

# AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE

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**2025**

*Annual Report*

RECONNECTING AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Building stronger, more connected communities through  
civil discourse, engagement, and education.

[americanpublicsquare.org](https://americanpublicsquare.org)

## **AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE**

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Founded on the belief that democracy works best when citizens  
*gather, listen, question, and learn*  
from one another.



“I like to believe that in these very contentious times, APS is an example of how issues can be addressed from all sides *without hostility*. It is important not to give up on this great experiment called America.”

-ALLAN KATZ, APS FOUNDER AND BOARD CHAIRMAN

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## The year 2025

unfolded against a backdrop of extraordinary political tension in the United States.

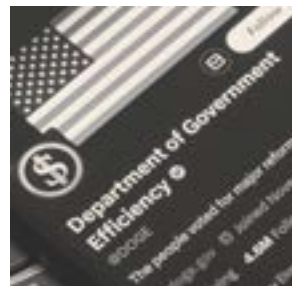
Tariffs. Immigration enforcement. Major shifts in healthcare funding. Complex foreign policy relationships.



Many Americans experienced these events as deeply personal and polarizing moments. Differences of opinion often turned into distrust.



Ongoing tension about the role of the media. A record-long government shutdown. Tragic political violence.



Confidence in the strength of American Democracy felt increasingly fragile, and public discourse often unfolded through debate and vitriol rather than a shared desire to find common ground.

## American Public Square exists for *precisely these moments.*

American Public Square (APS) creates spaces where people with different viewpoints come together with curiosity rather than contempt.



APS programs are designed to help challenge assumptions, deepen understanding, and remind participants that engaging civilly with one another is a key first step toward rebuilding trust.



These efforts may not eliminate polarization overnight. But they do remind us that meaningful dialogue is possible, even in the most challenging political environments.

When Americans feel pulled further apart, APS remains committed to bringing people together to rediscover the civic spirit that strengthens our communities and sustains our democracy.



# About

## AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE



American Public Square builds stronger, more connected communities through civil *discourse, engagement, and education.*

We champion the ideals of a civil society where citizens can engage respectfully, collaborate on shared challenges, and pursue their aspirations with purpose.

## OUR STORY



APS Founder and Board Chairman, Allan Katz, speaks with his wife, Nancy Cohn, and program panelist, Ebony Reed.

American Public Square traces its roots to Tallahassee, Florida where a proposed coal plant once divided a community. Determined to prevent the issue from fracturing his hometown, then-City Commissioner Allan Katz, alongside co-founder Liz Joyner, launched The Village Square—an organization dedicated to fact-based, civil dialogue on complex public issues.

Years later, after serving as U.S. Ambassador to Portugal, Katz brought the concept to Kansas City, where he joined the University of Missouri–Kansas City as a Distinguished Professor. With support from then-UMKC Chancellor Leo Morton and civic leaders including Mary Bloch and Peggy Dunn, American Public Square launched its first program in October 2014.

## OUR WORK

American Public Square works to educate, connect, and empower our community through:

### PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Featuring expert panelists who unpack the complex social, political, and economic challenges shaping our nation.

### CIVICS EDUCATION

Empowering adults and students with the skills to navigate today's fast-changing information landscape, think critically, and be active, informed citizens.

### COMMUNITY EVENTS

Building meaningful connections, fostering local relationships, and inspiring civic engagement.

### A DIVERSE MEMBER COMMUNITY

Rooted in a shared commitment to the common good, Members learn from one another, challenge assumptions, and grow together.

## OUR VALUES

### *Civility*

We believe being civil to each other is paramount to our shared American identity.

### *Facts*

We believe facts are foundational to collaboration and we are committed to protecting the integrity of fact-based dialogue.

### *Perspective*

We value diverse and divergent perspectives, believing that solutions are created out of the deeper understanding of each others viewpoints.

### *Action*

We believe in the individual and collective value of facing our nation's biggest challenges.

### *Honesty*

We value honesty, even when it's uncomfortable.



# 2025 Reflections

by Claire Bishop  
Executive Director & CEO  
American Public Square



At American Public Square, we believe that choosing to engage across difference is a responsibility and a necessity. A commitment to facts, civility, and a genuine desire to understand one another is the foundation of a functioning democracy.

If 2025 reminded us of anything, it is that democracy requires connection. This year brought no shortage of strain. Political division deepened and, for many, public trust continued to erode. Nevertheless, APS hosted 17 programs and welcomed more than 5,400 registrants into conversations that asked participants to think more deeply, listen more carefully, and stay in the room to hear perspectives they agreed with, disagreed with, and hadn't heard before.

