



2014
A Year of Connection



Vision

The Annette Strauss Institute envisions a democracy where all citizens are informed, vote, and are actively involved in improving their communities.

Mission

Through nonpartisan research, education, and outreach, the Institute seeks to understand and overcome obstacles to civic engagement.



A Letter from Our Director

Dear Supporters and Friends,

As 2014 comes to a close in the midst of important elections here in Texas and across the country, the Annette Strauss Institute has much to be proud of. This year we have further increased the visibility of our mission, strengthened civic life through our research and outreach, and built new partnerships that will help move the needle on civic engagement in Texas.

The Institute partnered with other civic organizations to produce a series of forums about the challenges facing the Austin City Council under its new geographic representation system. The Institute has also begun offering a series of Public Engagement Trainings designed to help government and community entities around the state engage more effectively with citizens. And the Lebermann Foundation, established in honor of legendary civic leader Lowell H. Lebermann, Jr., has given generously to support the creation of The Lowell Lebermann Forum. This series of public dialogues will build upon our innovative partnership with KUT and KLRU public media to get Texans directly involved in addressing our civic engagement crisis.

In all our programming, from middle school to adult audiences, one goal is paramount: to address the civic participation crisis by actively engaging citizens in our democracy.

Our research continues to make a vital impact as well. Most notably, the Engaging News Project has produced a series of seven reports and added a host of new media partners, all aimed at improving the quality of citizen engagement with online news. In addition, we are pleased that Mr. Wofford Denius and the Cain Foundation have established the Wofford Denius Chair in News Integrity to educate students and the public about the importance of media integrity. Meanwhile, the Texas Civic Health Index, released in 2013, continues to stimulate conversations around the state about the causes and cures for our state's low levels of civic and political participation.

As we continue to build support for our work, I'm delighted to announce that H-E-B has committed to becoming the Institute's newest corporate partner and the first to commit to five years of sustaining support for our work. We truly cannot imagine a more fitting friend than H-E-B, a leading Texas-based corporation that consistently and sincerely supports community engagement.

I am also pleased to introduce our new director of development, Karen Affeld. Karen comes to the Strauss Institute by way of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, where she oversaw significant growth and innovation in fundraising and donor cultivation. We are delighted that Karen will be leading our efforts to create new sources of support for our mission.

Looking ahead, I cordially invite you to attend Great Conversations, to be held the evening of March 3, 2015, at the AT&T Center at UT Austin. As you know, Great Conversations debuted this year as an innovative, mission-based approach to raising visibility and support for our work. This event brings together prominent leaders from the worlds of business, politics, media, community organizations, and the arts to lead conversations on current issues and topics. As the accolades attest, the first evening was a success: stimulating, engaging, informative, and enjoyable — all the things the Institute strives to be in everything we do. We look forward to seeing you there next year.

And finally, a note of remembrance and of sincere thanks. Ted Strauss, widower of our namesake, passed away on September 5, 2014, after a lengthy illness. We at the Institute remember Ted fondly as a generous man who loved politics and a good laugh. We are grateful for how the Theodore H. Strauss Civic Internship award has helped so many young people build their professional skills and networks, deepen their dedication to public service, and achieve their dreams. His legacy truly lives on in every Strauss intern and in the work of the Annette Strauss Institute.

The work we do would literally not be possible without the support of people like Ted and like you who care about the future of our state and our nation. At just the moment when many indicators suggest citizens are giving up on democracy, you are not. Together, we can help Texas to become a leader in active, engaged, responsible citizenship.

Cordially,



Regina G. Lawrence, PhD
Director, Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life



Texas Civic Health Index Continues to Kick-start Conversation

In 2013, the Annette Strauss Institute (ASI) released the first-ever Texas Civic Health Index. Analyzing U.S. Census Bureau data, the report showed that levels of political and civic participation in Texas lag behind most other states in the nation. That troubling news has stirred conversations around the state that are continuing today.

This year we have used the Texas Civic Health Index to inform, enlighten, and motivate concerned citizens. Findings from the Index have been presented to a number of government, civic, and nonprofit organizations including the Texas Council for the Social Studies, the National Council for the Social Studies, the Discovering Texas History Conference, the Texas Nonprofit Summit, the Dallas Women's Foundation, the Dallas Breakfast Group, the Texas AmeriCorps Grantees, the Senate Hispanic Caucus, the Lakeway Men's Club, and Texas Impact. The Texas Civic Health Index also informed our first Texas Conference on Civic Life on the UT Austin campus in November 2013, which brought together nearly 200 speakers and participants to discuss how civic life can be invigorated in the 21st century. In addition, ASI staff developed a curriculum that uses civic health data as an innovative tool to cultivate research skills and empower high school students to become more civically active and engaged.

Opposite: Great Conversations Honorary Co-Chairs, the Hon. Julián Castro & the Hon. Karen Hughes
This page: Texas Conference on Civic Life



ENP Inaugural News Engagement Workshop, February 2014

Research

This year, the **Engaging News Project (ENP)** made impressive strides toward identifying commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways to improve online news. Overseen by Dr. Talia Stroud, ENP uses rigorous research methods to test innovations on news websites that change how citizens engage with the news.

