

Design for Democracy

# Building Community Power

Impact report 2018



*Design for Democracy is supported in part by  
the National Endowment for the Arts*



the professional  
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# Executive summary



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# Building Community Power

## Project mission

**Designers advocate for civic engagement by building communication strategies that lead to greater participation, registration and awareness of the issues at stake.**

# Initiative overview

## Building Community Power

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### Project setup

AIGA designers used design as a tool to raise awareness, engage citizens and increase voters communications, education, registration, and access to information.

Designers were mobilized to address key civic engagement challenges:

1. in pair with nonprofit advocacy groups whose voters education programs were in need
2. by designing for or participating in social media campaigns

### Project partners

- Nonprofit VOTE
- AIGA chapters and members
- Local civic anchors under the umbrella of Nonprofit VOTE,
- including:
  - [PAFCO](#) (Protecting Arizona's Family Coalition) in collaboration with AIGA Arizona
  - [CPACS](#) (Center for Pan Asian Community Services) in collaboration with AIGA Atlanta
  - [Community Votes](#) in collaboration with AIGA New York
  - [ACRS](#) (Asian Counseling and Referral Service) in collaboration with AIGA Seattle

*“We aimed to innovate at the intersection of boots-on-the ground collaboration, local leadership, clarifying and sharing information, and human-centered connection.”*

*— Design for Democracy committee co-chair Rich Hollant*

## Key players

- **Committee co-chairs:** Rich Hollant (National board) and Frances Yllana (AIGA Dallas FW, TX)
- **Project leads:** Laetitia Wolff, Director of strategic initiatives, project curator with her assistant Angelica Dios; Heather Strelecki, Director of archives
- **Nonprofit VOTE partner:** Brian Miller, Executive director, James Hill, Director of communications, and Caitlin Donnelly, Education director
- **Committee members:** Karen Kurycki, Mark Randall, Panthea Lee, Drew Davies; Dana Chisnell, Marcia Lausen, Ana Monroe, and David Jon Walker
- Designer Andrew Fair, AIGA San Francisco, designed the brand guidelines and and info packet overview.

## Chapter creative leads

- **AIGA Atlanta:** Lennie Gray Mowris, Founder, Lenspeace, AIGA Design for Good Director; Suehyla El-Attar, Playwright; Kate Morales; Illustrator
- **AIGA Arizona:** Marissa Groom, Design for Good Director; Kathy Morgan, Finance/Treasurer; Julie Ray, Co-VP of Tucson; Angela Larkin, Design for Democracy Committee
- **AIGA New York:** David Frisco, VP, Nikki Chung, Principal, Office-Future
- **AIGA Seattle:** Peggy Liao, Designer/Strategist, Steve Tyree, Oliver Amyakar and Bonnie Tran, AIGA Seattle Volunteers
- All Aiga.org social media gallery contributors

## Project context

AIGA makes designers better citizens. Design for Democracy is one of AIGA's key strategic initiatives, with the mission to apply design tools and thinking to increase civic participation by making interactions between the U.S. government and its citizens more understandable, efficient, and trustworthy. The premise: good design makes your choices clear.

Post-2016 elections, more than ever designers sought opportunities to leverage their skills to support the democratic process—whether individually or collectively—to create meaningful social impact and increase civic engagement. The upcoming midterm elections were the perfect context to build greater community participation.



*Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. We are the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.*

To implement a 2018 NEA Creativity Connects Award AIGA partnered with [Nonprofit VOTE](#), the largest provider of nonpartisan information for nonprofits.

## Project background

Started in 2000, "Get Out The Vote," is part of the larger Design For Democracy program founded by AIGA in 1998. AIGA recognizes that good design makes choices clear. Design for Democracy works to enhance the entire voting process—from registering to the polling place experience—and the U.S. Elections Assistance Commission has endorsed AIGA's recommendations for redesigning election ballots to optimize voter participation.