We also saw meaningful growth in how and where the work of democracy happens. From launching *We the Readers* with Rainy Day Books to expanding partnerships with organizations like the Aspen Institute and the National Humanities Center, APS reached new audiences and built new pathways for engagement. Our selection as a Community Host for the Weaver Awards reflects a broader recognition that rebuilding trust is not just a local challenge, but a national one.

One of the moments I will carry with me is our first international trip to Portugal. It was an incredible opportunity to deepen relationships with many Members and get to know a beautiful country while engaging with Ambassadors, Mayors, and community leaders.

In Kansas City, I remain especially encouraged by our Civics Education Initiative. Watching nearly 100 local high school students take ownership of complex issues, lead conversations, and challenge one another with thoughtfulness and respect offers a clear answer to a question many are asking: are we preparing the next generation for civic thriving?

None of this work happens on its own. It exists because of a community that believes this effort is worth sustaining. Our donors, members, partners, and participants make it possible to not just host programs, but to create environments where people are willing to take the risk of engaging with one another over particularly polarizing topics.

Each of us has a choice in moments of disagreement, whether politically, personally, or professionally. We can respond with anger and deepen the divide, or we can choose to engage with discipline, curiosity, and respect. One path pulls us further apart. The other leads to a better citizenry.

At APS, we believe Americans are capable of that choice. Thank you for being part of this work.

*Claire Bishop*

## 2025 FAST FACTS

**5,400+** PROGRAM REGISTRANTS

Cocktails & Politics with David Hogg brought the highest number of registrants at 470 people.

**17** TOTAL PROGRAMS

### NEW EVENT SERIES WE THE READERS

Read, reflect, and wrestle with ideas that shape civic life; a partnership with Rainy Day Books.

**ORGANIZATIONAL WIN**  
APS SELECTED AS A  
COMMUNITY HOST ORGANIZATION  
FOR THE ASPEN INSTITUTE'S  
WEAVER AWARDS

**PROGRAM MILESTONE**  
**1<sup>ST</sup>** APS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM IN PORTUGAL

**RECORD-BREAKING**  
**\$530,000+**  
RAISED AT EVENING AT THE SQUARE

**TOTAL REVENUE**

**\$1,119,943**

**TOTAL EXPENSES**

**\$801,586**

42 donors contributed \$5,000 or more to support civil discourse in 2025.

## *Our Approach*

### THE APS CIVILITY TOOLKIT

In a time when public conversations can quickly become polarized, American Public Square believes respectful dialogue must be intentional.

That's why every APS program is guided by our Civility Toolkit, a set of principles and practices designed to create space for thoughtful, informed discussion.

Rather than avoiding complex or controversial issues, APS invites them into the conversation. The Civility Toolkit helps ensure those discussions remain constructive, grounded in facts, and guided by a spirit of curiosity rather than confrontation.

Through tools like fact sheets, curated audience questions, and structured engagement strategies, the Civility Toolkit equips speakers and participants alike to listen more closely, ask better questions, and engage more meaningfully.

For APS, it represents something larger: a practical model for how communities can come together—even when differences run deep.

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#### **MODERATED DISCUSSIONS**

APS events are moderated by an objective facilitator who ensures each panelist is given due time to represent their position. Questions are tough, but fair and allow free flow of conversation.



#### **NO APPLAUSE**

No applause is allowed during a program except at the beginning and end. This ensures everyone can hear the conversation and helps encourage neutrality during the discussion.



#### **CIVILITY BELLS**

Civility Bells are made available for the audience to ring when panelists wade into false, overly-dramatic or hyper-emotional territory. When a bell rings, the speaker must stop talking.



#### **FACT SHEETS**

Fact sheets are developed and distributed for each Signature Program. Content is reviewed by the panelists and moderator to ensure the discussion begins from a "common well" of information.



#### **FACT-CHECKERS**

APS Programs feature real-time Fact Checkers to confirm the validity of comments made during the program. Audience members are encouraged to request specific fact checks throughout the discussion.



#### **ROVING REPORTERS**

Roving Reporters, often members of the local media, engage with the audience to gather and curate questions, identifying themes to ensure frequent questions are presented to panelists and answered for the audience.



#### **SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?**

Panelists make closing statements in the form of answers to these questions. This allows them to restate their position on the topic at hand in a way that is actionable for the audience.

# 2025 *Milestones*

MOMENTS MOVING APS FORWARD

## APS Selected as Community Host for the Aspen Institute's Weaver Awards

Following a multi-month effort across 2025, American Public Square was selected as one of 25 Community Host organizations nationwide for the Aspen Institute's Weaver Awards.



