



Director, Rutgers Democracy Lab

Eagleton Institute of Politics

Leadership Profile

Summer 2025



WittKieffer

Executive Summary

Rutgers University, a prestigious Carnegie R1 Research University known for developing best practices and applying theoretical and practical knowledge to real-world issues, seeks an energetic, democracy-minded leader to serve as the inaugural Director of the Rutgers Democracy Lab (RDL).

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey ("Rutgers"), is the eighth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. It is an Association of American Universities (AAU) Carnegie R1 Research University. It is a state-wide institution, with campuses in New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, with more than 8,000 full- and part-time faculty, more than 14,100 full- and part-time staff, and 67,200 students from all fifty states and more than 120 countries.

The Rutgers Democracy Lab was established through a transformative gift received in November 2024. Its mission is to address the challenges and opportunities of contemporary democracy. This inaugural role presents a unique opportunity to transform democratic practices and to uphold democratic principles at a national scale, and with the requisite investment to do so quickly, and well. The RDL Director will report to the Provost of Rutgers–New Brunswick. Housed at the [Eagleton Institute of Politics](#), the RDL Director will work collaboratively with the Eagleton Director and other colleagues within the Institute. Eagleton's long history and core values, including promoting open and respectful exchanges of ideas and perspectives, make it the logical choice for the next phase of Rutgers University and the Donor's shared vision – the establishment of the Rutgers Democracy Lab. The RDL will "create a culture [at Rutgers] in which students from different viewpoints feel they can participate in conversations, and prepare students from all disciplines, whether engineering, business, or the arts, for the value of community engagement and how to be democratic citizens." The inaugural Director will have primary responsibility for building out the organizational and programmatic elements of the RDL, leveraging Eagleton's resources and infrastructure as a springboard for engaging departments, schools, and programs across New Brunswick and throughout the University.

The successful candidate will bring great passion for democratic ideals, along with the energy, entrepreneurial spirit, and work ethic to innovate boldly. They will also have the communication skills to engage with America's youth, inspire broad community participation and additional donor investment, and attract marquee talent to the RDL in all of its activities. While a terminal degree is preferred, the Director will hold, at minimum, a master's degree, or equivalent professional experience, with sufficient leadership and administrative experience to garner the respect of the RDL's various stakeholders. The Director shall hold a faculty position in Eagleton and/or one of the academic departments at Rutgers–New Brunswick. It is envisioned that the successful candidate will hold a faculty position in the professional practice ranks, but the rank and appointment type will be determined by the candidate's academic record.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of the document.

Rutgers Democracy Lab (RDL)

The Rutgers Democracy Lab (RDL), housed at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, was formed in the fall of 2024 with a transformational gift and a singular purpose: to strengthen American democracy. The guiding principle for this work is that democracy is enhanced when people are educated about the structure of the American government and possess the core competencies of democratic engagement, when they are equipped to be skeptical of ideological misinformation and disinformation, and when they are encouraged to seek common ground in discussions with those who hold differing views. The RDL aims to create a civic-minded community both online and on campus, informed by research and analysis on civics, political participation, civility, and campus climate. The Lab strives to transform American political culture – a complicated but essential endeavor.

The RDL aims to provide multi-layered civic learning opportunities, leveraging the whole University through three levels of engagement: in creating deeply immersive, high-impact civic learning opportunities for students, faculty, and staff each year; by elevating, supporting, and deepening existing, hands-on initiatives at Rutgers and the Eagleton Institute; and through creating and expanding University-wide programming.

The RDL's work will be centered around three pillars: (1) Learning how to talk to each other and engage in dialogue across differences; (2) Acquiring the knowledge and skills of civic engagement; and (3) Working collaboratively with students, faculty, practitioners, and community members to solve democracy's most pressing problems. The result of this work will be energized and empowered generations, equipped with the passion and skill to strengthen the principles of American democracy. While housed at Eagleton, and building upon the exceptional work they have conducted in this field, the Lab will ultimately engage all facets and disciplines of the University, from the arts to STEM, in order to benefit from multiple perspectives and to fully equip all who live in the United States for democratic participation.



Role of the inaugural Director, Rutgers Democracy Lab

Reporting to the Rutgers–New Brunswick Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and working in coordination with the Eagleton Institute Director, the inaugural Director of the Rutgers Democracy Lab will enjoy a unique opportunity for innovation with lasting impact, shaping a bold and durable vision, supported by an historic investment, and ultimately help shape the contours of contemporary democracy. The Director will hold, at minimum, a master's degree, or equivalent professional experience, with a terminal degree preferred, and shall hold a faculty position in one of Rutgers' academic departments. It is envisioned that the successful candidate will hold a faculty position in the professional practice ranks, but the rank and appointment type will be determined by the candidate's academic record.

