



# Shaping Civic Futures

2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

# A Letter from the Board Chair and Executive Director

## Dear Colleagues and Friends,

As Project Pericles approaches its twenty-fifth anniversary, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment for both higher education and democracy. Across the nation and the world, democratic institutions are strained, public trust in higher education and government is fragile, and the need for colleges and universities to prepare students for civic life has never been more urgent. At the same time, we see extraordinary opportunity: a generation of students eager to make meaning of their education, faculty committed to shaping civic-minded pedagogy, and institutions reexamining their public purpose.

This Strategic Plan is both a response to the urgent demands of this moment and a blueprint for the future. It carries forward the vision of our founder, Eugene Lang, and the enduring commitment of our consortium of liberal arts colleges and universities. It reflects extensive input from our Board, Program Directors, faculty, students, and partners, and it underscores our commitment to working alongside the many organizations and institutions advancing civic learning and democratic renewal. With this shared purpose and collaborative orientation, Project Pericles is poised to help lead the way in ensuring that civic learning is not peripheral, but central, to the undergraduate experience.

Our plan focuses on three interconnected priorities:

- **Pedagogical Influence:** shaping teaching and learning practices that cultivate civic identity, imagination, and agency.
- **Consortium Strength:** fortifying the dynamic network of Periclean institutions and ensuring the organizational capacity to support them.
- **Thought Leadership:** elevating the stories, research, and practices that can inspire the field and reassert higher education's democratic purpose.

Together, these priorities chart a path for Project Pericles—in partnership with our allied organizations—to move civic learning from the margins to the mainstream so that every student graduates prepared to participate in civic life, build thriving communities, and shape a vibrant democracy. Simultaneously, we seek to deepen the value of Pericles to our member institutions by ensuring students develop a sense of civic identity and democratic purpose alongside the confidence, skills, and career readiness to flourish beyond graduation.

We are deeply grateful to all who contributed to the development of this plan, and especially to the students, faculty, and campus leaders whose work embodies the spirit of Pericles every day. We invite you to join us in carrying this vision forward, as we work toward a future where civic learning is a defining feature of American higher education, and civic agency and engagement are defining outcomes for every student.

**With gratitude and resolve,**



**Ron B. Cole**  
Board Chair, Project Pericles  
President, Allegheny College



**Sanda Balaban**  
Executive Director, Project Pericles



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# Who We Are

## Our History

Eugene M. Lang (1919-2017), visionary entrepreneur and philanthropist, founded Project Pericles in 2001 to address a critical concern: the growing political cynicism and civic disengagement of young people. Mr. Lang named the organization after **Pericles**, the Athenian statesman often credited with shaping the first prototype of Western democratic society.

Over the past two decades, Project Pericles has partnered with higher education institutions to integrate nonpartisan community-engaged civic learning, grounded in the liberal arts and humanities, **across the entire campus experience**. We have collaboratively worked with hundreds of faculty and campus staff to reimagine courses and co-curricular programming, reaching thousands of students annually.

Through multi-campus initiatives and consortium-wide gatherings, we have built the trusted relationships with institutional leaders essential for **sustainable transformation**—facilitating curricular change that has resulted in new civic pathways, cross-departmental programs, and lasting cultural shifts.

## Our Mission

**Project Pericles places community-engaged civic learning at the heart of higher education.** Collaborating with students, faculty, campus leaders, and community partners, we advance innovative teaching and learning that stimulates curiosity, cultivates civic identity, and generates the confidence to revitalize democracy and civil society.

## Our Vision

We envision a future in which higher education prepares students from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives to participate fully in civic life, to help build thriving communities, and to shape a resilient democracy.



# What We Believe In

## Democracy as a Practice

Higher education must prepare students from all backgrounds and perspectives to actively shape and strengthen a democracy that works for everyone.

## Civic Learning

A well-rounded, purpose-driven education cultivates curiosity, critical thinking, moral imagination, and community engagement, guiding students and faculty to connect personal growth with a deep commitment to the public good.