The program recognizes and supports “weavers”—everyday neighbors who strengthen relationships, build trust, and foster belonging within their communities.

Through this four-year partnership, APS will:

- Identify and elevate local weavers across the Kansas City region.
- Distribute more than 20 microgrants each year to individuals and small nonprofits working to strengthen community connections.
- Convene gatherings that help participants learn the practices of what it means to be a “weaver.”
- Join a national network of organizations working to rebuild trust and strengthen the social fabric of communities across the United States.



## Expanded Partnerships and National Engagement

In 2025, American Public Square engaged in a strategic expansion of its partnerships and national presence. APS created the new role of Director of Brand and Partnerships, filled by **Ryan Bernsten**, who transitioned from his role on the APS Board to lead the effort. The position was designed to strengthen the APS brand, cultivate new audiences, and serve as an ambassador for the organization as it builds and deepens partnerships that advance its mission.



This intentional focus quickly broadened APS' engagement with national and regional partners, including the **Listen First Coalition**, a nationwide network of organizations working to bridge divides.

APS also partnered with the **National Humanities Center**, which selected Kansas City as a featured city in its Cities Project, a national initiative that highlights cultural, civic, and intellectual life in American communities. In collaboration with the National Humanities Center and the National WWI Museum and Memorial, APS hosted *In Conversation: How to Disagree Agreeably* featuring Dr. Cornel West, Robert P. George, and journalist Jane Ferguson.



Closer to home, APS launched a new partnership with **Rainy Day Books**, one of Kansas City's most respected independent bookstores and a longtime hub for the region's literary community. The collaboration began with a discussion of “Fight: Inside the Wildest Battle for the White House” and helped lay the foundation for a new monthly book club, *We the Readers*, designed to encourage civil conversation around current events.





## APS Hosts First International Civic Dialogue Trip

In the fall of 2025, American Public Square hosted its first international travel experience, bringing members of the APS community to Portugal for a 12-day civic and cultural exchange led by APS founder and former U.S. Ambassador to Portugal, Allan Katz.

Interest in the trip had been growing for years, inspired in part by Ambassador Katz's deep relationships and firsthand experience serving in Portugal. Customized for APS participants, the trip blended cultural exploration with thoughtful civic dialogue, extending APS' mission of civil discourse beyond the United States.

Participants traveled through Lisbon, Porto, the Douro Valley, Évora, and several historic towns, engaging with local leaders, historians, and community members while exploring the cultural and political forces shaping Portuguese society. More than a travel experience, the program created opportunities for meaningful conversation about democracy, culture, and global perspectives on public life.

**“Traveling to Portugal with APS was the *experience of a lifetime.***

**It was everything I love about international travel: the opportunity to broaden my perspective and take in incredible experiences and views throughout an expertly curated trip, while building relationships and community with a phenomenal and fun group of people.”**

-APS PORTUGAL TRIP PARTICIPANT



## APS Welcomes New Board Leadership

APS believes that a diverse, thoughtful, and actively engaged Board is essential to guiding the organization's work and ensuring that its programs reflect the communities it serves.

In 2025, American Public Square welcomed five new members to its Board of Directors. Each brings unique experience and perspective to APS, as well as valuable insight from across the civic, business, and nonprofit sectors.



**AZZIE AMANI-TALESHI**

SVP, Brand and Engagement Strategy Director, Pishkesh Market



**ESTHER GEORGE**

Former President & CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City



**LARRY JACOB**

Writer, Strategist, Advisor. Local civic leader.



**ALANA MULLER**

CEO, Coffee Lunch Coffee & Business Consultant



**REGINA KORT**

Community Volunteer

### CONTINUING A LEGACY OF SERVICE

During the year, Regina Kort also joined the APS Board of Directors, graciously stepping into the role her husband, Bill Kort, held prior to his passing in early 2025.

A longtime supporter of American Public Square and a frequent participant in its programs, Regina brings both deep familiarity with APS' mission and a personal commitment to strengthening the civic life of our community.

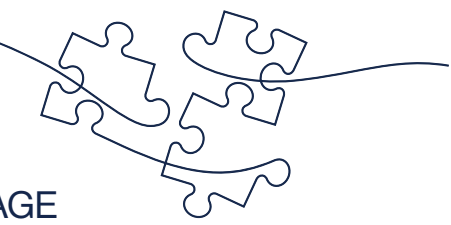
# APS

## Signature Programs

### WHERE CIVIL DISCOURSE TAKES THE STAGE

Signature Programs bring together expert panelists with diverse, and often divergent, perspectives to explore some of the most complex and polarizing issues shaping American life.

