting one of the AmeriCorps programs represents a strategic approach to enhancing an institution's civic engagement capacity, as it brings in federal or state funds to support civic and community engagement.*

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**Figure 12: Number of AmeriCorps Members Hosted Annually, by Program Type**



The findings reported in this section suggest that while institutions have established foundational structures for co-curricular civic and community engagement, there remains significant potential for expanding both the breadth and depth of these initiatives, particularly in developing more robust democratic engagement programming and scaling national service partnerships.

### Institutionalizing Civic and Community Engagement

Results from the ACECCP reveal complex patterns in organizational capacity for civic and community engagement, barriers to the work, and strategic efforts to overcome challenges and grow civic opportunities for students. In particular, the data show notable gaps between institutional recognition of barriers to establishing civic and community engagement as a collegewide priority and formalized, strategic efforts to move beyond them. In particular, while 41% of responding community colleges identify barriers to establishing civic or community engagement as an institutional priority—and 30% specify barriers in linking academics with community outreach, volunteering civic engagement, or service-learning initiatives—only 35% of responding institutions have developed a strategic roadmap or vision for civic engagement and just over one-

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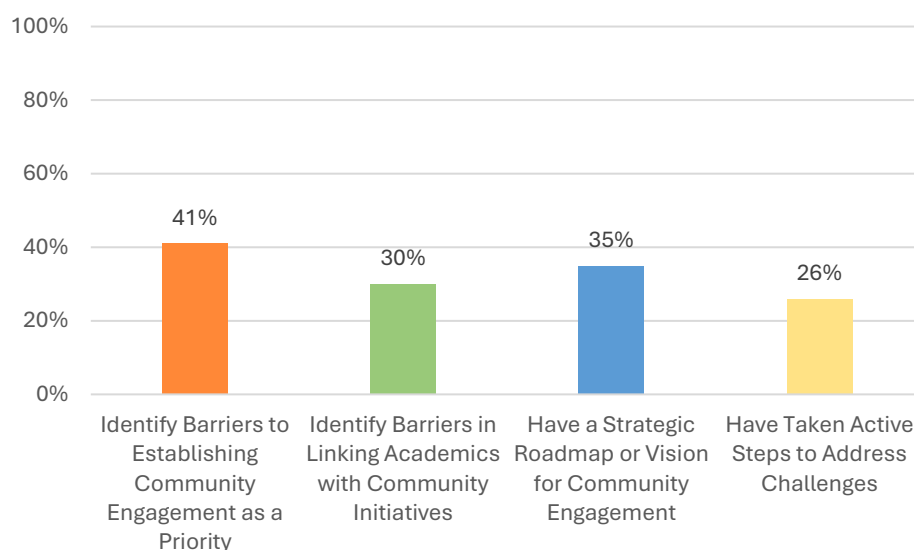
*Thirty-five percent of responding institutions have developed a strategic roadmap or vision for civic engagement and just over one-quarter have taken active steps to address the challenges in advancing civic or community initiatives.*

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quarter have taken active steps to address the challenges in advancing civic or community initiatives (see Figure 13). This disparity between barrier identification and active and strategic work

to grow civic engagement on campus suggests that there may be additional opportunities for community colleges to more systematically develop civic infrastructure and prioritize it in strategic planning.

**Figure 13: Percent of Community Colleges that Identify Barriers to Civic or Community Engagement, have a Strategic Vision for Civic Engagement, and that Have Taken Active Steps to Address Challenges to Address Challenges**



In 2016, Kisker acknowledged that numerous financial and infrastructure-related barriers stood in the way of developing civic engagement opportunities for students, and results from the ACECCP affirm this assertion. Indeed, of the 41% of responding community colleges who identified barriers to institutionalizing civic and community engagement as an institutional priority, financial constraints and infrastructure limitations were the predominant challenges, although faculty and staff resistance and lack of administrative support also factored heavily (see Figure 14). Among the 13% of colleges that listed other barriers to prioritizing civic and community engagement, top responses included lack of community support, limited student time and interests given other responsibilities, and limited faculty and staff