Every four years during presidential election cycles Get out the Vote, the nonpartisan campaign of AIGA Design for Democracy, encourages its members to apply their design expertise to motivate the American public to register and vote.

### Project budget

- \$70,000 NEA grant
- \$ 80,000 in in-kind donations, including Nasdaq and Adobe

## Design challenges

**Challenge 1:** Get designers to be civically engaged "boots on the ground," provide them with a collaborative platform to activate their community in partnership with local nonprofits.

**Challenge 2:** Focus on engaging the student population, naturalized refugees and immigrants, all first time voters in 2018.

# Design for Democracy history

## 1998

Richard Grefé, AIGA executive director (1995–2015) and 2016 AIGA Medalist, founded the strategic initiative Design for Democracy. Its goal is to apply design tools and thinking to increase civic participation by making interactions between the U.S. government and its citizens more understandable, efficient, and trustworthy

Although the Democrats are listed second in the column on the left, they are the third hole on the ballot.

(REPUBLICAN)	3	●
GEORGE W. BUSH - PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY - VICE PRESIDENT		
(DEMOCRATIC)	5	●
AL GORE - PRESIDENT JOE LIEBERMAN - VICE PRESIDENT		
(LIBERTARIAN)	7	●
HARRY BROWNE - PRESIDENT ART OLIVIER - VICE PRESIDENT		
(GREEN)	9	●
RALPH NADER - PRESIDENT WINDONA LA DUKE - VICE PRESIDENT		
(SOCIALIST WORKERS)	11	●
JAMES HARRIS - PRESIDENT MARGARET TROWLE - VICE PRESIDENT		
(NATURAL LAW)	13	●
JOHN HAGELIN - PRESIDENT NAT GOLDHADER - VICE PRESIDENT		

# Ballot and election design program

## 2000

Following the Florida ballot design fiasco, AIGA reaches out to Federal Election Commission in Washington ([www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)) to begin discussions on election design

## 2001

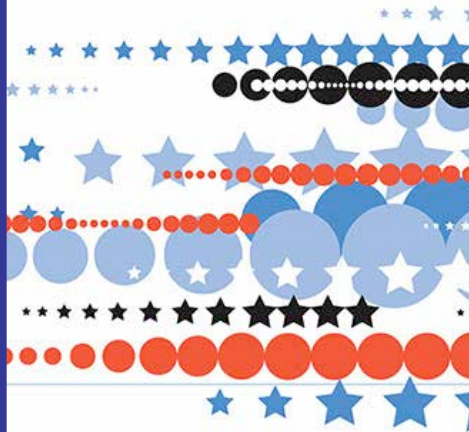
A group of design professionals, educators, and students begin a dedicated collaborative effort to extend the ballot design initiative into the complete voting experience. Marcia Lausen, AIGA Chicago chapter president and faculty at University of Illinois' School of Art and Design, worked with election officials in Cook County, Illinois, and then with the state of Oregon. As a group, they developed prototypes designed to improve election administration material, voting equipment, and voter education and outreach

## 2005

AIGA Design for Democracy partnered with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), to generate national ballot design principles informed by recent election design experience, as well as technical guidelines

## Design for Democracy: Ballot + Election Design

Marcia Lausen



## 2005–07

Election Assistance Commission (EAC) partners with Design for Democracy to research, design, test, and generate national best practice guidelines and samples for ballots and voter information materials

## 2007

AIGA's Election Design Fellowship program funded by the state of Oregon via Help Americans Vote Act (HAVA, 2002). Program conceived to foster the partnerships necessary to produce well-designed election materials

## 2007

*Design for Democracy: Ballot and Election Design*, published by University of Chicago Press/AIGA



## 2008

AIGA partnered with *The New York Times* on citizen journalism, helping to document the polling place experience

## 2009

AIGA expanded the Election Design Fellowship program to emerging designers in Washington state

## 2007–2010

AIGA Design for Democracy enters into an intense period of advocacy, promotion and dissemination encouraging government officials to use these new election design guidelines

