

NEW CENTER, INSTITUTE, OR CONSORTIUM PROPOSAL FORM

Name of Institution: University of South Carolina Columbia

Name of Proposed Center/Institute: Center for American Civic Leadership and Public Discourse

Proposed Date of Implementation: Fall 2025

Site: USC Main Campus, Columbia, SC (51102)

Program Contact Information (name, title, telephone number, and email address):

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Institutional Approvals and Dates of Approval (include Provost/Chief Academic Officer, President and Board of Trustees approval):

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences: 4/16/2025

Provost: 4/18/2025

President: 5/13/2025

Board of Trustees Academic Excellence and Student Experience: 6/20/2025 expected

Board of Trustees: 6/20/2025 expected

Background Information

State the nature and purpose of the proposed center/institute and its centrality to institutional mission.

The University of South Carolina Center for American Civic Leadership and Public Discourse will greatly expand fluency in the core ideals and values that have shaped American history. Exploring themes such as ordered liberty, democratic self-governance, rule of law, justice, and unalienable rights, the Center will promote bipartisan discussion of the critical issues facing our state and our nation. The Center will operate in accordance with the principles of academic freedom and actively cultivate an environment of mutual respect. Through public events, publications, and academic programs, the Center will equip students to thoughtfully evaluate political actions and arguments and solidify the University of South Carolina's reputation as a thought leader in the areas of civic engagement and civil discourse.

The University of South Carolina has a long history of cultivating responsible citizens and civic leaders. Our Office of Community Engagement, our Leadership and Service Center (including the Civic Engagement program), our minors in Leadership Studies and Law and Society, and our Founding Documents course offerings demonstrate our commitment to developing an ethic of public service and community engagement. These initiatives lay the groundwork for a needed and timely broader endeavor.

Drawing on existing and new faculty expertise from across the university, the Center will provide a coordinating, facilitating, and amplifying role for academic activities in the bipartisan study of American values. It will leverage existing courses, programs, and initiatives and build new, focused capacity. The Center will cultivate an ethos of leadership, collaboration, civility, scholarship, and public service.

Concentrating our expertise will enhance opportunities to train student leaders, engage the public, obtain state and federal funding, and attract donors.

List the goals of the proposed center/institute.

The Center has three core goals:

1. Establish a forum that fosters vigorous and open discussion of political issues and the challenges facing American democracy. The Center will bring marquee speakers with differing perspectives to the university, culminating in an awarded lecture each year. Through these events, the Center will foster respect and understanding through dialogue and debate, recognizing the need to evaluate issues from multiple perspectives. The Center will provide opportunities to engage in civil dialogue and encourage students and community members to reflect on and refine their convictions.
2. Engage in the national conversation about sustaining our democratic values, bridge divisions, promote citizen engagement, and seek common solutions. The Center will provide a platform for faculty members and visiting fellows to develop instructional materials, publish books and articles, and write opinion pieces. The center will draw upon the expertise of existing faculty, but will also catalyze senior faculty hires in fields that focus on the history and processes of democracy. These faculty members will mentor junior scholars and students and build a repository of scholarship pertaining to democratic ideals.
3. Convey a deeper understanding of the principles upon which democracies are founded and the ideals that launched and now sustain the United States. The Center will provide students with tools to understand the roots and core processes of American Democracy. Focused programming will equip students for leadership by introducing and refining the skills needed to effectively present ideas, critically evaluate information, forge connections with people who hold different or opposing views, build stronger communities, and seek mutually beneficial solutions. Along with strengthening instruction provided in courses that focus on founding documents and expanding Constitution Day programming, the Center will launch a program that recognizes and rewards student writing, speaking, and creative achievement on themes surrounding democratic ideals. Award recipients will form the core of our Student Scholars program.

Center Activities: The inaugural year of the Center coincides with the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This provides an opportunity for the Center to debut its mission in the context of increased public awareness and bring the campus and the community together in celebration of this defining event. During this year, the Center will:

- Conduct a monthly “Classroom for the Community” lecture series, inviting speakers of national prominence with unique expertise on the Declaration of Independence, America’s founding documents, South Carolina history, American history, political science, and Constitutional Law to present lectures open to the community.
- Award a “Leader in Civic Engagement Prize” to a public figure whose work exemplifies the mission of the Center. This award will consist of a public ceremony and a cash prize to the awardee, as well as a lecture by the award recipient. Having the inaugural prize coincide with a celebration of the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence will lend gravitas to the event and signal to the community that the university is committed to promoting civic scholarship, leadership, and character.