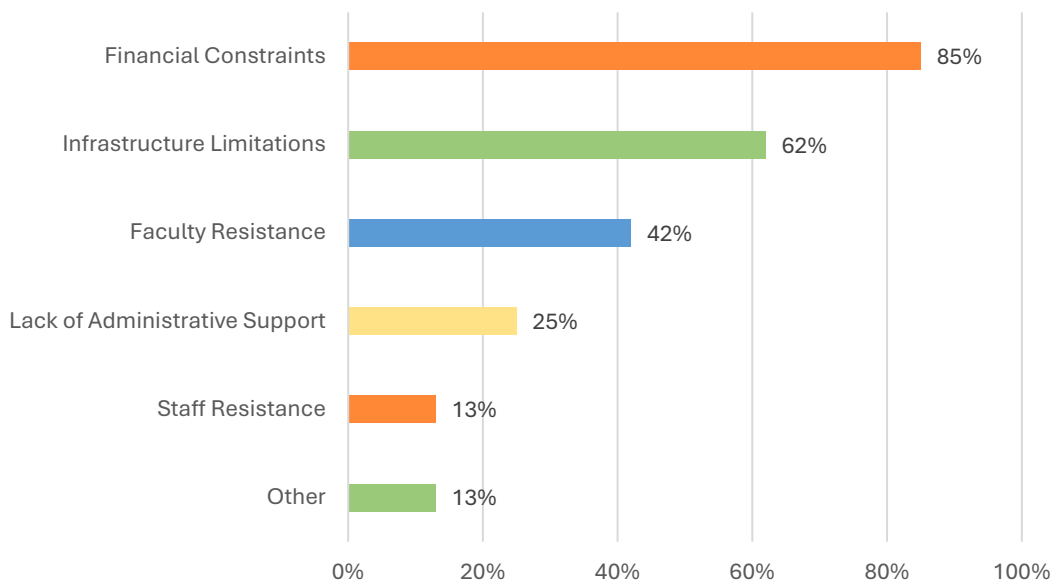
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*Forty-one percent of responding community colleges who identified barriers to institutionalizing civic and community engagement as an institutional priority, financial constraints and infrastructure limitations were the predominant challenges, although faculty and staff resistance and lack of administrative support also factored heavily.*

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capacity. These findings closely mirror the causes for not offering civic courses or community-based engagement experiences listed in the Annenberg (2024) report.

**Figure 14: Major Barriers to Establishing Civic and Community Engagement as an Institutional Priority**



Specified barriers to incorporating community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement or service-learning initiatives into the curriculum were similarly rooted in a lack of faculty and staff capacity, as well as specific challenges in modifying curriculum and graduation requirements. As Figure 15 illustrates, more than three-quarters of colleges citing academic integration barriers listed lack of staff to organize or implement such work as a barrier, and nearly three-quarters cited challenges incorporating civic or service requirements into the curriculum. Other major barriers included scheduling conflicts with extracurricular activities, curriculum modifications, challenges organizing community service opportunities, and graduation requirements. Among the 8% of institutions that identified other barriers, top responses included a mismatch between institutional and community partner needs, lack of faculty capacity (especially among part-time adjuncts), and legislative mandates. Once again, these causes for not incorporating community-based engagement experiences into the curriculum closely resembled those listed in