## Working Across Differences

Generous, open-minded, and solutions-oriented engagement across political, ideological, economic, and identity lines is vital to tackling shared challenges, building trust, and strengthening the social fabric.

## People-Centered Relationships

Transformation happens through long-term relationships with students, faculty, campuses, and community partners.

## Human Potential

Colleges and universities cultivate the motivation, skills, and confidence of students, faculty, and community members to thrive in their lives and careers while contributing to stronger communities and a more vibrant society.

## Liberal Arts and the Humanities

Rigorous intellectual inquiry grounded in these disciplines can equip students to test ideas, weigh evidence, and act with conviction informed by knowledge.

# Our Theory of Change

## The Challenge

Our democracy and civil society face pressure on multiple fronts. Higher education must rise to meet them. Many institutions seek to center civic learning but need the models, incentives, and capacity to do so.

## Our Distinctive Approach

Project Pericles harnesses the strengths of our liberal arts consortium—teaching-centered institutions, strong faculty-student relationships, and deep community ties—to test and scale community-engaged learning through strategic grantmaking and partnerships within and across campuses. Periclean programming actualizes students’ enthusiasm for change, ensuring civic action arises from intellectual rigor.

**This leads to a positive cycle in which:**

- Faculty embed rigorous, inquiry-driven civic and community engagement into teaching.
- Student learning experiences spark civic curiosity, shape identity, and build agency.
- Students and faculty form deep, reciprocal partnerships with communities.
- These partnerships strengthen local capacity and democratic infrastructure.
- Colleges see the positive impact and invest further in civic learning, institutionalizing new policies that catalyze transformation.
- Communities become stronger, and democratic participation increases.
- Project Pericles partners with allied organizations to bridge the field and optimize collective impact.
- The cycle renews: civic learning shifts from the margins to the mainstream, empowering young people to strengthen democracy.

## Outcomes

Faculty develop and share innovative civic pedagogies → Institutions embed civic learning into mission, curriculum, and culture → Students graduate with civic imagination, agency, and responsibility, grounded in disciplinary knowledge and scholarly inquiry → Communities—and democracy—gain capacity to tackle shared challenges → Higher education renews its democratic purpose and helps strengthen civic life.

# The Challenge

As our democracy faces profound challenges, demands on higher education have also grown. Many institutions want to center civic learning but need the models, incentives, and capacity to do so.

## Our Distinctive Approach

THROUGH...

WE HARNESS OUR STRENGTHS OF....

TO TEST & SCALE...



Project Pericles & Allied Organizations Facilitate a Positive Cycle in Which:



## Short Term Outcomes



Faculty develop and share high-impact civic pedagogies



Institutions embed civic learning into mission, curriculum, and culture



Students graduate with civic imagination, agency, and responsibility



Communities gain capacity to tackle shared challenges

## Long Term Outcomes

Higher education renews its democratic purpose and helps revitalize civic life.  
Civic learning shifts from the margins to the mainstream.

## PRIORITY #1

# Pedagogical Influence

### Goal

Advance teaching and learning approaches that empower students to lead with civic purpose and impact, ensuring that civic action is rooted in interdisciplinary knowledge, scholarly research, and critical inquiry.

### Strategies

- 1 Expand grant-making activities that empower faculty to experiment with curricular innovations that connect knowledge with community collaboration, civic learning, and student change-making efforts.
- 2 Develop and strengthen partnerships that bring new pedagogical practices into the classroom.
- 3 Advance methodologies that assess how civic and community engagement deepens student learning, development, and civic agency.



**“Project Pericles has inspired generations of young people to embrace the preparation for active citizenship as one of higher education’s most important contributions to the public good.** If our colleges and universities are to sustain the resilience of democratic institutions into the second half of the 21st century, Project Pericles must encourage future generations of students, faculty, and community leaders to engage societal challenges that promote democratic flourishing.”