Field Guides  
To Ensuring Voter Intent

Vol. 03

## Testing ballots for usability

## 2012

Additional advocacy to help inform the public and government to pay attention to ballot design in this presidential year, and particularly responding to the recent New York State ballot change

## 2016

Ballot design on display at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum as part of their *By the people: Designing a better America* exhibition

# Get out the vote campaigns

## 2000

AIGA Get Out the Vote campaign is being launched and has been held every four years since then

## 2004

AIGA Get Out the Vote campaign

## 2008

AIGA Get Out the Vote yields 319 posters and also includes PSA videos

## 2012

AIGA Get Out the Vote, 212 posters submitted for the campaign and exhibition at the AIGA gallery

## 2016

AIGA Get Out the Vote gathered 727 posters from members, partnered with The League of Women Voters, engaged 30% of its chapter network into activating the campaign and reached millions of viewers through a special partnership with Latino media platforms; a selection of posters are part of a Google Art Project, AIGA Get Out the Vote 2016. This online exhibition complemented live shows nationwide, organized in conjunction with the Republican National Convention and Democratic National Convention (Cleveland and Philadelphia, July 2016), at the AIGA Design Conference (Las Vegas, October 2016), and at AIGA chapters in other cities

## 2017-18

In anticipation of the mid-term election, AIGA with a National Endowment for the Arts grant, planned a new program to provide better voters communications



**“In November of 2000, a confusing layout in the closely contested presidential election brought ballot design into the national consciousness. It also provided a rare opportunity for those of us in design leadership to step forward and demonstrate how design can improve election materials and processes.”**

— Marcia Lausen, AIGA Chicago, Director of the UIC School of Design and founder of the Chicago office of Studio/lab, author of the book *Design for Democracy* (2007)



# 2017-2018 Project Timeline

## January-May 2017

General planning / review of previous campaigns and program design with new partner, Nonprofit VOTE

## Summer 2017

Nonprofit VOTE partnership established, along with definition of scope of work, framework and contract

## October 30, 2017

Public announcement of Design for Democracy: Building Community Power, with 2 prongs: matching civic anchors with AIGA chapters and a social media campaign.

## December 8, 2017

AIGA officially launches Building Community Power, introducing 10 chapters to the project intention, structure and process



## 2018

### January - April 2018

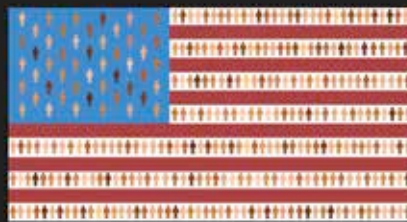
Chapters established relation with nonprofit civic anchors and developed scope of work and engagement strategy

### March 15, 2018

Gallery opened on aiga.org, inviting submissions for accessible, smart, inclusive social media cards/ messages encouraging civic engagement

### April-May 2018

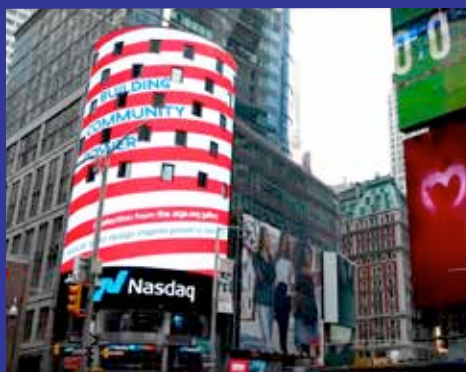
Adobe 1324 launched their partnership with AIGA to rally youth in submitting to our gallery and go vote for the first time in November



make congress look like US  
register to vote today

### May 15, 2018

Times Square pop-up public installation on NASDAQ screens opened, announcement of Adobe winners, and panel discussion, in the context of NYCxDESIGN festival



### July 15-September 15, 2018

Chapters continued to work in their respective states, built opportunities to test solutions in workshops, accelerated participation in various community events