In February, ENP hosted a two-day workshop with 10 digital news leaders. The group, representing major television, newspaper, radio, and online-only newsrooms, discussed a wide range of topics including how they connect with their audiences in a digital age.

In addition, ENP conducted an analysis of 155 newspaper and television news websites in the United States to understand how they use interactive features like social media buttons, comment sections, online polls, etc. The ENP team created a tool that allows newsrooms to embed multiple choice and other types of quizzes on their websites — tools that keep people on news sites longer while encouraging them to learn more. Meanwhile, ENP’s “Respect” button was adopted by The Texas Tribune for its new op-ed website, TribTalk.

In partnership with Solutions Journalism Network, ENP also researched how audiences react to stories that offer solutions to problems. Results showed that readers of solutions journalism felt more informed, engaged, and optimistic than non-solutions readers.

ENP’s research and innovative tools were featured by journalism organizations including the Nieman Journalism Lab, PBS, and the Newspaper Association of America, and supported by grants from the Democracy Fund Hewlett Foundation, Google, and the Rita Allen Foundation.

From Witherspoon Research Award winner Kristin Kelly: Since the 2004 presidential election, young voters have voted for the Democratic candidate at much higher proportions than older citizens. My goal was to better understand the changing behaviors of young adults by examining factors affecting vote choice including party, issue, and candidate factors. I compared the relative weight of these factors in the vote choice of 18- to 29-year-olds and citizens over 30 for multiple presidential election years to determine how political context and the issue environment affect the voting behavior of America's youth.

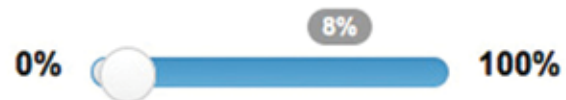
From Witherspoon Research Award winner Katherine Haenschen: The widespread adoption of interactive digital media presents new opportunities to encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process. I conducted a series of experiments using Facebook and email to determine if these media can be used to increase voter turnout. To date, I have been able to show an increase in participation using Facebook status updates, Facebook advertisements, and mass email messages.

From Project Vote Smart: Project Vote Smart continues to make a vital contribution by identifying and summarizing key bills from across the nation. This past year, 62 interns from 10 universities participated in the program. They have summarized more than 1,000 bills that are available on the Project Vote Smart website.



Top: Witherspoon awardee Kristin Kelly
Graphic below: Quiz tool developed by ENP to engage online news readers

What percentage of U.S. residents express their opinions about political or community issues on the Internet?



Built by the [Engaging News Project](#)



Connor Pfeiffer

2014 Campaign Bootcamp Alumnus, “2014 Spirit of Bootcamp” award winner, founder and former state chairman of the High School Republicans of Texas

“Campaign Bootcamp was such an important steppingstone for my career. I left with tons of new friendships and a stronger understanding of how campaigns are run.”



Senator Florence Shapiro connects with Dallas *Speak Up! Speak Out!* participants

Outreach

In the Institute's ongoing commitment to improving civic life, our faculty and staff have worked to educate and train engaged and effective citizens, especially the young. Our goals this year were to grow program participation, strengthen existing partnerships, cultivate new ones, and build an alumni network.

Growing Participation Across the State

New Politics Forum Statewide Watch Parties. The New Politics Forum (NPF) continues to connect emerging young leaders to civic life. This year NPF presented an exciting series of conferences that improved practical skills, expanded professional networks, and inspired the next generation to stay informed as citizens. Events included Campaign Bootcamp, the 2014 Post-Election Debriefing, and the Hatton W. Sumners Careers in Politics Conference, which this year featured "A Spotlight on Campaigns." Institute staff worked with faculty at universities around the state to set up watch parties and crowdsource video questions from students.

Growth of *Speak Up! Speak Out!* In 2014, SUSO saw its largest growth ever in a single year. Our innovative hands-on civic education program for secondary students engaged 965 students this year and 10 new schools.

Public Workshops and Conversations. The Institute offered more than a dozen citizenship trainings and workshops for Texans across the state. The audiences ranged from nonprofit leaders to young adults and public administrators to secondary teachers. Events included Executive Communication Training; Why Bother? City Government 101; Understanding the Federal Government Teacher Workshop; the ImagineOne Austin Information Series; Public Engagement Trainings; and the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) Peer Education workshop.

Strengthening and Cultivating Partnerships

Texas Tribune Festival, Student Experience. For the second year, the Institute partnered with the Texas Tribune to support a pre-festival networking event and the #TTFstudents Lounge. Students from across the state were invited to take advantage of valuable networking opportunities and meet-and-greets with speakers, sponsors, and Tribune staff.

Teacher training with Humanities Texas. In February, the Institute partnered with Humanities Texas to hold a workshop for middle and high school civics and government teachers. Workshop presentations on the U.S. Constitution and federal branches were offered by Charles Flanagan (National Archives and Records Administration, Center for Legislative Archives), Richard A. Baker (United States Senate Historical Office), and several others.