**EUGENE TOBIN**

*Former Senior Program Officer, Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation; Former President, Hamilton College*

## Key Activities

- **Expand campus re-granting programs** through a collaborative design process with campus leaders, offering tiered support (\$1k–\$8k) for syllabus revisions, course updates, and broader institutional change.
- Pilot and scale a **Civic Story Lab** that brings students, faculty, and community partners together to strengthen partnerships and amplify new narratives of democratic engagement through public storytelling.
- Secure funding for and pilot at least one new **cross-campus initiative**. Focus areas include supporting innovative civic- and community-engaged learning, as well as advancing civil discourse & action.
- **Build partnerships** with leading engaged-scholarship and pedagogy organizations to advance field movement.
- Implement **rigorous evaluation protocols** to assess campus re-grant proposals for civic learning outcomes and pedagogical design, guide strategic funding decisions for maximum impact, measure programmatic effectiveness, track institutional transformation, and monitor progress toward strategic plan objectives.



## PRIORITY #2

# Consortium Strength

### Goal

Deepen capacity to strengthen a dynamic, values-aligned consortium of institutions committed to civic learning.

### Strategies

- 1 Expand the Periclean Consortium's diversity across geography, size, and/or institutional type.
- 2 Increase organizational capacity and operational efficiency to execute our strategic priorities.
- 3 Develop a community of faculty, Program Directors, and campus leaders to foster cross-campus mentorship and relationships.
- 4 Leverage new technologies to enhance organizational productivity.



"I believe that higher education is an investment we make as a society in the future of our families and our country. The work of Project Pericles matters to me because I want my own children to be part of a citizenry that engages, connects and cares for each other. **And this can't be done by one institution alone. It really needs a whole ecosystem to center this**, and that's what the work of Project Pericles does."

WAY-TING CHEN

*Co-Founder and Senior Partner, Blue Garnet*



## Key Activities

- Publish a **comprehensive membership guide** that clearly outlines benefits and expectations, providing a roadmap to strategically diversify and expand the consortium. This includes creating **ROI case studies** for campus leaders (Presidents, Provosts, CFOs, and Trustees) linking civic learning to enrollment, retention, and outcomes.
- Strengthen our **Program Director community** through annual meetings, a community of practice, campus teams, and opportunities for cross-campus collaborative learning.
- Organize grantee **alumni networks** to build identity, advocacy, and peer support.
- **Launch diversified fundraising campaigns** to broaden the donor base and grow the budget sustainably in line with ambitious goals.
- **Strengthen organizational capacity** by upgrading digital tools (CRM, project management, and generative AI) and investing in staff training to allow more time focused on mission-critical activities.
- **Enhance governance and strategic insight** by creating board working groups and establishing an advisory board of historic leaders and higher education thought partners.





## PRIORITY #3

# Thought Leadership

### Goal

Position Project Pericles as a catalyst for demonstrating how community-engaged learning strengthens civic life and democracy and must be a core feature of higher education.

### Strategies

- 1 Convene higher education leaders around best practices for cultivating civic agency and advancing democratic revitalization through community-engaged learning.
- 2 Elevate faculty and student work through our platforms, university communications offices, and media outlets to shape national conversations in higher education.
- 3 Forge alliances with higher-ed consortia and civic organizations to advance shared positions, resources, and policy agendas that strengthen democracy.

"Today, I'm excited to see Project Pericles, under the dynamic leadership of Sandra Balaban and guided by a comprehensive and aspirational Strategic Plan, embrace the critical challenge of revitalizing democracy through educational collaboration and innovation—and to see Project Pericles emerge as a powerful voice in the higher education landscape."