- Host a series of “Civility Discourse” events where prominent South Carolinians with opposing views on current issues model civil and productive debate to bring the community together and engage in problem-solving through finding common ground.
- Establish a program to recognize and award student achievement in writing, speaking, and creative activities related to democratic ideals and values. Award recipients will form the core of our Student Scholars. The Student Scholars program will provide avenues for cohesive exploration of democratic ideals and civic leadership, connect students with our invited speakers, and actively promote writing, speaking and creative expression on topics related to the Center.
- Enhance academic opportunities through the creation of a new minor in Civics, housed within the McCausland College of Arts and Sciences, and led by faculty affiliated with the Center.

After the inaugural year, activities in support of the Center's mission can be organized into short and long-term aims. In the short term, the Center will:

- Award an annual Leader in Civic Engagement Prize to an outstanding public figure who has championed the values of the Center. This event signals the importance that the university and Center place on civic scholarship, leadership, and character. The choice of the annual Leader in Civic Engagement prize will be made by a nomination and selection process.
- Establish an annual speaker series around a central theme connected to the goals of the Center. Topics could include:
 - South Carolina’s Contribution to Founding Thought
 - The Export of American Constitutionalism
 - The Federalist Papers in America’s History of Political Advocacy
 - Constitutional Law as a Civic Problem-Solving Mechanism
 - Civility as an Act of Patriotism in the Public Sphere
 - Ethics in Democracy: Embracing Public Service for both Citizens and Officials
- Establish an annual multidisciplinary event celebrating American Civics in the Spring. These events will engage a broad range of the campus community. Representative events could include:
 - Neoclassical Art and the American Founding
 - Teaching Symposium on the Founding Documents
 - Special Collections: Celebrating Historical Documents in America’s Civic Past
 - Rhetoric Festival: Embracing the Lincoln Douglas Debates in the Modern Era
 - A Symphonic Celebration of the American Voice: Gershwin and Copland.
 - Benjamin Franklin—America’s Founding Father Scientist—an Exploration Fair for Columbia’s Elementary School Children.
 - Hosted author events focused on the themes of American Civics, American History, and American Politics that dovetail with the values of the Center.

In the long term, the Center will focus on deepening educational engagement, scholarly publication, and public discourse by:

- Cultivating a cadre of faculty and fellows who will promote the work of the Center by producing scholarly work, position papers, and other persuasive writing.
- Developing materials to be used during Freshman orientation. The orientation module would serve several purposes: alerting students to the campus commitment to American civics, expose students to important documents and ideas in American civics, allow them to participate in exploratory discussions with faculty before classes officially commence, and enable students to practice the deep engagement that will serve them well in every class they take at the University.

- Developing an engaging and interactive curriculum for middle and high school social studies students. Hosting groups of students on campus for these events would serve the dual purpose of exposing them to important ideas about American civics and the responsibilities of citizens and allowing them to experience campus life in the years before they make their college enrollment decisions.

Assessment of Need

Provide an assessment of the need for the proposed center/institute for the state, the region, and beyond, if applicable.

At this critical juncture in our nation's history, all citizens must be equipped to carry forward the American tradition of upholding a self-governing democracy with the Constitution and founding documents as their guiding framework. Universities play a critical role in preparing citizens to maintain and strengthen democracy.

Students must have broad opportunities to explore the democratic values, constitutional principles, and core ideals that have safeguarded the American way of life since the country's founding. Moreover, they must sharpen the skillset necessary for effective citizen leadership, including robust deliberation and rhetorical exchanges, clear and persuasive verbal and written communication, and the capacity to engage with opposing viewpoints while advancing solutions with civility and respect for those with differing opinions. Our students must be given the opportunity to embrace and practice the virtues of civic character based on ethical norms and shared values.

Beyond its direct campus impact, the Center will also engage the broader community in a multi-generational, multi-faceted conversation regarding the meaning of citizenship, the nature of leadership, and potential pathways to solutions for shared problems. The Center will be a focal point for scholarship and dialogue about issues facing us as members of our local communities, as South Carolinians, and as Americans. The Center's work will inform public discussion and connect South Carolina to the national conversation surrounding civic education, democratic ideals, leadership, and strategies to promote the achievement of shared goals.

