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National Coalition of Nonprofits and Funders Launch New Award to Celebrate Civic Bravery

The Courage Project launches with initial \$5 million commitment to celebrate everyday acts of civic bravery

Initial slate of 8 recipients includes range of organizations from across the country working to build community

NATIONWIDE - A new coalition of national nonprofits and major charitable foundations is launching The Courage Project, an initiative to honor and celebrate everyday acts of civic bravery. The founding partners of The Courage Project are the **CFLeads, the Freedom Together Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Public Welfare Foundation, The Skillman Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and United Way Worldwide**. Backed by an initial \$5 million commitment, The Courage Project will distribute awards to organizations and honor individuals who are exhibiting acts of courage and compassion in their communities by standing up for what they believe in, helping their neighbors, and building bridges across communities.

The project's inaugural partners are unified by a shared sense of purpose to bolster civic engagement, underscore the importance of community, and uplift the foundational values of our nation through acts of courage that strengthen our democracy and our shared future. From the United Way of South Sarasota County building a legal aid initiative to better serve its community to a sixth-grade teacher who refused to remove a sign in her classroom announcing that "everyone is welcome here," the inaugural recipients are everyday heroes who model courage in their communities.

The Courage Project distributes awards ranging from \$10,000-\$50,000 to organizations and honors individuals for acts that demonstrate exceptional bravery in their communities. For organizational awards, local civic organizations receive recognition for specific actions. For individual recipients, recipients may recommend donations to

values-aligned American nonprofit organizations. By allowing recipients to “pay it forward,” the project gives everyday Americans a chance to support nonprofits that provide vital community services, promote civic engagement, uphold human dignity, and champion the public good.

The first recipients of The Courage Project are:

- Commander William Marks, Jinny Amundson, and Janice Holmes, who joined forces to distribute banned books in Annapolis, MD, in response to the Naval Academy’s removal of more than 300 titles under a federal directive, providing access to students and community members alike.
- Sarah Inama, a sixth-grade teacher from Idaho, who refused to remove a classroom sign that read “everyone is welcome here,” ultimately resigning rather than compromising on her core beliefs.
- Jamie Cook, Jen Gaffney, and Jonna St. Croix, who led a small New York town in support of a local immigrant family detained by ICE, organizing a public rally that helped bring the family home.
- Cotton Blossom Gardens, under the leadership of Janice Lucero, is preserving Indigenous agricultural heritage and educating youth in New Mexico by providing hands-on experience with traditional agricultural practices.
- Women of Welcome, whose leaders traveled to the California-Mexico border to offer support to asylum seekers and to allow other evangelicals the opportunity to better understand border hardships through personal exposure.
- Laundry Love, which partners with local laundromats and volunteers across the country to restore dignity through clean clothes – hosting over 300 locations nationwide supporting low-income families, students, and unhoused individuals by covering the cost of laundry.
- United Way of South Sarasota County is building a legal aid initiative to serve the community’s elderly and A.L.I.C.E. (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) populations -- those who have little to no “access to justice” within the civil legal system.
- Lisa Gardner, President of the Spokane Chapter of the NAACP. When individuals in apparent KKK costumes were captured on security footage in January 2025, this Eastern Washington NAACP chapter responded swiftly by alerting

authorities, requesting increased security for upcoming MLK Day events, and framing the incident as a reminder of ongoing work needed in the community – reinforcing community resilience and safety while honoring a long legacy of local civil rights leadership.

“As we look forward to the 250th anniversary of the country's founding, we celebrate the country's best values: courage, kindness, and community,” **said Deepak Bhargava, president of the Freedom Together Foundation.** “Every day, Americans help each other through crises, build bridges across divides and take risks to defend our freedoms. Democracy is nurtured in communities across this country. Even in the most challenging moments, courage is contagious.”

“The future is not finished, but it is for us to determine every day,” said **Tonya Allen, president of the McKnight Foundation.** “These courageous leaders and organizations show us the path forward and inspire us to act in pursuit of a more perfect union. To them, we express our deepest gratitude for their bold actions to strengthen community and preserve the best of our nation.”

“Everyday acts of courage make our communities strong, connected, and resilient. As individuals, we all are empowered with the ability to be the positive change we want to see in our communities,” said **President and CEO of United Way Worldwide Angela F. Williams.** “We need only take the first step by checking in on a neighbor, volunteering to clean up a local park, or organizing a food drive. Courage can take on many shapes – our voices, our talents, or simply our willingness to show up for others expecting nothing in return. These selfless acts of compassionate courage are powerful reminders of our collective humanity at its best. Through The Courage Project, United Way Worldwide is proud to help honor the organizations and individuals who embody these values, whose everyday bravery keeps us going.”

“We witness acts of courage take place in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods every day—from librarians defending the freedom of expression to community leaders creating spaces where people feel they belong,” said **MacArthur Foundation President John Palfrey.** “The Courage Project is an opportunity to publicly recognize the contributions of everyday individuals who build bridges across communities and make our country stronger.”

Awardees for the initial slate were chosen because they had taken actions that exemplified core American values of courage, kindness, and decency. Alongside the announcement of the inaugural slate, The Courage Project partners are thrilled to announce an open public nomination form on the initiative's website:

thecourageproject.org. The public nomination form ensures that Americans across the country are able to recognize and honor courageous work in their communities.

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