### Late August-September 24, 2018

In support of National Voters Registration Day, AIGA launched a weekly themed campaign, with a call to action for social media messages focused on issues at stake in midterm elections and special emphasis placed on student engagement

### September 25, 2018

Campaign led by Nonprofit VOTE, across the nation, leveraging its civic anchors and private sponsors communication channels

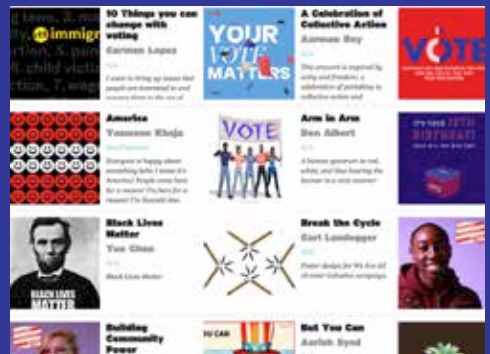


### September 15 - November 6, 2018

Chapters finalized their deliverables with respective partners, some in time right before election day

### November 6, 2018

Gallery closed with [393] social media cards total from AIGA members and nonmembers, a high participation rate building on previous GOTV records



## 2018 Context



**Fact:** Voter turnout in the United States is among the lowest in the developed world. More than 1 in 4 Americans are not registered to vote.



**Fact:** Young people (18–29) make up 45% of the voting eligible population in the U.S. Yet only 21% of young people, voted in 2012.

**Fact:** Asian American and Pacific Islander communities and low income eligible families have some of the lowest election turnout.

**Fact:** 23 million people move across state lines every four years. In those four years, 19 million people turn 18 and another 3 million become naturalized citizens. That means 45 million people must update their registration every four years.

***“People vote because of values they hold and see in others, and because they feel they're part of a larger cause and community.”***

— Brian Miller, Executive director, Nonprofit VOTE

# Deliverables + processes

## Overlapping components

Design for Democracy: Building Community Power delivered the transformative power of design to activists who work to increase voters communications, education, registration, and access.

Designers were mobilized to address key civic engagement challenges:

1. either in pair with nonprofit advocacy groups whose voters education programs were in need
2. and/or by designing for or participating in social media campaigns.

**The project featured these two overlapping components over a year, both aimed to provide clear communications on the why, where, when, and what to vote on.**



### Part 1: Chapters & Nonprofits

The chapter-based curated component paired four active AIGA chapters with Nonprofit VOTE's recommended "civic anchors" partners. These local organizations host traditional voter registration programs but needed to advance their tactics and strategies to reach underrepresented populations—such as low-income citizens in New York's social housing, second generation Asian American/Pacific Islanders youth in Seattle, the next generation of young Latina voters in Arizona, or a patchwork of Asian, Latino, Muslim immigrants and refugees living in Atlanta's Buford Highway area. In targeting first time voters, designers devised engagement toolkits and collaterals that built communities' sense of belonging, demonstrating design's integration in community organizing.



*Voter pledge cards by AIGA NY, to encourage community members to vote locally.*



*Social media collateral from AIGA Arizona's Media Pack*



*Frame from AIGA Atlanta's video campaign, This is You.*

The nonprofit organizations gained a higher understanding of their own constituents' information gaps. The human engagement facilitated by design revealed recurring roadblocks, such as language barriers, apathy, lack of representation, and overall understanding of the electoral system—especially those hailing from non-democratic countries.

**These are the partnership processes and results:**



AIGA New York opted for a two-phase project management, with preliminary art direction to define a clear and tight scope of work with their partner Community Votes, and then recruit a designer, through an invitation only process, who developed the solution. They designed issue-based information cards for Community Votes, produced in English, Spanish, and Chinese. The cards were used to train voter engagement program staff. Three issues (affordable housing, healthy food, public transit) emerged from a dozen workshops held with Henry Street Settlement Houses.



