

2025

ANNUAL REPORT



FOREWORD

Dear Everyday Democracy friends and partners,

In communities across the nation, people are choosing to come together. They are gathering in libraries, museums, community centers, and other shared spaces to listen, share stories, and imagine what a stronger, more inclusive democracy could look like. These local “third spaces” are where democracy becomes real – practiced not in theory, but in relationship. They remind us that democracy is not abstract; it is built and renewed through everyday acts of connection.

This is the work of Everyday Democracy.

Local democratic organizing matters because democracy grows when neighbors engage across difference, when everyday people are supported to lead, and when dialogue moves toward collective civic action. In 2025, we partnered with communities, institutions, and organizations to strengthen these civic foundations and to create spaces of belonging, shared leadership, and courage, even in hard moments.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, we are invited not only to reflect, but to recommit. The 250th is a chance to tell fuller stories about our past and to spark civic imagination about the future we want to build together. We believe this milestone is a call to action: to expand who belongs, who leads, and whose voices shape our democracy.

The stories in this report reflect that hope. They show people building power, strengthening community, and practicing democracy every day.

Thank you for walking alongside us in this work – especially now, when it matters most.



Merle McGee
President & CEO



Gillian Howell
Board Chair

ABOUT US

OUR MISSION

Everyday Democracy **builds power** with individuals and groups **advancing multiracial democracies** in their local communities.

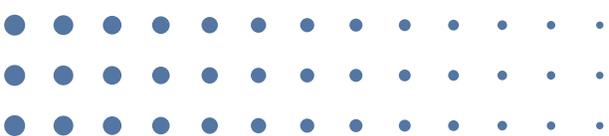
OUR VISION

We envision a **vibrant, multiracial democracy** where all people have access, resources, and power to create thriving communities.

OUR VALUES

- Relationships & active listening
- Building trust
- Challenging dominant narratives
- Confronting structural oppression
- Honoring local histories
- Continuous learning



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2025 HIGHLIGHTS

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PRACTICING DEMOCRACY AT THE LIBRARY

Public libraries play a crucial role in fostering civic health—with library staff at the forefront. This year, we launched a new partnership with the Urban Libraries Council to transform libraries across North America into hubs for civic engagement, discourse, and community building. We trained library professionals from twelve public library systems in the U.S. and Canada in our multipartial facilitation approach – building skills to lead inclusive, balanced dialogue by centering multiple viewpoints, addressing power dynamics, and interrupting dominant narratives.

In 2026, each library system will engage residents on a local issue of their choice, reaching an estimated 350 people total – strengthening democracy where it begins: close to home.

The partnership drew national attention, including [coverage by Bloomberg](#) highlighting libraries as vital civic spaces amid declining institutional trust.