RDL embodies a bold commitment to equipping students with the tools and knowledge to engage with, strengthen, and explore their profound impact on democratic processes.

The inaugural Director will:

- Lead the development of groundbreaking programs connecting students, faculty, and communities as well as drive innovation in democracy education and civic engagement;
- Build partnerships with leading democracy-focused organizations;
- Shape the national conversation about higher education's role in democratic renewal;
- Create a very visible and relevant new center for Rutgers involving its three geographic campuses and four chancellor-led units;
- Shape democracy education at the national level and involve students in this work;
- Build and lead high-performing teams;
- Drive innovation within a major public university while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to advance the University's mission;
- Connect to the world outside of Rutgers at local, state, and national levels;
- Deliver a new model for other universities and their campus-based democracy work.



Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

The inaugural Director of the Rutgers Democracy Lab will work vigorously, and with a significant investment, to effectuate the vision for the Lab. The Director will play a key leadership role in shaping the Lab's research vision, building academic and community partnerships, and advancing initiatives related to democracy, public policy, and civic engagement.

In addition, the inaugural Director will be expected to:

- **Establish an Advisory Group Reflecting the Needs of the Lab:** Essential to the success of the Lab is to establish clear and consistent mechanisms to gather perspectives from the Lab's most important constituency: America's youth. As the next generation poised to influence and lead American democratic participation and intuitions, their early and frequent input to the Director will be critical to serving their needs. From understanding their preferred communication platforms, to their use of Artificial Intelligence, or policy perspectives, this advisory group will serve as a key advisor to the formation, expansion, and evolution of the RDL.
- **Develop the RDL Technology and Democracy Research Hub:** What will set the RDL apart from other democracy labs is an analytic capability to monitor online trends, shifts in sentiments, opinions, and attitudes – as well as the capability to supply faculty with data and information to complement programs, research, and education offered through the RDL and other areas of the University. Working in sync with the *Think and Do Tank*, the *Research Hub* will serve as a data engine to help craft Rutgers-specific educational programs and workshops, identify knowledge gaps and possible focus areas for additional research and scholarship, and provide insights that help solve democracy's most pressing problems.
- **Establish RDL Measurement and Assessment Protocols:** Measurement and assessment will be an important component of the RDL. Faculty will work with students to conduct assessments of programming and will conduct research and publish scholarship related to the effectiveness of civic learning at Rutgers and beyond. RDL faculty will also incentivize other faculty to engage in related work through the provision of stipends for faculty from different academic disciplines across the University.
- **Create the RDL Think and Do Tank:** Each academic year, the RDL will recruit undergraduate and graduate students from a wide variety of academic disciplines across the entire University to serve as members of the RDL *Think and Do Tank*. Students will receive a stipend for their participation during the fall and spring semesters and will be eligible to receive academic credit. Students at the RDL *Think and Do Tank* will focus on at least one societal challenge each year, as determined by the RDL's Executive Director and in consultation with the visiting scholar/practitioner based on their professional expertise.
- **Expand Talking Across Difference Offerings:** *Talking Across Difference* was first piloted as a series of faculty workshops in the spring 2024 semester. These workshops encourage dialogue and explore different perspectives in classrooms of all disciplines. From STEM to humanities, opportunities to help students explore contemporary issues from different perspectives and engage in dialogue with each other can be woven into existing curricula of all disciplines. The RDL will help expand upon these offerings.
- **Support Faculty to Integrate Civic Engagement Learning Into Their Coursework:** Civic engagement should be woven into curricular offerings throughout all academic disciplines. Faculty support and professional development is an essential part of civic engagement education. The RDL will support some existing educational initiatives in addition to having the ability to create new educational opportunities to meet the evolving needs of the Rutgers community. RDL faculty in New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden will create workshops and programming for faculty and staff to meet the specific needs of each campus.
- **Develop Civic Engagement Programming with Real-World Impact:** The Rutgers Democracy Lab will serve as the central location through which scholars, students, practitioners, and the community come

together to devise solutions to public problems. Programming will include, but not be limited to, speakers, teach-ins, community service projects, and conversations centered around democracy. Activities will involve collaborations between disciplines as well as local communities, working with the respective counties and municipalities of each campus to establish early voting sites in New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, and at least one drop box to facilitate vote-by-mail for our students.

