

---

# CECD PROJECT PROPOSAL

---

Prepared for: Center for Engagement and Community Development

Prepared by: Thomas S. Vontz, Professor and Director, Center for Social Studies  
Education and Arthur DeGroat, Director, Office of Military Affairs

Date: April 1, 2013

---



*Three Words that Changed the World. . .*

## A NATION OF IDEAS: INTERPRETING AMERICA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

### INTRODUCTION

After approval in the Kansas House (95-25), HB 2280 is under consideration by the Senate Education Committee. Most political observers believe it will become law. The bill, also known as "Freedom Week," will require all Kansas school districts to provide "appropriate" instruction during the *week* of September 17 to explore the "meaning and importance of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution, in their historical contexts."

As a land-grant university, Kansas State University shares an important responsibility—with teachers, citizens, school officials, and other leaders—to create meaningful, interesting, and engaging curricula that bring this mandate to life. Kansas State University's Center for Social Studies Education and Office of Military Affairs in collaboration with Inland Sea Productions and its partners the National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian Institution *propose to design, field-test, and distribute an engaging, content-rich, and enduring Freedom Week curricula*, A Nation of Ideas.

The proposal connects the considerable resources (both artistic and intellectual) of Inland Sea Production's, *We the People: A Giant Screen Film* ([We the People](#)),<sup>1</sup> the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution with current scholarship on the evolving and enduring importance of America's Founding documents—the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

*A Nation of Ideas* seeks to help students and citizens answer questions that have engaged thoughtful men and women since the Founding: 1) How have political ideas shaped American history, culture, and political life? 2) How have Americans shaped their political ideas?<sup>3</sup> The education materials will utilize a conceptual<sup>4</sup> and visual approach<sup>5</sup> to deepen understanding of political ideas (See Appendix A: Visual Organizer of CECD Proposal)

### PUBLIC NEED

Even if HB 2280 does not become law, there is a public need for clear, concise, and engaging material to help students and adults learn more about America's foundational political ideas. Civic education in Kansas and the United States—both within and outside of school—suffers a variety of problems. Civics is increasingly crowded out of a K-12 curriculum that emphasizes reading and mathematics; funding for civic education is at historic lows; partisanship and ideology run rampant on the web and clouds the judgment of moderation and common sense; the state of civic knowledge among K-12 students is "dismal;"<sup>6</sup> the level of student knowledge is often "*superficial or detached from life*;"<sup>7</sup> and data suggest a widening civic opportunity gap.<sup>8</sup>

A popular theme among many political commentators is the polarization of American politics.<sup>9</sup> The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) has documented that many American students do not possess even a basic understanding of political ideas (e.g., constitutionalism, human rights, citizenship, representative democracy, and civil society) or the participatory and intellectual skills that bring those ideas to life. This proposal will engage important stakeholders to develop curricula that will help Kansans and Americans frame, debate, and ultimately decide important public issues using a framework of ideas that emanate from the United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

### ORGANIZATIONAL ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS (see letters of support)

**Kansas State University's Center for Social Studies Education and Office of Military Affairs**<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Thomas S. Vontz, Professor and Director, Center for Social Studies Education, KSU<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Art DeGroat, Director, Office of Military Affairs, KSU<sup>12</sup>

**Inland Sea Productions in association with the National Archives and Records Administration and Smithsonian Institution, Kansas City**<sup>13</sup>

Ms. Aimee Larabee, President, Inland Sea Productions<sup>14</sup>

## **Russell Sage College's Council on Citizenship Education<sup>15</sup>**

Dr. Stephen Schechter, Professor and Director (Professor Schechter also serves as a graduate faculty associate at KSU)<sup>16</sup>

### **INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT PARTNERS**

Dr. John Patrick, Professor Emeritus, Indiana University (Professor Patrick also serves as a graduate faculty associate at KSU)<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Ken Thomas, Teacher, Blue Valley Northwest High School

Mr. Chris Kemp, Teacher, Wichita Heights High School

Ms. Blanche Wulfekoetter, Teacher, Jefferson West High School

Dr. Lisa Biteau, Elementary Gifted and Talented Teacher, Manhattan Public Schools

Mr. Clayton Lucas, Teacher, Atchison County Community Schools

### **PROJECT OUTCOME**

To collaborate with engagement partners to produce, field-test, and distribute an engaging, content-rich, and standards-based Freedom Week curriculum for elementary, secondary, and adult learners.