Every Signature Program is guided by the APS Civility Toolkit.



In 2025, Signature Programs examined free speech, civic polarization, and the evolving national debate surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Signature Programs *Speaking Freely: Examining Free Speech in Modern America*, *Truth in Turmoil: Free Speech in a Divided Nation*, and *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Controversy* brought nationally recognized voices to the APS stage.

Among them were noted civil liberties scholar **Nadine Strossen** and **Jonathan Turley**, renowned author and legal scholar, whose participation highlighted the caliber of thinkers and practitioners who contribute to APS conversations.

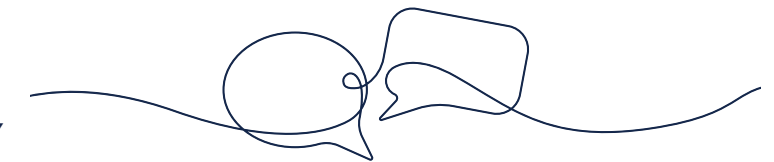
The impact of these programs often extends beyond the event itself. Following the *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Controversy* discussion, panelist **Pete Mundo** invited fellow panelist **Monica Harris** to continue their conversation on his regional radio program bringing the dialogue sparked at an APS program to a much broader audience.



# APS

## Cocktails & Politics

### WHERE LEADERS AND COMMUNITY MEET IN CONVERSATION



*Cocktails & Politics* events offer a more intimate opportunity for conversation with leaders directly involved in the political and policy debates shaping the country.

The format underscores the belief that meaningful civic dialogue often begins not just on stage, but in the conversations that happen before and after the program.

In 2025, APS welcomed **David Hogg**, former co-vice chair of the DNC and Leaders We Deserve PAC founder, for a *Cocktails & Politics* conversation with Kansas City civic leader **Jason Kander**. Together, they discussed the current state of American politics and the future of the Democratic Party, with a particular focus on the perspectives of younger generations entering political life.

The program drew 470 in-person participants, making it the most highly attended event of the year.

# APS

## Community-Building Programs

### POWERING CONNECTION, CONVERSATION AND CULTURE

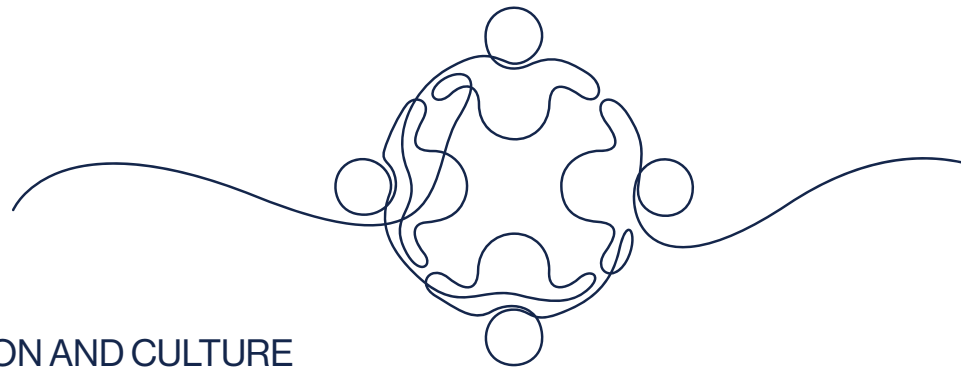
In addition to its core program series, American Public Square hosts a range of community-building events designed to bring people together through shared cultural and civic experiences. Through these programs, APS focuses on building intentional community connections, recognizing its importance at a time when many Americans feel increasingly disconnected from one another.

One of the year's most widely attended events in 2025 was *In Conversation: How to Disagree Agreeably*, presented in partnership with the National Humanities Center and the National WWI Museum and Memorial. Featuring **Dr. Cornel West**, **Robert P. George**, and journalist **Jane Ferguson**, the event explored how people with deep philosophical differences can engage one another with respect and intellectual honesty. More than 1,600 people registered for the livestream, underscoring the strong public appetite for thoughtful dialogue across differences.



**“Another *inspiring* and *thought-provoking* event is in the books... congratulations to the American Public Square team for bringing another engaging and meaningful civic dialogue to life.”**

-EBONY REED, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, THE MARSHALL PROJECT



APS Community-Building Programs included film screenings such as “Elephant in the Room,” a political romantic comedy, “Beyond the Bridge,” which complemented APS’ student programming on homelessness, and “Punch 9 for Harold Washington.”