Will the proposed center/institute impact existing programs or services at the institution? If yes, explain.

☒ Yes

☐ No

Yes, the Center will amplify and extend the impact of several key initiatives at the University of South Carolina. It will work closely with existing programs across campus listed below to both support and build upon their success:

- [Founding Documents](#) courses as required by the REACH Act
- Minors in [Leadership Studies](#) and [Law and Society](#)
- [Constitution Day](#)
- [Lincoln-Douglas Society](#)
- [Office of Community Engagement](#)
- [Leadership and Service Center](#) (including the [Civic Engagement](#) program)

The Center will focus on deepening civic educational engagement because faculty affiliated with the Center will establish a new interdisciplinary minor housed within the McCausland College of Arts and

Sciences. It will further work with affiliated faculty to develop new courses focused on American Civics. The addition of these new core courses provides an opportunity to offer a minor in Civics to USC students. The minor track will include existing Carolina Core courses that showcase founding documents with new and existing courses further exploring democratic values, public service, and community engagement.

Describe any similar centers/institutes in South Carolina.

There are no centers or institutes of this scope or scale in South Carolina. Programs do exist at other universities throughout the United States; leading examples include the [James Madison Program](#) at Princeton University and the [School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership](#) at Arizona State University. Regionally, similar initiatives are underway at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Florida. Locally, the Tocqueville Center at Furman University shares our mission but does not offer the scope and scale that we propose. Located in the center of South Carolina, with proximity to the state capital, an enduring commitment to public education and community engagement, and serving a student population of over 38,000, we are uniquely situated to have an immediate impact on South Carolina and the nation.

Many universities in South Carolina have established civic engagement programs. With a focus on service learning, these programs forge stronger connections between students and their local communities. Students have opportunities to build leadership skills, identify local needs, and develop solutions. As valuable as these civic engagement programs are, they are not deeply grounded in an examination of democratic values, nor are they designed to engage in a sustained larger-scale dialogue regarding challenges facing American Democracy.

Faculty

Provide a brief explanation of any changes in faculty, staff and/or administrative assignment that may be required as a result of the proposed center/institute.

The Center personnel will include the following and the financial support table includes the estimated costs for these personnel, including fringe and head count tax:

- Executive Director (New Tenure Track hire)
- Academic Director (New Tenure-track hire or existing Faculty)
- Research Director (New Professional Track Faculty)
- Full professors (2) (New Tenure-Track hires)
- Associate Professor (New Tenure-track hire)
- Affiliate Faculty (Initial list included below)
- Administrative staff (2)
- Graduate Assistants (2)

Rank and Full- or Part-time	Courses Taught for the Program	Academic Degrees and Coursework Relevant to Courses Taught, Including Institution and Major	Other Qualifications and Relevant Professional Experience (e.g., licensures, certifications, years in industry, etc.)
Executive Director (NEW): Full Professor in	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	Extensive administrative leadership, research experience, and teaching in focus areas associated with the Center.

Political Science or History			
Academic Director (NEW): Associate or Full Professor in Political Science or History	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	Extensive experience in academic programming and course development and a minimum of 6 years of experience in conducting research and teaching in focus areas associated with the Center.
Research Director (NEW): Full Professor in Political Science or History	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	Extensive experience in research and grant writing to support activities associated with the Center.
Associate Professor (NEW) in Political Science or History	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	A minimum of 6 years of experience in conducting research and teaching in focus areas associated with the Center.
Full Professor (NEW) in Political Science or History	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	A minimum of 10 years of experience in conducting research and teaching in focus areas associated with the Center.
Full Professor (NEW) in Political Science or History	To be determined	PhD in Political Science, History, Philosophy, or related discipline	A minimum of 10 years of experience in conducting research and teaching in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Assistant Professor in Political Science	A range of courses in Poli Sci, such as POLI 300/PHIL 330, POLI 304	Political Science (PhD) Duke University (2017)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Assistant Professor in African American Studies	Courses in AFAM, such as AFAM 200, AFAM 201	Educational Administration and Policy (PhD) University of Georgia (2013)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Professor of Sociology	Courses in SOCY, such as SOCY 101, SOCY 515	Sociology (PhD) Cornell University (2001)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Professor of Philosophy	Courses in PHIL, such as PHIL 114, PHIL 532	Philosophy (PhD) Emory University (1995) Philosophy (MA) Emory University (1993)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Associate	Courses in HIST, such as HIST 102, GIST 377,	History (PhD) University of Chicago (2010) History (MA) University of Chicago (2003)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.