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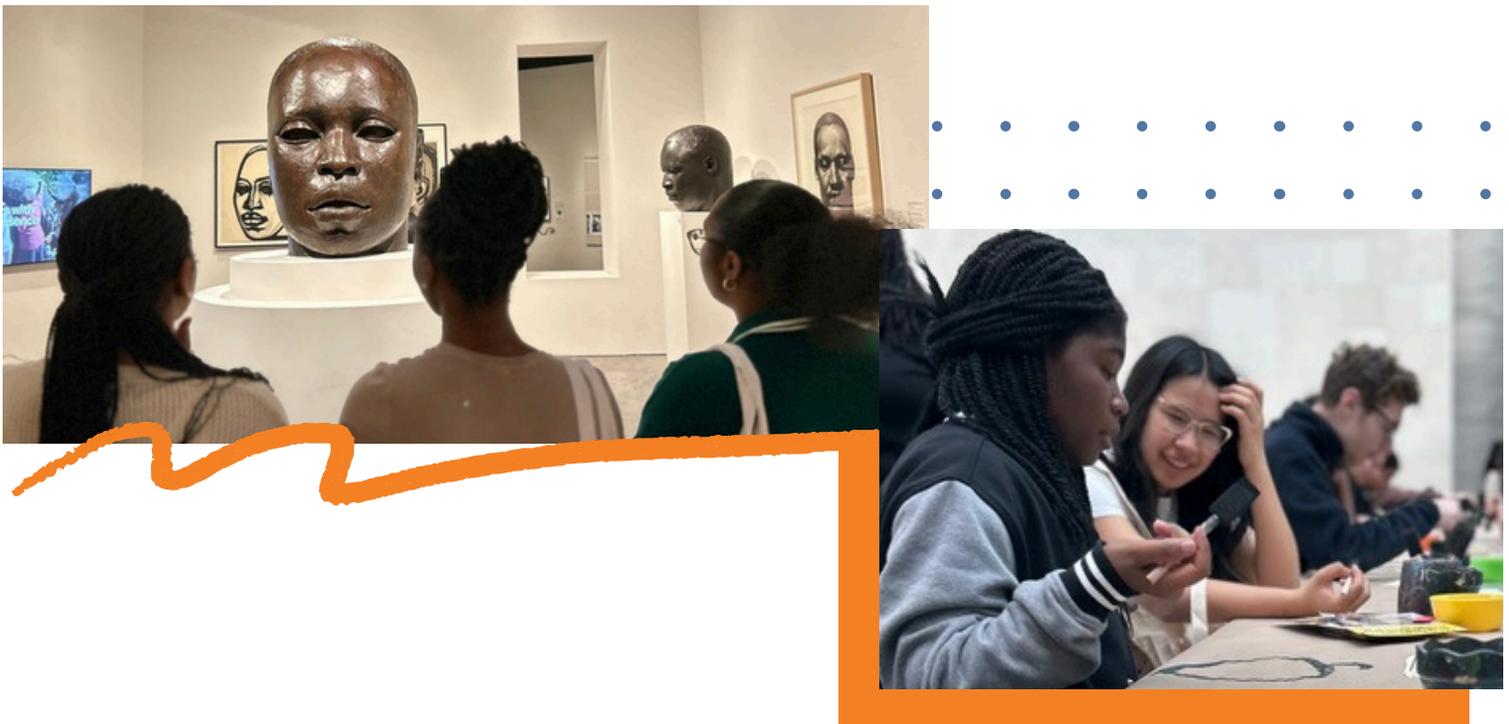
A large, stylized orange quote icon.*“We have a responsibility to uphold libraries as **trusted spaces** where democratic conversations can take place.”*

- Librarian & Project Participant

SPARKING CIVIC IMAGINATION THROUGH ART

We held our first Arts & Democracy Lab in partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston during College Night, welcoming 750 college students from across the Boston area. Centered on the Witnessing Humanity: The Art of John Wilson exhibit, we invited students to engage with Wilson's powerful exploration of racial identity, labor, family, and civic participation spanning more than 60 years of American life.

Guided by volunteer peer facilitators from the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, trained by Everyday Democracy, students connected their own experiences to questions of identity, power, justice, democratic decision-making, and belonging. Through facilitated dialogue, reflective prompts paired with artworks, and a collective mural inspired by Wilson's work, participants explored how art can open pathways to deeper understanding and civic imagination.



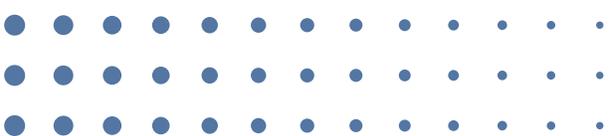
YOUTH BREAK BREAD & BUILD DEMOCRATIC SKILLS

Students from Bridgeport and Westport came together to discuss history, food, and democracy. They gathered around a three-course meal centered on corn, beans, and squash – the “Three Sisters” crops traditionally grown together by Indigenous communities in a relationship rooted in balance, care, and reciprocity with the land, which later became a commodity tied to colonization and the Atlantic slave trade.

Guided by food historian Ramin Ganeshram and Clan Mother Shoran Waupatukuay Piper of the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, students explored the cultural histories and meanings behind each ingredient as it was served. Conversation unfolded naturally over the meal, moving from personal reflections to deeper dialogue about power, resilience, and equity. Students considered how food can tell stories of both survival and control – and what those stories reveal about the food systems shaping our lives today.