The community film screening of *Punch 9 for Harold Washington* was hosted in recognition of Black History Month and featured local civic leaders, Kansas City Mayor **Quinton Lucas**, Former Mayor **Sly James**, Former Mayor Pro-Tem **Alvin Brooks** and Jackson County Legislature Chairman **DaRon McGee** who reflected on race, politics, and leadership.

APS also hosted a conversation with **Jonathan Allen** and **Amie Parnes**, co-authors of “Fight: Inside the Wildest Battle for the White House,” offering attendees an in-depth look at one of the most closely watched presidential campaigns in modern history.



### LOCAL NEWS AT A CROSSROADS

APS partnered with the KC Media Collective to host *Local News at a Crossroads*, a conversation exploring the challenges and future of local journalism.

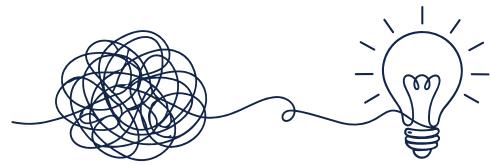
This partnership reflects APS’s commitment to supporting a broader information and media environment that enables healthy public dialogue.



# APS

## Discussion Groups

### THE VOICES THAT SHAPE THE CONVERSATION



Discussion Groups place the voices of participants at the center of the conversation, inviting community members to bring their own experiences, questions, and perspectives into dialogue with authors, local experts, and civic leaders.

The format reflects APS' belief that event attendees themselves bring a wealth of insight into the topics explored at APS programs, and their input plays a vital role in shaping APS programming.



2025 Discussion Groups explored timely and complex issues through highly interactive conversations. *Beyond the Punchline* examined the intersection of comedy, censorship, and politics and *More than a Uniform: Hear from Those Serving our Community* addressed the polarization surrounding first responders, public safety, and community trust.

APS also hosted a two-part *Community Conversation: Shaping the Future of Local Programming* series, designed specifically to listen and gather feedback from participants about the topics and formats they would like to see in future APS events.

Hosted in a variety of community venues including Discourse Brewing, Vine Street Brewery, First Amendment Brew Haha Comedy Club, these events also illustrate APS' desire to engage people all around the community for conversation in new and engaging spaces.

## Quotable

### DISCUSSION GROUP COMMENTS

“There is always something you can *learn* from the opposing side.”

“We all have strengths we can use to better *understand* ourselves and others.”

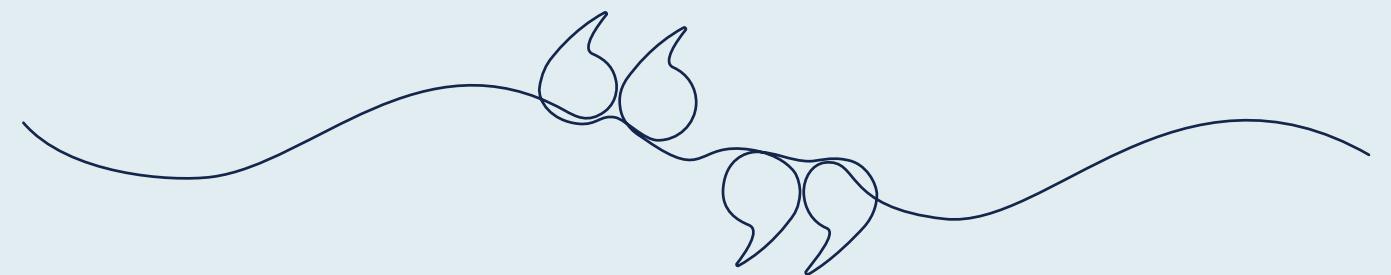
“When you talk to people face to face, you are more *civil* and *empathetic* and less likely to spread misinformation like on social media.”

“Being an active and informed citizen is an intentional investment toward *collaborative* growth to pass the torch forward.”

“The more we know, the more we can *advocate*.”

“When you know the people around you, you think about and *engage* with them differently.”

“Try to *listen* instead of speak!”



## With all our thanks...

In 2025, these panelists, moderators, journalists, fact checkers, and partners helped bring APS conversations to life by sharing expertise, asking difficult questions, and modeling respectful dialogue for our community. We are profoundly grateful to them.