AIGA Arizona assembled a small hands-on team setup from the get go with AZ Design for Good director at its helm; engagement of members happened via social media and Phoenix Design Week. They designed “Change starts with you,” a digital Media Pack for Protecting Arizona’s Family Coalition (PAFCO), that empowers first voters and Millennials to take control over their lives, especially people with disabilities in collaboration with Ability 360.



AIGA Atlanta applied the Path to Impact methodology throughout the project and allowed for the engagement of a diverse population, not only of ACRS multilingual communities but also diverse in terms of creative skills, disciplines, and levels of familiarity with AIGA. They designed a [video campaign](#) for Center for PanAsian Community Services (CPAC) that aimed to celebrate, and motivate greater democratic representation, engagement, and understanding of and among immigrants and refugees.



Social media promotion for AIGA Seattle's Civic Engagement Kit



AIGA Seattle conducted a series of rigorous design thinking exercises applied to identify the need of the AAPI-focused organization, and helped define and select the recommended solution. designed a digital kit for Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) targeting Asian American Pacific Islander youth. The kit contains information on community issues, how to get involved, buttons and stickers to be distributed to their friends, and posters to be hung in their community.

For more details on process and methodology, read chapters individual mini case studies on each chapter's respective websites.



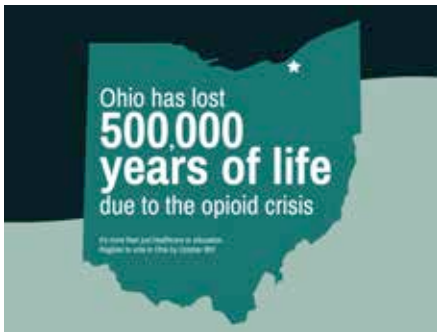
## Part 2: Social media campaign

Kicked off mid-March 2018, the social media asset gallery was opened to AIGA members and non-members who were invited to submit visually impactful, intelligent, non partisan, accessible digital communications, specifically for social media use. Targeting first-time voters, youth and new immigrants, the digital assets ([the gallery](#) contains 393 submissions to date, all free to download) supported Nonprofit VOTE, which, in turn, distributed the content to their partner organizations and civic anchors.



The 2018 campaign gathered social media cards whereas the previous years collected posters

# Open gallery submissions



Ohio's Opioid Crisis by Abigail Pasca



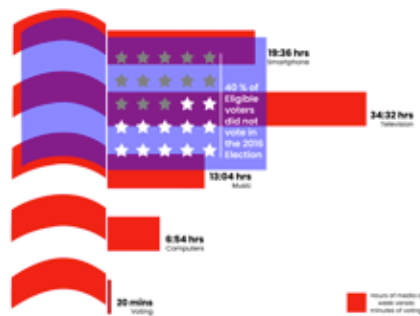
Express Yourself, by Alexia Carcelli



The Sale, by Frank Madison.



AI GA shared submissions as part of multiple themed call-to-actions for designers.



Waste of Time, by Kiana Jones



Uncle Sam Meme, by Caleigh Nemey



The Future is Female, by Naomi Frantz.



Happy 18th, by Richard Ruiz.