Professor of History			
Affiliate faculty member: Professor of Elementary Education and Dean	Courses in EDUC	Mathematics Education (PhD and MS) University of Tennessee (2008)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Professor of Law and Dean	Courses in LAWS, such as LAWS 544, LAWS 570	School of Law (JD) University of Michigan (1999) Russian and Eastern Studies (MA) University of Michigan (2003)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.
Affiliate faculty member: Professor of Law	Courses in LAWS, such as LAWS 509, LAWS 724	School of Law (JD) Harvard (2003)	Extensive research and teaching experience in focus areas associated with the Center.

Resources

Identify any new library, instructional equipment and facilities needed to support the proposed center/institute. For facilities, identify any new facilities or modifications to existing facilities needed to support the proposed center/institute.

Library Resources: No new library resources are needed to support the center.

Equipment: Office furnishings and supplies will be needed.

Facilities: No new facilities are needed. Office space has already been identified (estimated at 5,000 gsf).

Financial Support

Sources of Financing by Year						
Category	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	Total
Tuition Funding	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Special State Appropriation	\$0	\$1,845,000.00	\$2,775,000.00	\$2,730,000.00	\$2,728,000.00	\$10,078,000.00
Reallocation of Existing Funds	\$1,200,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,200,000.00
Federal and/or Other Funding	\$200,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$200,000.00
Total	\$1,400,000.00	\$1,845,000.00	\$2,775,000.00	\$2,730,000.00	\$2,728,000.00	\$11,478,000.00
Estimated Costs Associated with Implementing the Center/Institute by Year						
Category	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	Total
Program Administration and Faculty/Staff Salaries	\$310,000.00	\$1,088,000.00	\$1,637,700.00	\$1,890,500.00	\$1,949,720.00	\$6,875,920.00
Facilities, Equipment, Supplies and Materials	\$485,000.00	\$288,000.00	\$526,100.00	\$309,300.00	\$237,600.00	\$1,846,000.00
Library Resources	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other - Director, Co-Director, Center Faculty Travel	\$20,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$135,000.00
Other - Visiting Scholar Support	\$434,000.00	\$226,000.00	\$249,000.00	\$253,000.00	\$267,000.00	\$1,429,000.00
Other - Direct Expenses Fees	\$151,000.00	\$218,000.00	\$332,200.00	\$247,200.00	\$243,680.00	\$1,192,080.00
Total	\$1,400,000.00	\$1,845,000.00	\$2,775,000.00	\$2,730,000.00	\$2,728,000.00	\$11,478,000.00
Net Total (i.e., Sources of Financing Minus Estimated Costs)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Budget Justification

Provide a brief explanation for all costs and sources of financing identified in the Financial Support table.

Resources for year 1 have been identified as \$1,200,000 has been pledged from the Office of the President and \$200,000 will come from an existing Mellon Grant. Resources for years 2-5 will be requested from the State Legislature.

The estimated costs include center personnel, including fringe and head count tax for the following (existing affiliate faculty are not included):

- Executive Director
- Academic Director
- Research Director
- Associate Professor
- Full professors (2)
- Administrative staff (2)
- Graduate Assistants (2)

The Facilities, Equipment, Supplies and Materials line includes the cost for office space estimated at 5,000 gsf as well as office furnishings and supplies (existing space on campus has been identified to house the center). Other costs include travel for Center personnel, Visiting Scholar Support to support speaker fees and travel and event expenses, and direct expenses.

Evaluation and Assessment

Provide an outline of how the proposed center/institute will be evaluated and explain how assessment data will be used.

The leadership of the Center will engage in continuous program assessment in coordination with the external advisory board. Key metrics will include:

- Attendance at public events
- Successful launch of new minor
- Number of students enrolled in courses related to all minors
- Number of books and articles published by affiliated faculty
- Ability to attract and hire strong candidates for faculty positions
- Number of grant applications submitted by affiliated faculty
- Number of faculty affiliates
- Number of student entries to award competition
- Number of students involved in the Student Scholars program

This data will be reviewed annually and used to improve center activities, if applicable. Per policy, centers and institutes at USC are reviewed every five years to determine whether the center is meeting its goals and should be continued.