### PANELISTS:

Jonathan Allen, author  
Anna Bailey, senior policy analyst – Center on Budget and Policy Priorities  
Ashton Botts, attorney, actor and director  
Stephanie Boyer, CEO – reStart  
Alvin Brooks, former Mayor Pro-Tem of Kansas City, Missouri  
Stephen Buckley, editor, journalist and professor at Duke University  
Meg Cunningham, rural health reporter – The Beacon  
Renée DiResta, associate research specialist – McCourt School of Public Policy  
Philip Arthur Dixon, local relationship expert  
Laura Clark Fey, privacy law specialist  
Robert P. George, professor and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions  
Dr. Jeanine Hastings, professor of Education – William Jewell College  
Monica Harris, executive director – Fair for All  
Daniel Heizman, captain – Kansas City Fire Department  
Josh Henges, homelessness prevention coordinator – City of Kansas City, Missouri  
David Hogg, co-founder – March for Our Lives  
Sly James, former Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri  
Dr. Anna Kaaiakamanu, assistant professor of Nursing – William Jewell College  
Steve Kramer, owner – First Amendment Brew Haha  
Robert Kuehl, chief of police – Raytown, Missouri  
Quinton Lucas, Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri  
Alan Long, Chief – Overland Park Fire Department  
Dr. Anthony Maglione, professor of Music – William Jewell College  
Dr. Tammy Mikinski, local relationship expert  
Ashley Muddiman, associate chair – KU Department of Communication Studies  
Jeff Mulligan, station manager – KSHB

Pete Mundo, talk show host – KCMO Talk Radio  
Amie Parnes, author  
Graham Parsons, visiting professor – Vassar College  
Lisa Rodriguez, director of journalism – KCUR  
Ryan Sorrell, founder and executive director – The Kansas City Defender  
Nadine Strossen, free speech expert and author  
Chris Sununu, former governor of New Hampshire  
Elliot Threatt, veteran comedian and cultural commentator  
Jonathan Turley, author, attorney and legal scholar  
Mary Ann Villarreal, Vice President of Institutional Excellence – American Association of Colleges and Universities  
Kia and Derek Walsh  
Paul Webster, executive director – LA Alliance for Human Rights and visiting fellow – Cicero Institute  
Dr. Cornel West, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair – Union Theological Seminary  
Mará Rose Williams, assistant managing editor – The Kansas City Star

**“Above all, I want to express my *sincere appreciation* for the program participants who show up. They make these challenging conversations possible, and I believe we are all better for their participation.”**

**-ALLAN KATZ, APS FOUNDER AND BOARD CHAIR**

### MODERATORS:

Jane Ferguson, foreign correspondent – PBS NewsHour  
Chris Green, executive editor – The Journal  
Jason Kander, senior advisor – Veterans Community Project  
DaRon McGee, Jackson County Legislature Chairman  
Cal Perkins, student – William Jewell College  
Kynala Phillips, editor – Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Neighborhood Dispatch  
Ebony Reed, chief strategy officer – The Marshall Project  
Reshad Staitieh, programs director – The Conflict Resolution Center  
Margaret Talev, director – Syracuse University Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship  
Yvette Walker, opinion editor – The Kansas City Star

### ROVING REPORTERS:

Laura Bauer, investigative reporter – The Kansas City Star  
Steve Corbin, emeritus professor – University of Northern Iowa  
Ivan Calderon, student – William Jewell College  
Georgia Kerrigan, intern – KCUR's Up to Date  
Toriano Porter, opinion writer – The Kansas City Star  
Ebony Reed, chief strategy officer – The Marshall Project  
Lora Vogt, VP of Education and Interpretation – National WWI Museum and Memorial  
Mará Rose Williams, assistant managing editor – The Kansas City Star

### FACT CHECKERS:

Sophie Green, law student – UMKC School of Law  
Allen Rostron, associate dean and the Edward A. Smith - Missouri Chair in Law, the Constitution, and Society – UMKC School of Law  
Velimir Sefanovic, law student – UMKC School of Law  
Danielle Wagner, law student – UMKC School of Law  
Leah Wankum, deputy editor – The Johnson County Post

### BY THE NUMBERS:

**35+** EXPERT PANELISTS  
**8** MODERATORS  
**4** FACT CHECKERS  
**11** PARTNERS  
**5** PROGRAM SPONSORS

### PROGRAM PARTNERS:

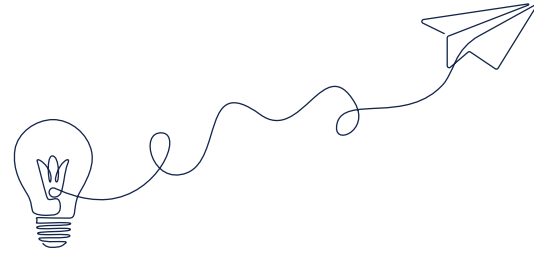
Kemet Coleman, founder – Vine Street Brewing  
Glenwood Fine Arts Theatre  
Adam Hawley, founder – Lift KC  
Jackson County Legislature  
Johnson County Library  
Kansas City Media Collective  
LINC KC  
National Humanities Center  
The National WWI Museum and Memorial  
Zach Perez, KCUR journalist  
A. Phillip Randolph Institute

### PROGRAM SPONSORS:

Hall Family Foundation  
Health Forward Foundation  
McDonnell Foundation  
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art  
Sue Seidler & Lewis Nerman  
Park 39 by The Brain Group  
Jack and Glenna Wylie Foundation

# APS

## *Civics Education*



At a time when political polarization, civic disengagement, and a growing reluctance to engage across differences are reshaping public life, APS works to build civic education skills across generations.