## Part 3: Times square showcase



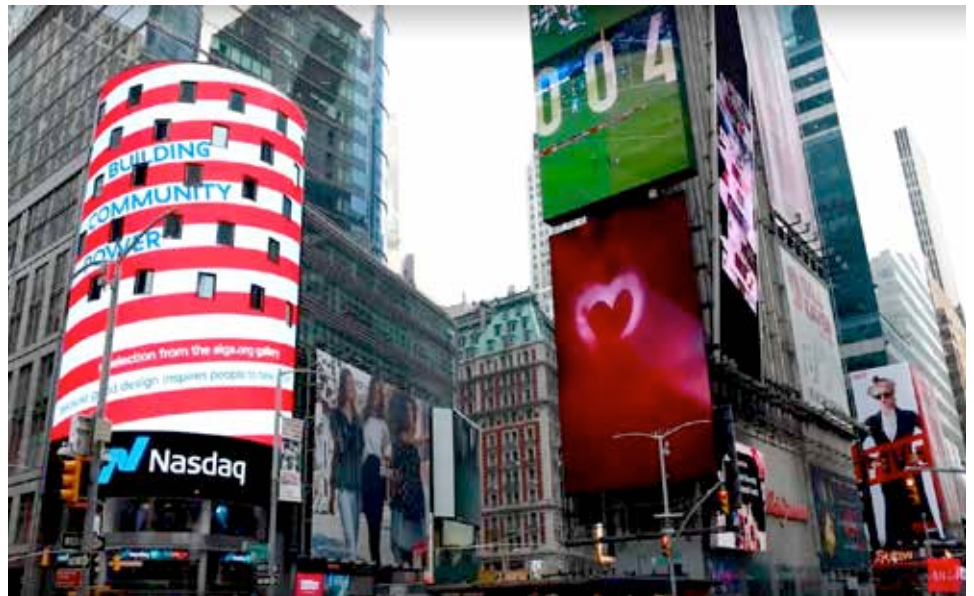
*Community Votes volunteers providing pledge cards on the street.*



*Design for Democracy leadership team, in front of the Times Square Design Pavilion.*



*Following the pop-up exhibition, AIGA New York and their partner Community Votes participated in Design Talks, a series of curated panels during NYCxDESIGN.*



*Popup intallation on NASDAQ's Times Square super size tower, May 15, 2018.*

The open-source gallery of democracy messages became visible via ongoing social media campaigns and public installations. The campaign invited submissions in cycles: first for the May festival NYCxDESIGN later rekindled for back to school week, leading to National Voter Registration Day (Sept. 25, 2018) again throughout October leading up to the midterms.

AIGA members and non-members were invited to yield the vote by building greater awareness of the political issues at stake in these midterm elections. Common issues explored in the submissions included women's rights, racial equity, gun violence, immigration and first time voter's civic duty.

# Implementation challenges

## Lessons learned.

### Pros and cons of the matchmaking model

In a statement made by AIGA Design for Democracy committee chair Rich Hollant, Building Community Power aimed to innovate “at the intersection of boots-on-the ground collaboration, local leadership, clarifying and sharing information, and human-centered connection.”

*“Building Community Power provided the capacity to bring local stakeholders together with local designers to identify key issues that matter most to the community and encouraged and enabled them to commit to voting accordingly.”*

– Peggy Liao, Seattle  
Chapter lead

In four communities design teams worked to yield the vote by building deeper civic engagement, fostering a sense of accountability, and serving advocacy organizations. By pairing AIGA chapters to Nonprofit VOTE’s distributed network of civic anchors, we were able to engage with program directors aware of communication gaps. Designers improved the tools traditionally used to connect with future voters and strengthen their media—flyers, palm cards, cheat sheets, toolkits. However designers were often faced with a lack of capacity and consistency from nonprofit partners, unable to fully implement the solutions proposed.

Designers reinforced their role as communications specialists more than they fundamentally questioned the tactics used to engage citizens on the ground. All teams conducted hands-on workshops with constituents and gained direct access to underrepresented populations.





*Design for Democracy Poster 1, by Alysa Adkins*



*Vote for Change, by Nick Kline*



*Only 53 Years, by Tysen Stenzel*

Although our partner Nonprofit VOTE introduced us to civic anchors, we depended on their goodwill often without a full-on commitment. As a result, we started with loose expectations, shifting calendars and poor role definitions; many civic anchors didn't seem committed nor eager to collaborate with our chapters.

Nonprofit VOTE recommended that our local chapters onboard those nonprofits, but the anchors had limited capacity and understanding of design. Although AIGA offered to provide introductory design training, Nonprofit VOTE pushed back arguing that civic anchors would empirically discover design via their local partnership. In retrospect, we could have scheduled a mandatory training session at the launch of each project.

## Scaling down and managing expectations

Originally, the goal was to recruit 10 AIGA chapters and connect them with 10 Nonprofit VOTE civic anchors. Although Nonprofit VOTE introduced us to 10 civic anchors, the value of the relationship did not extend beyond the initial introduction.