- **Increase Visibility and Reputational Excellence:** Rutgers and Eagleton have a reputation for excellence. The inaugural Director will ensure that the work of the Lab is communicated in a wide-reaching, impactful manner. As a result, the RDL's work will be known nationally and internationally for its intentional, collaborative actions to create a University community committed to addressing public concerns through a wide range of activities including but not limited to volunteering, public service, advocacy, and educational outreach. Rutgers will become known nationally and internationally for creating programming that fosters an equitable and inclusive democracy, while simultaneously reaching young people on the social media channels they use daily.
- **Cultivate a National Consortium of Like-Minded Institutions (Nation-Wide):** An important goal for the RDL will be partnering with nonpartisan groups and other universities with an interest in promoting civic engagement and democratic norms, and who have common interest in promoting positive messaging, enhancing civics knowledge, and encouraging civic engagement and service. Through partnership, the RDL has the potential to reach new audiences and amplify messages that have the capacity to drown out misinformation, disinformation, and excess partisan noise.
- **Develop a Digital Democracy Wall at All Student Centers:** In addition to housing all of the RDL's social media and digital content on social media channels and on democracylab.rutgers.edu, The RDL will work with the student centers in New Brunswick (Busch, Livingston, College Ave, Douglass Cook), Newark, and Camden to strategically place large-scale LED wall screens that highlight the content of student digital creators, other student content submissions, and other relevant content and information. Not only will this drive traffic to social media channels and website, but it will bring the content directly to the students in the heart of each campus – the student centers.
- **Staff the RDL to Transform Rutgers into a University-Wide Democracy Lab:** The transformational gift, which created the RDL, allows for the development of a mission-driven team prepared to implement the various elements of the RDL in a cohesive, efficient manner, on a full-time basis and for the long term. The inaugural Director will build and support a team to implement this ambitious agenda.



Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The ideal candidate should possess many, if not all, of the following experiences and skills:

- An infectious passion for American democracy, and the communication skills necessary to inspire others to join the RDL's mission, purpose, and programming;
- Facility with modern technologies and communication platforms, especially those that are preferred by students and America's youth;
- A yearning to create something innovative, new, and significant;
- Grit, determination, flexibility, and entrepreneurial spirit required for experimentation;
- A rising star in politics and civic engagement scholarship who is agile, quick-witted, and spirited;
- Outstanding interpersonal and relationship building skills to engage in meaningful ways with a broad range of highly invested stakeholders, both inside an academic setting and externally;
- Demonstrated success in recruiting, retaining, and inspiring high-performing teams;
- Extensive experience in designing, implementing, and overseeing a set of academic programs consistent with the Lab's mission and values;
- Demonstrated ability to engage with a wide variety of external constituents including industry leaders, legislative, government, and community partners, and the charisma to create Lab advocates in those settings;
- Proven fiscal planning and budget management skills;
- Appreciation and understanding of (or desire to learn) grant writing, institutional fundraising, and donor cultivation and stewardship;
- Comfortable working in a setting that is political yet non-partisan, straddling the world of politics and academia;
- Advanced understanding of American politics, ideally politics and government within the state of New Jersey;
- The qualities of leadership necessary to guide the Lab to success including adaptable, innovative, transparent, self-motivated, efficient, decisive, excellent judgement, well-organized, detail oriented, and a willingness to listen;
- Master's degree required (or equivalent professional experience), Ph.D preferred.

Rutgers as a Microcosm of a Model of Democratic Community

Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey ("Rutgers"), is the eighth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. It is an Association of American Universities (AAU) Carnegie R1 Research University. It is a state-wide institution, with campuses in New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, with more than 8,000 full- and part-time faculty, more than 14,100 full- and part-time staff, and 67,200 students from all fifty states and more than 120 countries.

Rutgers University has three main regional locations that are well-positioned to serve the needs of students. The largest location, in New Brunswick, is situated in a busy urban core that extends across both banks of the Raritan River, giving way to bucolic green spaces and a more “classic” campus atmosphere. In Newark, Rutgers anchors the state’s largest city just miles from New York City. In Camden, just across the Delaware River from downtown Philadelphia, students benefit from a small, close-knit learning community with access to all the big-city amenities. Rutgers–New Brunswick is perfectly situated in central New Jersey, near the major urban centers of New York City and Philadelphia and the iconic Jersey Shore. Rutgers’ flagship location is home to five campuses across New Brunswick and Piscataway that offer everything from a pulsing, bustling environment to a tree-lined, classically collegiate campus feel.

Faculty members at Rutgers are known for excellence in teaching and research, developing best practices, and applying theoretical and practical knowledge to real-world issues. Rutgers-New Brunswick, the historic birthplace and flagship of Rutgers, is also the leading public university in New Jersey, a top fifteen public national university, and a top 100 world university.