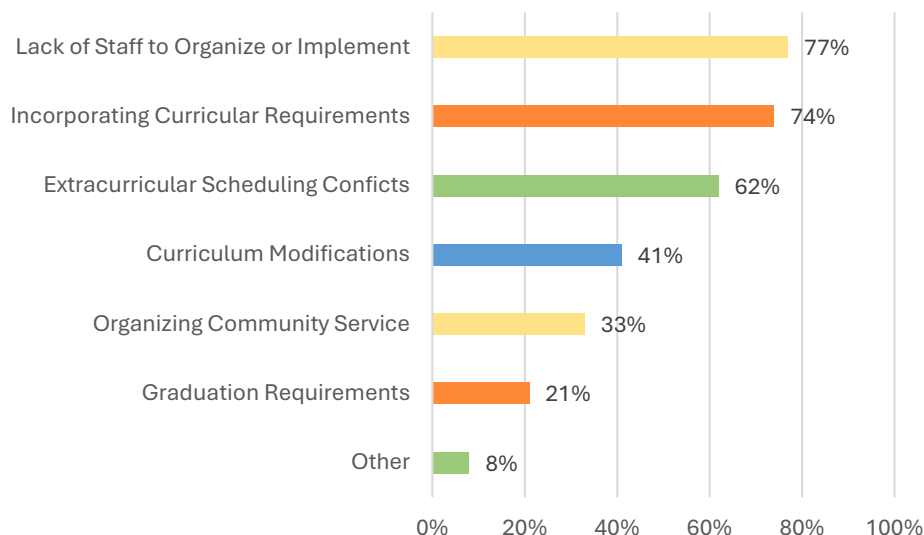
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*Specified barriers to incorporating community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement or service-learning initiatives into the curriculum were similarly rooted in a lack of faculty and staff capacity, as well as specific challenges in modifying curriculum and graduation requirements.*

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the Annenberg (2024) report, which cited “lack of resources, other curricular goals are more of a priority, and lack of faculty/instructors who could undertake these courses” as the major barriers.

**Figure 15: Major Barriers to Incorporating Civic and Community Engagement into the Curriculum**



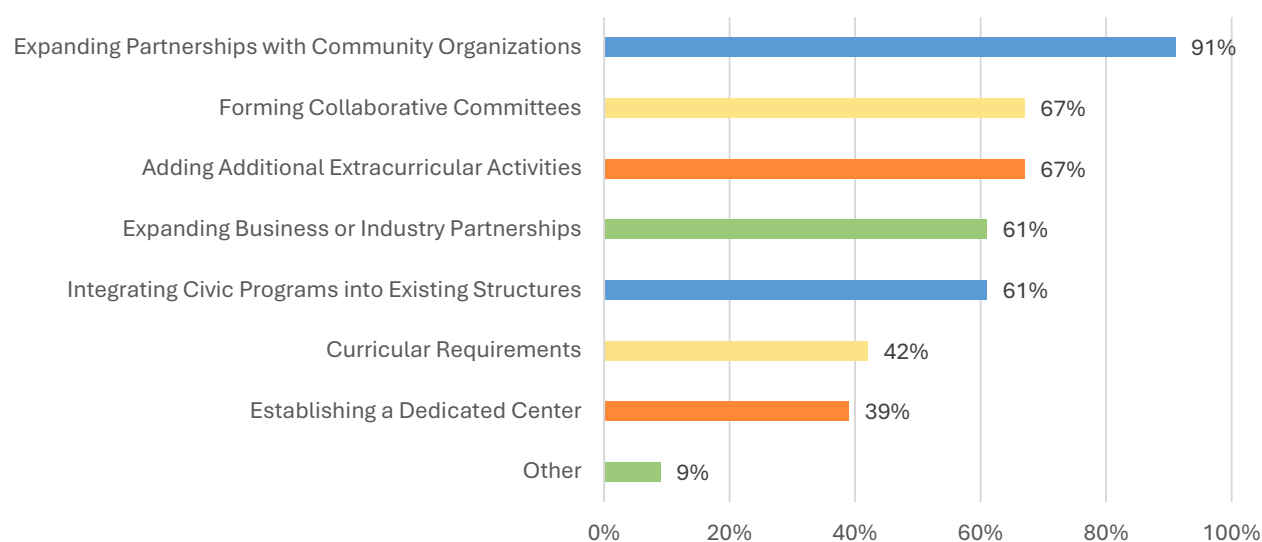
As noted previously, although 41% of responding community colleges identified barriers to institutionalizing civic and community engagement, only 26% have taken active steps to overcome them. Figure 16 shows the most

common steps these 26% of respondents have taken to institutionalize efforts related to community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, and service-learning. Responses indicate a strong emphasis on external partnership development, as well as the development of internal structures to support civic engagement. The distribution of strategic responses suggests prioritization of structural solutions over academic modifications, such as changing curricular requirements. Among the 9% of responding colleges that identified other active steps, top responses included setting aside a dedicated time block between classes for civic activities, hiring a volunteer coordinator, and purchasing volunteer management software.