### CIVIC LEARNING FOR ADULTS

In 2025, APS partnered with institutions including Johnson County Community College and Metropolitan Community College to deliver interactive workshops for students, faculty, and administrators focused on navigating difficult conversations with respect and clarity.

APS also served as a featured presenter for the Thrive cohort, delivering a keynote and leading sessions on media literacy and civil dialogue alongside local journalists. These workshops equip participants with practical skills—separating fact from assumption, listening actively, and finding common ground—that can be applied in classrooms, workplaces, and everyday life.



Community participants join APS facilitators in an interactive session which prompts them to think critically about the challenges communities face and their own personal response to how they engage in solving problems constructively.

## WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN *engaged citizen* TODAY?

### CIVIC LEARNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

#### The APS Civics Education Initiative

##### ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION

9 Schools  
91 Students

The APS Civics Education Initiative (CEI) equips high school students with the tools and experiences needed to navigate the modern-day political, civic, and information landscape.

##### ADDRESS MODERN-DAY CIVICS EDUCATION GAPS

Political polarization. Media literacy. Intellectual curiosity. Constructive communication.

Through a custom-developed, year-long program, students of diverse backgrounds come together to build skills in civil dialogue, media literacy, research, and critical thinking while learning how to navigate polarization and engage in a democracy constructively.

##### BRIDGE CLASSROOMS AND COMMUNITY

Unprecedented access to civic and thought leaders.

A key differentiator of the CEI program is its experiential, hands-on approach. Students benefit from APS' vast network of journalists, policymakers, and civic leaders, engaging with them in conversation and collaboration.

##### DELIVER EXPERIENTIAL, HANDS-ON LEARNING

An APS Signature Program produced by the students, for the community.

The pinnacle event of the CEI program is a student-produced APS Signature Program that is open to the public. Students deliberate over, research, and choose a complex topic; evaluate research and select panelists; and facilitate the live program using the APS Civility Toolkit.

##### DRIVE MEANINGFUL CHANGE

Prepare students for active citizenship and 21st century democracy.

Students report increased confidence engaging across differences, stronger analytical and communication skills, and a deeper understanding of their role in a democracy.

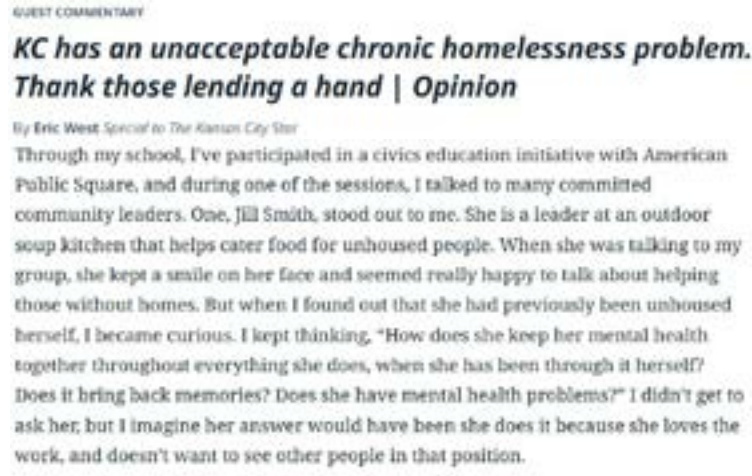


# Homelessness: A Neglected Epidemic

## An APS Student-Produced Signature Program

In spring 2025, CEI students produced a public program exploring the complex issue of homelessness. After researching the topic throughout the year, students selected panelists representing diverse perspectives, helped design and execute the event, and played active roles during the program, implementing APS' Civility Toolkit to guide a respectful, fact-based dialogue.

This conversation about homelessness did not end when the event concluded. In the weeks that followed, the discussion continued in the local media where multiple articles (including an opinion piece written by a CEI student) representing different perspectives on homelessness were published in response to the program. These articles showed how a student-led APS conversation helped catalyze broader civic dialogue in the community.