### **SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE**

The collaborative partners of this project bring with them considerable resources:

- Free and unrestricted access to \$1.7 million worth of audio, video, and animations from Inland Sea Production's *We the People*.<sup>18</sup>
- Free and unrestricted access to resources on *We the People's* companion website.
- Commitment from national civic education experts and leading Kansas teachers to participate in the project.
- Financial and organizational commitment from the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Museum to provide free showings of *We the People* beginning in September 2013.
- Financial and organizational commitment from Kansas State University's College of Education.
- An ideological framework developed at Kansas State University that defines America's foundational political ideas (see Appendix B: Framework of American Governance).

The engagement team will create immersive learning modules for three groups: elementary students, secondary students, and adult learners. Representatives from each of these groups will serve on the project team. The learning modules will be designed so that learners can use parts as stand-alone lessons or complete packages that would roughly equal five days of instruction. All learning modules will utilize:

- a visual approach to concept development;
- resources of *We the People* and its companion website;
- concept development (i.e., use the Framework of American Governance);

The initial project team meeting will produce a list of principles and guidelines that will guide the development of three extended learning modules (the group will meet virtually using K-State Online's Wimba feature). Three teams of teachers and civic education experts (i.e., elementary, secondary, and adult) will prepare draft learning modules for review and critique by the entire project team. Completed prototype learning modules will be ready to field test by September 17, 2013, which is national Constitution Day, the national premiere of *We the People*, and part of the inaugural Kansas Freedom Week. The learning modules will be field tested with elementary, secondary, and adult learners (including veterans groups and recent immigrants). Free showings of *We the People* will be provided at Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Museum.

This CECD Engagement Grant opportunity poses a unique incentive to create a new direction for the enduring efforts towards enhancing civics literacy through education, the arts, and public engagement. This new direction creates a targeted opportunity to impact the Kansas citizenry through the collaboration and engagement of history and social studies

teachers. In addition, this engagement incentive would also allow the project team to link this specific effort to add value to a Kansas statewide initiative and event, Freedom Week. Simply stated, these objectives would not be pursued without the enabling impact of this CECD engagement grant.

### **Timeline**

April – May (2013)	Develop learning module guidelines
June – July (2013)	Complete draft modules (elementary, secondary, and adult)
Sept – Dec (2013)	Field test learning modules (teacher and student survey)
Jan – May (2014)	Finalize learning modules
Jan – May (2014)	Seek funding for summer workshop
June-Aug (2014)	Summer workshop for elementary, secondary, and adult educators
September (2014)	Publish finalized learning modules for use on Constitution Day, Freedom Week, and throughout the year for anyone wishing to learn more about Founding ideas.

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

The *Nation of Ideas* project aims to serve Kansans and the American public for an extended period of time. To do so will require mid- and long-term funding mechanisms to enable gallery and educational resources updating and expansion that will go beyond NEH grant funding. This project has three viable fiscal mechanisms to accomplish this.

First, the *We the People* educational film ticket revenue donation program to our 501.c.3 educational fund established at Kansas State University. This fund expects to receive \$25,000.00 per year from contractually obligated funds that institutional theater managers provide back to the *We the People* fund. Since the *We the People* film is an “evergreen” film and its content does not lose relevancy over time—this revenue is expected to be realized for three to six years after release.

Second, a scholarship program from private and institutional gifts will be managed by the Kansas State University Foundation (501.c.3) for the purpose of providing grants to student, civic and special needs (under-served) groups to enable access *We the People* film and the *Nation of Ideas* educational materials at major regional institutional theaters.

Finally, we will actively pursue additional humanities and educational grants needed to sustain this *Nation of Ideas* program. Additionally, we will establish partnerships with national academic centers of civics education to sustain the project..

### **ACCOMPLISHMENT BENCHMARKS**

- Guidelines for learning module development
- Draft learning modules
- Revised Draft learning modules
- Attendance at *We the People* by 180 elementary, secondary, and adult learners
- Teacher and student survey to be completed after participation in learning module.
- Collection, analysis, and interpretation of data
- Finally revised learning modules for elementary, secondary, and adult learners are made available and free to the public online.

### **COSTSHARING**

This project will share costs between three entities (1.) CECD Engagement Incentive Grant to develop the learning modules; (2.) Existing privately donated funds in the Kansas State University College of Education’s (managed by the KSU Foundation) *We the People/Nation of Ideas* Project fund for use in evaluating curricula; and (3.) *We the People: A Giant Screen Educational Film* sponsorship funds previously donated by the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation to the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Museum to support educational and public engagement of the film and learning materials.