The evening ended not with a final word, but with possibility. Students left with ingredients, recipes, and new questions to carry forward – along with ideas for continued learning, conversation, and civic action.



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STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Strong democracies are built by people willing and prepared to lead with care, fairness, and shared purpose. Everyday Leaders equips community members with the skills to lead inclusively, build diverse coalitions, and turn dialogue into meaningful civic action.

We partnered with Queens Public Library to bring Everyday Leaders to a community eager for this kind of leadership. Demand far exceeded capacity: we were able to accept just 32% of applicants. Those selected strengthened their ability to lead across difference, navigate power and equity, and work collectively toward change rooted in community priorities.

Building on this momentum, we launched a new cohort of Everyday Leaders in late 2025 in Hartford – continuing to grow a network of leaders ready to meet today’s challenges with courage, collaboration, and care.

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*“These skills will **enhance my ability** to take on greater responsibility in organizations I volunteer with and provide a strong foundation for **future leadership roles.**”*

- Everyday Leaders Participant, Queens, NY

MAPPING THE PATH TO FOOD JUSTICE

We brought neighbors together on New York City's Lower East Side for an intergenerational event with the Lower East Side Ecology Center and Center for Wellbeing & Happiness to imagine and act toward a more just food system. Participants shared personal experiences of finding – or struggling to find – healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful food, naming how power and inequity shape everyday realities in their community.

As conversation deepened, neighbors marked gardens, markets, and missing resources on neighborhood maps, imagining what a more just food system could look like – and what it would take to build it. To ground big ideas in real practice, small groups prepared and shared a meal using locally sourced ingredients – connecting visions of a more just food system to tangible, collaborative work.

The impact was immediate and measurable: 77% of participants plan to volunteer locally, nearly nine in ten committed to supporting local food producers, and a strong majority intend to stay civically engaged.



SHARING OUR EXPERTISE



Everyday Democracy’s Civic and Community Engagement team delivered a hands-on workshop at the **International Listening Association’s** annual convention. Through a dynamic role-playing exercise, participants practiced dialogue skills that build empathy, understanding, and shared purpose across differences.



Our President and CEO, Merle McGee, joined the **PlayFull Podcast** to explore what it means to be brave in today’s fractured world. The conversation examined navigating complexity, showing up authentically, and leading with radical imagination – inviting listeners to reflect on how courage, creativity, and connection can fuel democratic renewal. [Listen to the full episode.](#)

DOING DEMOCRACY

Throughout 2025, Everyday Democracy hosted Doing Democracy events. [Waging Love for an Inclusive Democracy](#) convened national leaders in accountability, belonging, and restorative justice to explore love as a force for justice, transformation, and real democracy in action. [Remaking the Commons: Stories of Civic Space, Belonging, and Democracy](#) examined how civic spaces are being preserved, created, and reimaged. [Gen Z and the Future of Democracy](#) challenged one-size-fits-all approaches to youth engagement, centering young people as leaders in shaping democracy’s future.

JOIN US

The promise of this nation lies in our ability to see one another, across differences, as neighbors equally worthy of respect and care.

Invest now in building a people-powered, multiracial democracy rooted in dialogue, shared leadership, and collective civic action.



Support our mission with a gift today at Everyday-Democracy.org/donate, or contact Shannon Duncan Bodwell, Vice President of Advancement, at sduncanbodwell@everyday-democracy.org to learn more.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS

Everyday Democracy's work is powered by institutional partners who believe in the promise of local leadership, inclusive dialogue, and community-driven solutions. Their support enables us to build civic capacity and sustain democratic practice in communities nationwide. Thank you!

- AAA-ICDR Foundation
- Aicher Family Foundation
- Commonwell Fund
- Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
- CT Humanities
- Fairfield County's Community Foundation
- Freedom Together Foundation
- Greater Hartford Gives Foundation
- William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund