Creating Courageous Communities: 
Developing a Statewide Learning Community in 
Media Literacy to Counter Extremist Violence

Applicant: University of Rhode Island
Location: Rhode Island
Track: Promising Practices: Multiple Projects Track
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Proposed Start/End Dates: 24 months
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Abstract. Disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda have become large-scale social problems, shaping the way citizens view facts, define truth, and make decisions. Because extremist communities coalesce around disinformation and propaganda, exposure to messages that promote hateful ideologies can lead to violent conflict. Learning to critically analyze news, information, digital media and popular culture through media literacy education can benefit all members of society because it can diminish the appeal and efficacy of us-vs-them persuasive paradigms that rely on activating strong emotions and oversimplifying ideas and information. Media literacy education should be a component of civic education, but many educators lack knowledge and skills for how to bring it into the civic education curriculum to address the threat of domestic extremism. Targeted public service messages can increase public awareness of the threats by individuals encouraging violence and attempting to radicalize others through spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories, and false narratives on social media and other online platforms. Because students develop media literacy competencies through creating media for authentic real-world audiences, a statewide creative media contest can be an effective way to develop media literacy competencies while increasing public awareness of the risks of targeted violence and terrorism. This statewide initiative aims to empower people in Rhode Island to be resilient to violent messaging and recruitment while building resilience through media literacy education that protects and champions democratic responsibilities and values. The statewide program includes 3 components designed to reduce the threat of domestic extremism through advancing media literacy, dialogue, and active listening among the people of Rhode Island. In Program 1, courageous community conversations provide meaningful media literacy dialogue to learn about propaganda, disinformation and domestic extremism. We seek to reach military spouses and family members, public health and public safety employees, K-12 educators, librarians, high school and college students, and media and public relations professionals. Participants learn how to apply digital media literacy strategies to critically analyze controversial and contentious examples of propaganda and disinformation and learn practical strategies to reduce high conflict through dialogue and active listening. In Program 2, high school and college educators will receive training on how to integrate media literacy into civic education, where topics including disinformation, propaganda, and domestic terrorism and extremism are addressed in the context of civic literacy competencies. They implement practical instructional strategies that help their own learners build resilience to harmful forms of contemporary propaganda and disinformation that advocates violence. In Program 3, a statewide student media campaign engages high school and college students in social media, video and audio public service announcements and billboards creation, with support from local state public safety experts as well as communications and public relations professionals. raising public awareness of the harms of violent extremism and the importance of applying digital media literacy competencies in responding to false narratives, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and disinformation.