**JAN R. LISS**

*Founding Executive Director of Project Pericles*

## Key Activities

- Expand our field influence by creating opportunities for higher education leaders to learn from and work together through **webinars, conferences, and presentations** spotlighting innovative strategies for building civic capacity and democratic participation.
- Reimagine and refresh our online **Civic Engagement Resources** as a dynamic showcase of the best faculty, student, and alumni work. This refreshed resource will highlight evergreen, replicable frameworks and evaluation tools developed by our consortium—designed to inspire and be adopted across higher education.
- Update our **internal communications toolkit** with case studies, templates, and advocacy materials, giving campuses practical tools to highlight their impact and ensuring stakeholders see clear progress on our shared priorities.
- Execute external campaigns to **highlight campus stories and national impact**, including op-eds, letters, and media placements that demonstrate the link between local community engagement and strengthening of democratic purpose.



# Overarching Metrics



## Student Civic Agency

Reach **15,000+** students annually by 2028, with **80%** reporting increased civic efficacy.

## Methodology Advancements

Establish a baseline of our current reach and develop evidence-based frameworks that measure key outcomes from our Strategic Grants and other programming through partnering with evaluation/field experts.

## Faculty Leadership and Field Influence

**80%** of Project Pericles grant recipients demonstrate ongoing leadership in civic learning within 18 months through presenting their work, publishing articles, mentoring colleagues, securing additional funding, or including civic engagement in tenure/promotion materials by 2028.

## Field Impact through Thought Leadership

National thought leadership pieces (self-published or via external platforms), webinars, and speaking engagements collectively reaching **25,000+** higher education/civic learning stakeholders annually by 2028 with evidence of influencing institutional practices, cross-sector partnerships, and/or policy conversations that strengthen the democratic mission of higher education.

# Lexicon

**Project Pericles aspires to bridge the gap between the real world and higher education.** We seek to ensure our messaging remains accessible to a broad public audience. To that end, our lexicon provides a brief overview of key terms related to our work.

## **Civic** \_\_\_\_\_ :

**Agency:** Individuals' ability and desire to effectively identify, explore, and address shared challenges. Through academic, cocurricular, and extracurricular programming, higher education institutions have a critical role to play in fostering students' civic agency.

**Engagement:** The processes in which individuals interact with their community, government, and society to advance the public good. Civic engagement is critical for democratic participation.

**Identity:** The sense of belonging, responsibility, and connection that a person has to their role as a citizen and participant in democracy. Civic identity arises from one's critical reflection on their participation in a broader community.

**Imagination:** The capacity for an individual to envision a more just, inclusive, and vibrant future, as well as the place of themselves and their community within it. Civic imagination is a prerequisite for civic engagement.

**Learning:** The process by which individuals develop the knowledge, skills, and commitments for active participation in a democracy. Civic learning is necessary for effective civic engagement.

**Purpose:** The motivation for individuals to strengthen and engage their knowledge and skills towards community and political action. We aspire for students to become citizens with civic purpose.

**Community-Engaged Learning and Research (“CELR”):** Collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

**Democracy:** A practice of shared responsibility for a common future. It is an unfinished task of making social choices and working toward public goals that shape our lives and the lives of others.

# Lexicon (continued)

**Liberal Arts:** Liberal arts is an educational approach intended to produce character, moral discipline, and mental rigor in young people in order to prepare them for enlightened leadership in government, business, and the professions. Liberal arts pedagogy advances students' abilities to identify assumptions, draw inferences, distinguish facts from opinions, draw conclusions from data, and judge the authority of arguments and sources.

**Pedagogical Influence:** The impact of teaching and learning experiences on participants. We view pedagogical influence as a means to the development of the next generation of citizens.

**Periclean Institution:** A higher education institution that is a formal and recognized member of the Project Pericles Consortium. Periclean Institutions are distinctive in their approach to civic learning.

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# Periclean Institutions

Allegheny College  
Bates College  
Berea College  
Bethune-Cookman University  
Carleton College  
Chatham University  
Dillard University  
Drew University  
Elon University  
Goucher College  
Hampshire College  
Hendrix College  
Macalester College  
The New School  
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Pitzer College  
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Rhodes College  
Skidmore College  
Swarthmore College  
Ursinus College  
Wagner College  
Widener University