Because the partnership was less formal with the civic anchors, it was difficult to manage expectations. With shifting calendars and poor role definitions, many civic anchors were not prepared to make a commitment to collaborate with AIGA chapters. Nonprofit VOTE recommended that our local chapters onboard those nonprofits, but the anchors had limited capacity and understanding of design.

Due to a lack of commitment, capacity, and time partnerships with civic anchors in other chapters, including: MassVote in Boston, Nonprofit Montgomery outside of DC, Project Home in Philadelphia, and Democracy NC in Raleigh were not successful, despite encouraging preliminary conversations.

## The relevance of social media

Throughout the campaign, we encouraged designers to address the "WHY," i.e. the reasons to go vote. Addressing issues at stake and illuminating the ins and outs of the political system—while remaining non partisan—was a challenge. Although we provided submission instructions, nonpartisan guidelines, a detailed creative brief, and researched data for inspiration, many straightforward (red+blue) nonpartisan "GO VOTE" messages were received.

# Positive outcome

## Measuring impact

### Students first time voters

**Because our intent had always been to encourage first time voters, we targeted students in a couple ways.**



*Adobe 1324 Competition winner, submitted by The New School student River Wittke*

1. In partnership with [Adobe Project 1324](#) we managed to expand our submission and overall visibility for the project, in the early part of the Spring. Adobe reached their hundreds of thousands of followers, aged 13-24, via a parallel competition organized to support ours on Times Square.

One finalist, River Wittke, was honored to attend the May 15 event for her piece “Make Congress Look Like US” a graphic aimed to connect to young voters by highlighting Congress’s composition of mostly white men.

The winner was selected by a jury composed of Harry Allen for Design Pavilion, James Hill of Nonprofit VOTE, Ally Kostick for NASDAQ, Laura Peres, Pratt student graduate, Tim Tompkins for Times Square Alliance, Frances Yllana, co-chair of the Design for Democracy committee, and famous design advocates Milton Glaser and Luba Lukova, who helped select content. In the span of a couple of weeks Adobe received 27 projects, 4,779 views, and 55 appreciations.

You can read more about the DEC's participation by visiting: <https://educators.aiga.org/building-community-power-curriculum> and download the DEC curriculum template [here](#)

2. Secondly, we also reached out to our education members via the AIGA Design Educators Community ([DEC](#)) inviting them to participate during the fall semester. The AIGA DEC shared curriculum templates to encourage faculty to start at the beginning of the academic year.

This yielded enthusiastic support from schools whose instructors designed custom studios around our program. Other schools had picked up on the opportunity to engage their students on civic matters as soon as Spring 2018.

## Continuing a 20-year old tradition

AIGA was able to continue leveraging design for a good cause: Design for Democracy. Expanding the definition and scope of what design can do—not just the layout of the ballot itself—this project demonstrated the strategic significance of design in the way it engages citizens, communicates value, and provides access to information—often taken for granted.

It also amplified the research conducted by [AIGANY's Citizen Design Now!](#) Fueled by the post-2016 drive for change and a heightened consciousness of designers responsibility, the initiative encourages designers to participate in deeper civic roles. With additional funding, the NY chapter was able to merge their Citizen Designer Now! research with their new Community Votes network.

## Expanding design practice

Community designers underestimate how much time and energy is spent on managing multi-sector collaborations. These projects reveal the vast depth and breadth of what design can do to facilitate more efficient, human communications, while building new skills and competences: “I wish we'd operationalize design research into such process,” reflects David Frisco, lead on the Community Vote project. Our postmortem survey shows designers' top takeaway was: impact in their local community and definition of their practice expanded.

If scalability is more of a wish than a reality, modeling is key to the success of this type of endeavor. AIGA Atlanta plans to showcase their CPACS collaboration as a demo case study at the upcoming AIGA Leadership Retreat (August 2019), which Atlanta will be hosting this year. CPAC promised to share the project with its local Community Board, annual board meeting, county, or election officials, and Community Votes promised to post it on their website.

