



Fellows for Democracy and Public Service Initiative



Fellows Challenge: Solutions for Advancing American Democracy and Public Service—Request for Proposals

We invite you to join the Fellows Challenge by proposing innovative solutions for advancing democracy and public service. The Bridge Alliance and the National Academy of Public Administration are offering six stipends of \$10,000 each—one per sector—for essays that generate actionable insights and executable plans to advance democracy and public service. The sectors are:

Public Service Leadership and Civil Service Reform

Examine the systems, rules, and practices that govern the federal workforce, identifying opportunities to modernize for greater agility and impact. This includes strategies to recruit, develop, and sustain the next generation of public leaders equipped to navigate complexity and deliver results.

Voting and Elections

Trust in our electoral processes is foundational to democratic legitimacy.

Analyze various components of voting and election administration—from registration to ballot security—offering actionable recommendations to ensure impartiality, transparency, and trust, all of which are foundational to democratic legitimacy. This sector can include ethics standards for senior election officials and safeguards against political interference.

Bridging and Dialogue

Nonpartisan reforms that ensure robust competition and fair representation are vital to a functional government accountable to the people.

Elevate efforts that foster mutual understanding, respectful dialogue, and shared purpose across ideological, cultural, and generational lines. Constructive engagement is not just possible—it is essential to democratic renewal.

Electoral Systems Reform

Nonpartisan reforms that ensure robust competition and fair representation are vital to a functional government accountable to the people.

Fellows will examine innovations such as ranked-choice voting, gerrymandering reform, campaign finance transparency, and independent voter rights—co-creating the policies and movements that reshape how power is held and shared.

Trustworthy Information leads to Trust in Government

Democracy depends not only on what we know, but on how we know it.

Focus on restoring a shared civic reality through rigorous measurement and reliable reporting—empowering citizens to interpret trends, evaluate outcomes, and advocate for evidence-based change.

Pluralism

America's strength lies in its diversity—and in our capacity to navigate it with empathy and imagination.

Explore how pluralism is practiced, challenged, and reimaged across communities and institutions, amplifying stories of coexistence, conflict, and cultural evolution to shape a republic where every voice matters and every story counts.

The essays are intended to be published in *The Fulcrum*, the Bridge Alliance's online magazine, and on the Academy's website.

Awardee Expectations and Deliverables

Awards are designed as both a research and collaboration opportunity, combining independent thought leadership with engagement and shared learning. Over the course of the program, awardees will contribute written work, engage in public dialogue, and participate in various events organized by the Academy and Bridge Alliance.

- **Period of Performance:** 12 months
- **Stipend:** \$10,000 per participant; one per core sector
- **Written Products** to be promoted across Bridge Alliance and Academy media platforms:
 - Two long-form essays (1,400+ words each), or
 - Four short-form essays (700+ words each), or
 - Another creative approach with at least two publishable deliverables.

All work products done by the awardee in conjunction with this project will be the intellectual property of the Academy and the Bridge Alliance, however, awardees

may adapt their work for personal or professional publication at the conclusion of this challenge, provided attribution is given to the Bridge Alliance and the National Academy of Public Administration.

- **Engagement:**

- Participate in monthly cohort meetings with Bridge Alliance and Academy staff.
- Develop and host one 90-minute public roundtable (within the first 7 months) to engage stakeholders and advance discussion on the chosen topic; Academy staff will provide logistical support.
- Collaborate with Bridge Alliance and Academy teams on storytelling, publicity, and visibility efforts.

- **Eligibility:**

- Open to both Academy Fellows and non-Fellow experts in core sectors.
- Multiple proposals may be submitted, but each must focus on one core sector.
- Co-authorship is permitted; however, the stipend will be awarded to a single individual responsible for completion of the stipend agreement. The proposal should clearly identify the primary author (i.e. project director) as well as co-authors.

How to Apply

1. Identify the sector you plan to address.
2. Review the submission [Google form](#) in advance to determine how to organize your proposal to align with the submission fields. Note that if you log into a Google account, you can save your work. Otherwise, you must complete the form in one session.
3. In addition to entering identifying information, you will answer the following questions:
 - *Describe your idea, approach, and intended impact in the selected sector. In your approach, include which format you're selecting- 2 essays, 4 essays, or alternative approach- and how it will be achieved. If the latter, please explain. (200 words max).*
 - *How will you collaborate with a diversity of stakeholders to generate actionable insights? You may include the roundtable as a portion of this*

response, but it is not sufficient by itself to meet the evaluation criteria. (200 words max).

- *How will your research and dialogue translate into tangible reforms and executable action plans? (200 words max).*
- *Provide a brief timeline for your proposed work and deliverables. (200 words max).*

4. Timeline

- **Proposal Submission Deadline:** All proposals must be submitted by 5:00 PM, EST, December 5, 2025 through the [Google form](#). Early proposals are encouraged and late submissions will not be considered.
- **Notification of Awardees:** Selected applicants will be notified by January 12, 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Completeness of responses.
- Relevance and significance to the selected sector.
- Clarity and feasibility of the proposed approach.
- Potential for impact: development of actionable insights through collaboration with diverse stakeholders, tangible reforms, and executable action plans.
- Creativity and rigor in approach.

Contacts

For questions about this solicitation, contact Mark Hertko at mhertko@napawash.org or Nadia Faour at Nfaour@napawash.org.

Frequently asked questions and answers will be posted at <https://napawash.org/bridge-alliance> for the benefit of all applicants.