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*The most common steps the 26% of respondents have taken to institutionalize efforts relate to community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, and service-learning. Responses indicate a strong emphasis on external partnership development, as well as the development of internal structures to support civic engagement.*

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**Figure 16: Active Steps Taken to Expand Civic and Community Engagement**

Findings presented in this section suggest that community colleges are making strides to establish long-term commitments to civic and community engagement, but many continue to face significant challenges. Resource constraints and lack of faculty and staff capacity are particularly persistent challenges that will require long-term planning and prioritization in both advocacy efforts for local and state funding support and institutional funding allocation decisions.

### Implications and Future Research Opportunities

Over the decades, numerous publications have extolled the capacity and responsibility of institutions of higher education to develop students as scholars, citizens, and informed participants in our democracy. Indeed, students’ “ability to apply democratic principles within increasingly complex social and global contexts” has long been “a central aim of American higher education” (Annenberg, 2024, p. 2). Through this landscape analysis of civic and community engagement in community colleges, the ACECCP provides invaluable information about the ways and extent to which these institutions—which educate nearly 40% of all undergraduates in the U.S.—provide opportunities for students to “attend, analyze, reflect, connect, and communicate on issues of importance” (Fischman & Gardner, 2022, p. xiii) and develop skills that “are both relevant to the marketplace and critical for political participation” (Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2019, p. 276).

Findings from the ACECCP offer a clear snapshot of community college civic and community engagement in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, and as such provide community college leaders and civic educators with a baseline to assess future progress toward greater civic and community engagement at their institutions. In particular, ACECCP findings indicate that most community colleges exhibit a substantial degree of intentionality toward civic and community engagement, though fewer have incorporated a similar level of commitment into faculty rewards and promotion processes or adopted civic and community engagement requirements across the curriculum. Similarly, while nearly all community colleges offer some type of co-curricular civic or service-related activities or clubs, there is a notable bifurcation among institutions with multiple opportunities for students to civically engage outside the classroom and those with only a modest portfolio of civic and community-based activities. Indeed, findings from the ACECCP indicate that

although some colleges have made major strides toward institutionalizing civic and community engagement across multiple curricular and co-curricular structures, there remains potential to expand the breadth and depth of civic initiatives at most institutions. The majority of colleges responding to the ACECCP are working to do just that, primarily through external partnerships with business, industry, and community-based nonprofit partners.

ACECCP findings can also serve as a blueprint for how community colleges across the country, especially smaller and rural serving institutions, might incorporate additional opportunities for civic and community engagement. In particular, for institutions new to this work, the ACECCP provides examples of how community colleges have successfully institutionalized their commitment to civic learning across the curriculum, developed civic program or graduation requirements, and/or added co-curricular opportunities for engagement. In addition, concrete steps taken by some colleges to strategically overcome barriers to civic efforts may be replicated elsewhere.

For smaller colleges, beginning by adding a civic engagement mission statement, or including civic and community engagement in the college mission and vision, are practical first steps to institutionalizing civic engagement. Possible next steps may include systematically adopting some of the curricular and co-curricular practices outlined in this report, offering civic-minded opportunities for professional development, and incorporating faculty rewards and expectations for civic work.

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*For institutions new to this work, the ACECCP provides examples of how community colleges have successfully institutionalized their commitment to civic learning across the curriculum, developed civic program or graduation requirements, and/or added co-curricular opportunities for engagement.*

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For institutions seeking to justify the human and financial resources necessary to expand opportunities for civic and community engagement on campus, findings from this study—including, for example, that 77% of community colleges prioritize civic learning in their strategic plan and 60% of institutions finance civic and community engagement through their general fund—may be useful. For colleges that have already worked to systematically incorporate civic learning strategies and requirements across multiple programs, the ACECCP can be used to benchmark continued progress and to share best practices and lessons learned with regional partners.