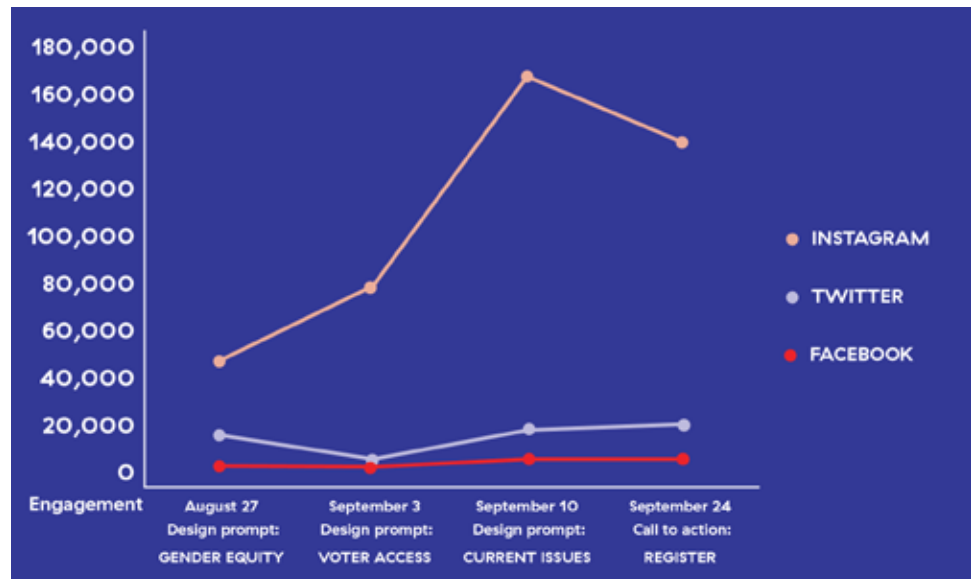
“This project taught me what it means to be an American.”

– Lennie Mowris, Atlanta Chapter lead

“This project gave purpose to our studio in 2018.”

– Nikki Chung, Office-Future

## Res publica on social and on the streets



*Social media engagement per social media channel for the fall prompted many submissions, in anticipation of NVRD.*

Our social media metrics show followers strongly supported our grassroots campaign. Instagram by far was the most successful channel of engagement with reaches up to 80,000 for an issue-based prompt (re: voter suppression and accessibility) in early September. Two of the posts we created were in the top five AIGA posts for reach over the whole year. What's more challenging to measure is the link between a social media engagement and an action in real life. For National Voters Registration Day (September 25) the BITLY link we created to lead to Nonprofit VOTE's Register page only received 26 clicks.

The ultimate impact for this project was the Times Square installation which brought awareness of democratic values in a highly trafficked public space; it broke the media consumption pattern on one of the most visited sites in the world. Shown on a highly-coveted media screen, our video garnered 165,000 impressions in the span of 10 minutes, and 1,155,000 impressions from the marquee screen within a month. Although it's impossible to appreciate the link between a message projected on a public billboard and the act of registering/voting, we believe that using design to communicate to the general public about important civic issues can make a difference.

# Conclusion



We learned that briefing designers to create impactful messages beyond "go vote" was a challenge, and especially to keep a nonpartisan approach. We also learned that working with nonprofits requires education both of designers who tackle social issues and of nonprofit organizations for them to better understand the value of design. It also requires commitment to a process and patience from designers.

We hope that in the future our chapters will be able to engage in partnerships more often, as we know how transformative and meaningful the power of design and civic engagement can be.

Voters turnout in the U.S. this past midterm elections was the highest since 1966.

What did Building Community Power had to do with it? A lot...

Let's get started for 2020.

**Document prepared by  
Laetitia Wolff, December 2018  
with the assistance of Angelica Dios**



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