**2024-25 Participating Schools:** Liberty High School, Belton High School, Guadalupe Centers High School, Ewing Marion Kauffman School, Olathe North High School, Shawnee Mission North High School, University Academy, St. Teresa's Academy.



### DEEPENING THE WORK OF CIVICS EDUCATION

In 2025, American Public Square created a new Civics Education Fellow position with support from the Amb. Allan J. Katz Fellowship Fund, established in 2024. The fellowship was designed to support growing interest in civics education work, and to deepen research into best practices that strengthen civic learning and dialogue.

APS welcomed **Carolyn Franano** as its first fellow. A recent graduate of the American University of Paris, Carolyn brings a global perspective and a passion for community engagement as she helps advance APS' expanding civics education programs.

2025

# Evening at the Square

*featuring*

**CHRIS SUNUNU**

FORMER GOVERNOR OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

American Public Square hosted its annual Evening at the Square fundraising event on December 8, 2025 at the iconic Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The event proved to be a record-breaking success, with more than 475 participants and over \$530,000 raised to support APS programming.

### EVENT CO-CHAIRS

**David & Cynthia Westbrook** and **Frank Lipsman & Janet Mark**

The conversation with Gov. Sununu was moderated by APS National Steering Committee Member, **Margaret Talev**, Axios Senior Contributor and founding Director of Syracuse University's new Institute for Democracy, Journalism and Citizenship.



### FOUNDERS'S CIVILITY AWARD

**Susan Seidler Nerman**

The Founder's Civility Award honors the accomplishments of a remarkable leader who has demonstrated a commitment to bringing together Kansas City's diverse community.



### WILLIAM KORT VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

**Bill Kort**

This year's inaugural award was presented to longtime APS friend and champion, Bill Kort, in memoriam. APS seeks to honor Bill's legacy through this permanent award that will be presented each year at Evening at the Square, an event that was important and personal to him.

*Bill Kort was one of American Public Square's earliest champions and a dedicated member of its Board of Directors. His enthusiasm for thoughtful dialogue and civic engagement helped shape the organization's growth and impact. We remain deeply grateful for his leadership and friendship.*



# APS *Member Community*

GROUNDING IN CURIOSITY, RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE,  
AND THE PURSUIT OF BETTER UNDERSTANDING



APS Members are part of a community that believes in the value of fact-based, civil discourse on the issues shaping American life.

Membership support makes it possible for APS to continue offering free, accessible programs that expose participants to new ideas, informed insights, and viewpoints that often challenge assumptions and deepen understanding.

APS Members also enjoy special opportunities to engage more deeply with the organization's work, including Members-Only events, priority registration for APS programs, and other exclusive experiences throughout the year.

## 584

TOTAL  
MEMBERS

## 196

NEW MEMBERS  
IN 2025

### CORPORATE CHAMPIONS

APS WELCOMED

### ENTERPRISE BANK AND CREATIVE PLANNING

TO THE CORPORATE MEMBER COMMUNITY

**“I joined APS after attending programs as a non-Member and I consistently appreciated both the topics and the quality of discourse. I’m always seeking experiences that offer something meaningful to think about—and APS delivers that. Joining APS has *deepened my connection to this community*, and now I find myself wondering what took me so long.”**

-MARTHA ATLAS, APS MEMBER

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*(continued)*

# APS *Member Community*

## 2025 MEMBERS (continued)

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**“APS brings people together from diverse backgrounds to explore complex topics, learn from one another, and deepen understanding by exposing participants to *new ideas, unfamiliar issues, and diverse perspectives*—strengthening the tone and quality of public discourse.”**

**—KAREN HUGHEY, APS MEMBER**

# APS

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*Together*

### IN CLOSING

The work of American Public Square is made possible by a remarkable community. We are deeply grateful to the funders, members, partners, panelists, participants, and staff who make this work possible as well as the thousands of individuals who show up each year ready to listen, learn, and engage.

As we look to 2026, APS is preparing for an exciting next chapter. New national partnerships, including our work with the Aspen Institute's Weaver Awards, will expand APS' impact beyond Kansas City. Later in the year, we will convene a multi-day conference, hosted in Kansas City in partnership with the national Listen First Coalition. The conference will bring together voices from across the country to explore how communities can strengthen civil discourse in an increasingly polarized world.

The year ahead also marks the 250th anniversary of the United States, an important moment to reflect on the ideals that shaped our nation and the ongoing work required to sustain them. Throughout the year, APS will host conversations that examine the enduring questions of American Democracy, from immigration and the economy to free speech and the evolving meaning of the Declaration of Independence.

We are grateful to be on this journey with you, and optimistic about what we can build together in the years ahead.



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