Although many findings from the ACECCP can be immediately applied at community colleges across the country, expanded participation in the survey is necessary for more in-depth analyses of how community colleges contribute to greater civic and community engagement within the broader postsecondary landscape. For example, future analyses might explore the extent to which civic engagement is distributed across the curriculum at community colleges (or whether it is predominantly incorporated into government, history, and sociology courses), as well as whether a more expansive curricular integration improves transfer students' preparation for civic engagement at four-year institutions. Other studies might investigate whether and how community colleges enable online students to participate in civic learning and community engagement. Finally, the ACECCP identified numerous barriers to institutionalizing civic engagement, and each are worthy of



expanded research to inform practical solutions. These and other research questions have the potential to lead to greater civic and community engagement within community colleges, as well as improved civic outcomes for community college students.

However, building civic infrastructure cannot happen without financial resources. While some in the university sector call for community colleges to find more innovative ways to encourage civic and community involvement, and to think more creatively about civic learning, it is unrealistic to expect the resource deprived colleges to do more without an infusion of support from state and local governments, as well as private philanthropic organizations.

In addition, as the beneficiaries of community college-prepared transfer students, four-year colleges and universities can do more

to recognize the hard work that community colleges do to educate, train, and support America's most vulnerable and marginalized college students and seek new ways of collaborating in civic engagement initiatives that do not further stress the community colleges' financial and human resources. For example, a possible (and likely cost-effective) starting point might be to embed civic and community engagement activities into existing 2+2 transfer partnerships, with four-year college partners taking on the bulk of any associated financial or personnel commitments. Cross-sector collaborations that recognize the strengths and experiences of civic educators at both community and four-year colleges—and that seek to mitigate the resource constraints that often preclude civic work at community colleges—hold great potential for expanding civic engagement between institutions and within our communities.

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*As the beneficiaries of community college-prepared transfer students, four-year colleges and universities can do more to recognize the hard work that community colleges do to educate, train, and support America's most vulnerable and marginalized college students and seek new ways of collaborating in civic engagement initiatives that do not further stress the community colleges' financial and human resources.*

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The time for expanded study, collaboration across two- and four-year institutions of higher education, and advocacy is now. With over 1,000 community colleges across the nation serving as stepping-stones to further education and careers, these institutions have an enormous influence on students' participation in civic life. Thus, further study of community colleges as producers of democratically knowledgeable citizens of all ages and political beliefs is critically important, especially given the American public's increasingly partisan divide and general susceptibility to misinformation. This report offers an encouraging and asset-based snapshot of civic and community engagement efforts occurring on American community college campuses. Additional college responses from the 2025 ACECCP administration will produce quantitative analysis and a typology of college community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, and service-learning activities. Ongoing funded research by both the Mississippi State University Community College Advocacy Lab and the Center for the Study of Community Colleges will expand institutional participation in the ACECCP, as well as conduct more in-depth analyses of the landscape of community outreach, volunteering, civic engagement, and service-learning at community colleges.

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## APPENDICES

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**Appendix A: Number of ACECCP Responses by State**

<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
Alabama	4
Arizona	10
Arkansas	3
California	8
Colorado	5
Connecticut	1
Florida	3
Georgia	2
Hawaii	2
Illinois	6
Iowa	3
Kansas	2
Kentucky	5
Louisiana	4
Maine	1
Maryland	6
Massachusetts	1
Michigan	4
Minnesota	2
Mississippi	9
Missouri	4
Montana	1
Nebraska	1
New Jersey	5
New Mexico	1
New York	7
North Carolina	3
Ohio	2
Oklahoma	1
Pennsylvania	3
Texas	4
Utah	1
Vermont	1
Virginia	4
Washington	3
West Virginia	1
Wisconsin	4
Wyoming	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>

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## Appendix B: List of Tables and Figures

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