Online Election Reminders and Registration for Students with TurboVote. In Texas, only 16% of 18- to 29-year-olds participated in the 2010 midterm elections. To improve that turnout in 2014, UT Votes piloted a service called TurboVote, which offers students an online, digital platform that provides access to voter registration, absentee ballots, and electronic reminders about all upcoming elections.

Celebration of National Voter Registration Day. UT Votes and several Texas Votes chapters also participated in National Voter Registration Day, a single day of coordinated field, technology, and media efforts that created pervasive awareness of voter registration opportunities. Campus chapters registered voters, and our UT chapter distributed hundreds of voter guides with nonpartisan election-related content.

New documentary vignettes added to the American Trustees collection. The Institute is excited to have worked with the Department of Communication at the University of Cincinnati to expand the American Trustees Project, a collection of short documentaries that highlight ordinary citizens making a difference in their communities. Each of the Ohio Trustees is also the focus of a corresponding civics lesson for middle or high school students.



New Politics Forum networking event

Building an Alumni Network

Reconnecting with Institute alums. New to our communication efforts this year, the Institute has been reconnecting with past program participants and featuring them in e-newsletters and on our website. They include Casey Floren, two-time Project Vote Smart intern; Angela Lee, former Witherspoon award winner who has applied her research findings to a project with the Dallas Morning News; and middle school teacher Rebekah Gomez, former Campaign Bootcamper and Humanities Texas workshop participant.

Connecting alumni with additional professional development and networking opportunities. This year the New Politics Forum created a robust LinkedIn group with more than 170 members, internship opportunities with past speakers, and scholarships to the Texas Tribune Festival for students who served as program ambassadors.



Courtney Arnold

AmeriCorps VISTA, Program Assistant for Strategic Growth

“I’m excited to bring my experience as a City Year, San Antonio Corps member to *Speak Up! Speak Out!* and our educational outreach efforts. Getting young people involved in civic life is pivotal, and I’m glad to be a part of it.”

Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life Advisory Council

Ms. Arcilia Acosta
Mr. James Adams
Mr. James Aldrete
The Hon. Ernest Angelo, Jr.
The Hon. Ben Barnes
The Hon. Chris Bell
The Hon. Henry Bonilla
Mr. Jay Brown *
Mr. Kevin Burnette
Ms. Christy Carpenter
Mr. Snapper Carr
Mrs. Jo Anne Christian
Mrs. Aimee Boone Cunningham
Ms. Denise Davis
Mr. Ted Delisi
Ms. Suzanne Erickson
Mr. Alan Feld
Ms. Shirley Green
Mr. Jeremy Halbreich
Mrs. Nancy Halbreich
Mr. Mark Harkrider
Ms. Susan Hays
Mr. Russell Keene
Mr. Rusty Kelley
The Hon. Cyndi Krier
The Hon. James "Pete" Laney
Mr. Greg Levenson
Mrs. Shana Harnisch Levenson

Mr. Dickson Louie
Ms. Molly Beth Malcolm
Mr. Bob Mann
Mr. Cappy McGarr **
Mrs. Janie McGarr
Ms. Linda Lea Moore
Mr. Kevin Moomaw
Ms. Pasha Moore
Mr. Mike Myers
The Hon. Elliott Naishtat
Mr. Sam Perry
Ms. Hannah Peters
Ms. Karen Reagan
Mr. Hector Rivero
Dr. Stefanie Sanford
Ms. Jenifer Sarver
Mr. Rodney Schlosser
Mr. Paul Serff
The Hon. Florence Shapiro
Mr. George Shipley
Mr. Allan Shivers, Jr. **
Mr. Brian Shivers
Mr. Robert Spellings
Mrs. Sue Strauss
Ms. Eleanor Waddell *
The Hon. Ralph Wayne

* Co-Chair
** Former Co-Chair



The Strauss Legacy

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life is named for Annette Greenfield Strauss, former Dallas mayor, community leader, and philanthropist. Mrs. Strauss was an extraordinary woman whose accomplishments and commitments were legion. By the time she became Dallas' first woman mayor, Mrs. Strauss had spent 40 years as a volunteer, community activist, and city council member. As mayor, she brought together the city's diverse communities during a time of great change and challenge. A fervent fundraiser, she raised millions of dollars for education, the homeless, health care, and the arts. It is our honor to further her legacy.

Get Involved

In this time of low voter turnout and apathy, with Texas ranking near the bottom in every measure of civic health, the work of the Institute has never been more important. Your support is critical to our success. Our outreach and education programs depend on private donations and grants for funding. Every dollar you donate helps build communities of engaged, informed, voting citizens. Make a gift today. Attend an event. Join our social media community. Be part of the solution. Visit www.annettestrauss.org to find out how.



2504 A Whitis Avenue, Stop R2000
Austin, Texas 78712-1538

T 512-471-1959
F 512-471-1927

www.annettestrauss.org

 @astraussinst