Diversity, in all its forms, is celebrated at Rutgers. Among all national universities ranked by U.S. News & World Report, Rutgers-New Brunswick ties for 37th in campus ethnic diversity, and among AAU public institutions in the U.S. News & World Report rankings, is second in campus ethnic diversity. Among Big Ten schools, it ranks first in campus ethnic diversity and social mobility.

If a strong culture of civic engagement and encouraging dialogue across differences can prevail at Rutgers, it can prevail everywhere. Rutgers University is the perfect laboratory to test and implement innovative programs that promote democratic participation, active citizenship, and social change.

Eagleton’s Unique Role in Advancing These Principles

The [Eagleton Institute of Politics](#) was established in 1956 with a bequest from Florence Peshine Eagleton, who expressed in her will that it was her “settled conviction that the cultivation of civic responsibility and leadership among the American people in the field of practical political affairs is of vital and increasing importance to our state and nation.” While this mission is very much a product of the [2024 Task Force on Civic Engagement and Public Service](#), for more than sixty years, the Eagleton Institute has studied how American politics and government work and change, analyzed how the democracy might improve, and has promoted political participation and civic engagement. Cultivating civic responsibility and leadership is part of Eagleton’s DNA, and as such, this mission will continue to be a priority at Rutgers into the future.

Eagleton’s long history and core values, including promoting open and respectful exchanges of ideas and perspectives, make it the only choice for the next phase of Rutgers University and the Donor’s shared vision – the establishment of the Rutgers Democracy Lab. The RDL will “create a culture [at Rutgers] in which students from different viewpoints feel they can participate in conversations, and prepare students from all disciplines, whether engineering, business, or the arts, for the value of community engagement and how to be democratic citizens.”

Leadership



William F. Tate IV, President

William F. Tate IV took office as the 22nd President of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, on July 1, 2025.

A nationally recognized social scientist, his research – focused on producing theoretical, epidemiological, and geospatial models to understand social determinants of STEM indicators and educational attainment, social stratification, and developmental outcomes – earned him election into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Education.

Prior to Rutgers, he served as President of Louisiana State University, where his leadership team achieved record-setting gains in research, student success, economic impact, philanthropy, and legislative support. He spent nearly three decades in faculty and administrative positions at Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Wisconsin–Madison.



Francine Conway, Chancellor, Rutgers-New Brunswick

Francine Conway, Ph.D., has served as Rutgers-New Brunswick's chancellor since 2023.

Dr. Conway, a Distinguished Professor, previously served as Chancellor-Provost, Provost, and Dean of the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. She is an award-winning scholar and clinical psychologist recognized for her work in child psychopathology. She previously served as the Dean of Rutgers–New Brunswick

Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology.

Prior to joining Rutgers in 2016, Dr. Conway was a faculty member at Adelphi University in the Derner School of Advanced Psychological Studies for 13 years. She holds degrees from Cornell University, Columbia University, and Adelphi University.



Jason Geary, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Jason Geary, Ph.D., is Rutgers–New Brunswick's Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, a role he assumed in July 2025.

Prior to becoming Provost, Geary served as Dean of Mason Gross School of the Arts and later in his tenure was appointed Senior Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives. As Dean, he launched several interdisciplinary collaborations, including a minor in creative expression and the environment with the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of

Environmental and Biological Sciences and a minor in arts management and leadership with the Rutgers Business School.

Before joining Rutgers in 2020, Geary served as Director of the School of Music at the University of Maryland and, prior to that, taught musicology for twelve years at the University of Michigan, where he also rose to become an Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the School of Music, Theatre, & Dance.

Procedure for Candidacy

WittKieffer is assisting Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in this search. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and nominations and applications will be accepted until this position is filled. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Melody Rose, Ph.D., Julia Bradley, and Bronwen Pelaez, Ph.D.

RDLDirector@wittkieffer.com

Compensation Information: The salary range for this position is \$150,000 - \$300,000.

It is university policy to provide equal employment opportunity to all its employees and applicants for employment regardless of their race, creed, color, national origin, age, ancestry, nationality, marital or domestic partnership or civil union status, sex, pregnancy, gender identity or expression, disability status, liability for military service, protected veteran status, affectional or sexual orientation, atypical cellular or blood trait, genetic information (including the refusal to submit to genetic testing), or any other category protected by law. As an institution, we value diversity of background and opinion, and prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of any legally protected class in the areas of hiring, recruitment, promotion, transfer, demotion, training, compensation, pay, fringe benefits, layoff, termination or any other terms and conditions of employment. For additional information please see the [Non-Discrimination Statement](#).