

From “1776” to “What’s Next:” Teaching Civic Possibilities
K-12 Teacher Professional Development

James Madison’s Montpelier | July 7-8, 2026

AGENDA OUTLINE

Tuesday July 7, 2026

11:30-12:00pm: Arrive, pick up name badge and materials in Lewis Hall

Participants should park in the main Montpelier parking lot and follow signs with overnight luggage to Lewis Hall. Registration and materials pickup will be in the foyer of Lewis Hall, just outside the classroom.

Teachers will be given a name tag, hard copies of deliberation issue guides and facilitator materials as well as a workbook on facilitating deliberative dialogues in K-12 classrooms.

12:00-1:00pm: Introductions, getting to know you, and agenda review

Lead: Dr. Abigail Amoako-Kayser, JMU College of Education

1:00-1:30pm: Experience deliberating “1776: What Should We Do?”

Lead: Dr. Kara Dillard, JMU Madison Center for Civic Engagement

Imagine that you are a colonial citizen in the spring of 1776. Tensions throughout the colonies are at their height. The second Continental Congress is meeting. What should we do?

Participants will get a hands-on experience deliberating about the historic decisions that led to the Declaration of Independence. Weighing actions and tradeoffs of three different ways to act, participants will get a first-hand experience with materials to encourage deliberating about 1776, including choices like remaining unwavering in support of King George, declare independence in clear terms, or use diplomacy to pursue the colonies aims.

1:30-1:45pm: Break

A short break with snacks provided

1:45-3:30pm: Tour of Madison’s house (2-3 groups staggered start times)

Lead: James Madison’s Montpelier staff

3:30-3:45pm: Break

A short break with snacks provided

3:45-4:30pm: Foundations of deliberative pedagogy for K-12 classrooms workshop

Lead: Dr. Kara Dillard

This session introduces K–12 educators to the foundations of deliberative pedagogy and its role in fostering civic learning in the classroom. Participants will debrief the earlier deliberation on 1776 while also exploring the concept of deliberation as civic discourse, examining key learning outcomes associated with implementing deliberative practices, and distinguishing deliberation from related forms of discourse such as dialogue and debate. The session will also highlight the core features of effective deliberation—including weighing trade-offs, considering diverse perspectives, and engaging in collaborative decision-making—to support meaningful student engagement and civic skill development.

4:30-5:00: Break

5:00-6:00pm: Exploring the deliberation materials workshop

Lead: Dr. Abigail Amoako-Kayser

This workshop engages K–12 educators in an in-depth exploration of the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) issue guides they will implement this year, including “*1176: What Should We Do?*”, “*A New Land: What Kind of Government Should We Have?*” and the forward-looking “*What’s Next, America?*”. Participants will examine how these guides support deliberative pedagogy by structuring student inquiry around complex public issues, while also reviewing accompanying teacher facilitation guides, classroom assignments, assessments, and strategies for aligning deliberative activities with state standards of learning. The session emphasizes practical application, equipping teachers with the tools and resources needed to facilitate meaningful, standards-aligned deliberations that build students’ critical thinking, civic reasoning, and collaborative decision-making skills.

6:00-8:00pm Dinner and conversation on the portico

All participants will spend the night in the Constitution Village on site at James Madison’s Montpelier. Constitution Village is comprised of 28 private bedrooms.

Wednesday July 8, 2026

7-8:00am: Optional sunrise/pre-breakfast woods walk and tour of Madison family cemetery

Lead: James Madison's Montpelier staff

8:00-8:30am: Breakfast

Lewis Hall

8:30-10:00am: Bill of Rights tour on the landscape

Lead: Patrick Campbell, James Madison's Montpelier

Tours will start at Lewis Hall right after breakfast

10:00-10:15am: Break

10:15-12:00pm: Deliberating “What’s Next America?” and debrief

Lead: Dr. Kara Dillard

This session immerses K–12 educators in deliberative pedagogy through a structured experience using the “1787: A New Land” issue guide. Framed in the historical context of a fragile new republic in 1787, participants will deliberate across three distinct options for governance—strengthening the existing confederation, establishing a stronger central government, or allowing states to govern independently—while weighing trade-offs and consequences of each approach. Through guided facilitation, teachers will connect these perspectives to their learning about James Madison and the origins of the Constitution, deepening their understanding of how deliberation supports civic reasoning, historical inquiry, and collaborative decision-making in the classroom.

12:00-12:30pm: Lunch and Learn: James Madison and the 250th

Lead: TBA

12:30-1:45pm: Skills for facilitating civic discourse and historic decisions workshop

Lead: Dr. Kara Dillard, Aidan Heitt and Bubuney Havi, Madison Center for Civic Engagement

This workshop equips K–12 educators with the foundational skills needed to facilitate a National Issues Forums (NIFI) deliberative dialogue in the classroom. Participants will learn practical strategies for guiding student-centered discussions, including how to pose curious, open-ended questions, actively listen, and draw out diverse perspectives and disagreements. The workshop will also address how to navigate tension and emotion productively, helping students engage respectfully across differences, and how to support the group in identifying areas of common ground. Emphasis is placed on building facilitation confidence and fostering inclusive, inquiry-driven classroom environments that strengthen students’ civic voice and deliberative capacity.

1:45-2:00pm Break with snacks

2:00-3:30pm: Practice and skill building facilitating in small groups

Lead: Bubuney Havi and Kristina Nano, Madison Center for Civic Engagement

This session focuses on building teachers' confidence and competence in facilitating deliberative forums by moving from theory to guided practice using NIFI issue guides. Educators will work in grade-band groups to practice facilitating key components of a deliberative forum—including framing the issue, guiding exploration of options, and weighing trade-offs—while receiving peer feedback and support. By actively facilitating portions of the forum, teachers will deepen their understanding of deliberative pedagogy and develop the skills needed to lead structured, student-centered discussions. Participants will leave prepared to implement deliberations on historic decisions in their classrooms with clarity, confidence, and intentionality.

3:30-4:00pm: Conclusion – assessment, PLC overview

Lead: Dr. Abigail Amoako-Kayser, JMU College of Education

This closing session provides an opportunity for educators to reflect on their learning across the seminar series and consolidate their understanding of deliberative pedagogy and classroom practice. Participants will engage in a structured debrief to identify key takeaways, challenges, and applications, while receiving an overview of next steps for continued engagement through a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The session will also introduce assessment and evaluation strategies aligned with project goals, emphasizing how to measure student learning, facilitation effectiveness, and overall program impact to support sustained implementation of deliberative practices in K–12 classrooms.