

RESEARCH ASSISTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

OVERVIEW

More in Common and the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University are looking for a graduate student or researcher available to help with literature reviews and background research for a project beginning immediately in the spring of 2021. This position will be supported through a stipend from More in Common and is open to graduate students or researchers with backgrounds in civic studies, political science, sociology, psychology, or any field of collective action, democracy studies, and pluralism.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

More in Common and the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University seek to organize a convening and follow up publication focused on synthesizing the evidence base for **how we create collective settings that develop the behaviors and orientations that underlie a culture of democracy**, and proposing a research agenda for moving forward. This will be an action-oriented convening (most likely in May 2021) intended to drive subsequent efforts that conceptualize, test, measure, and evaluate new interventions for shaping a positive culture of democracy. Convening participants will include researchers and practitioners from a diverse set of fields and backgrounds: researchers and academics from political science, psychology, communications, and sociology; advocates and campaigners from democracy reform and racial justice; civil servants from local, state, and federal government; and grassroots practitioners from association organizations concerned with civic engagement, behavior, and values.

Through this work, we seek to build a new conceptual architecture or framework which challenges the democracy reform ecosystem to consciously integrate efforts to shape the culture that makes possible an integrated approach to systems change. There is a great deal of integrated research and advocacy towards system reforms such as rank choice voting, expanded districts, increasing the size of the House of Representatives, and enacting stronger campaign finance reforms. Similarly, academics working with campaigns have produced a large volume of insights on voter engagement and mobilization, thus seeking to shape civic and political behaviors. However, there is far less evidence for how to affect constructive culture change on values such as pluralism or political tolerance, cultivate shared bridging identities, or nurture the kind of collective empowerment that moves beyond conventional identities or “tribes” and minimizes the “rule or die” mentality that polarizes our politics. The field also lacks rigorous evidence for how to better engage the approximately 40% of voters who rarely vote. Cutting through all these gaps are issues of race, belonging, and power.

Too often, we take the notion of a culture of democracy as a given. Culture, however, does not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, it emerges in the collective settings in which people come together to learn the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. Alexis de Tocqueville famously wrote about the importance of these informal “schools of democracy” in making democracy work. Nowadays, in the 21st century, those

schools of democracy have either morphed or become so weak that they would be hardly recognizable to Tocqueville. Yet, they remain fundamental to the democratic project. How can we identify and examine the characteristics of settings that bring people together, nurture the behaviors and orientations necessary for a pluralistic democracy, and create a collective culture of democracy?

The researcher's primary responsibilities will be to assemble a literature review on existing work in this area and help prepare materials that will both inform the convening, and the publication or report that emerges from it. The bulk of the work is likely to take place from Feb-May 2021, with some follow up possible in the summer of 2021.

For more information on the project, see the concept note [here](#).

RESPONSIBILITIES

The researcher's primary responsibilities will include the following:

1. Conducting literature review and synthesis of multidisciplinary research on what we know about the kinds of collective settings that are likely to shape the behaviors and orientations that underlie a culture of democracy;
2. We imagine that conducting this literature review will involve (a) developing citation network maps across multiple disciplines, (b) developing annotated bibliographies, (c) conducting interviews with leading scholars and experts in the field to gather their expertise, (d) writing the literature review;
3. Regular check-ins with the More in Common and SNF Agora teams, including creating a schedule for initial outlines, first drafts, and revisions;
4. Supporting creating preparatory materials for the May 2021 convening; and,
5. Other duties as assigned.

We seek candidates that are strongly interested in studying democracy and community-based organizations, as well as the intersection of "on the ground" research and advocacy. Excellent writing and communication skills are a must.

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS (BY THE TIME OF APPLICATION)

The minimum qualification required to be considered an applicant is to be a currently-enrolled Ph.D. student in any related field (e.g., political science, political psychology, sociology, ethnic studies, public policy, etc.) or an independent researcher with the appropriate background.

Additional Qualifications (required by start date):

1. Ability to work both independently and in collaboration
2. Ability to meet project deadlines
3. Experience working in teams
4. Exceptional writing, research, and communication skills

5. Experience conducting meta-analyses and literature reviews desired
6. Excellent organizational skills

DIVERSITY + EQUITY + INCLUSION

We value diversity across many dimensions, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, age, religious belief, and political orientation.

TIMELINE

The appointment for this position will begin immediately and extend to the summer of 2021. We anticipate weekly requirements of 12-15 hours. Compensation will be \$25/hour.

HOW TO APPLY

This position is open until filled. Questions regarding this position, and [application materials](#) can be directed to kelsie@moreincommon.com with the subject line “Research Assistant Position”.

Complete applications will include a cover letter, CV, and short writing sample of 5000 words or less, and the names and contact information for three references. Letters of reference are not required at this time. We will seek your permission before contacting your references.