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# Toward Citizen Centricity: Leveraging the Citizens Academy to Foster Inclusive, Sustainable, and Generative Civic Engagement in Midland, MI

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This service learning project aims to utilize positive psychology research to foster inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement among residents of Midland, Michigan. We conceptualize civic engagement as an outgrowth of social capital, and we leverage the constructs of mattering, fairness, belonging, and bridging to offer positive interventions aimed at increasing Midland's social capital. Specifically, we propose several changes to evolve the city government's existing educational civic leadership program called the Citizens Academy. First, we suggest adjusting the academy's recruitment process to expand access and inclusion by increasing the number and diversity of participants. Second, we introduce a more participatory and citizen-centered approach to the program content that builds on Midland's four strategic pillars as a guiding framework. We offer four positive psychology-based exercises to be interwoven into the Citizens Academy curriculum: Strengths and Values, Community Exploration Guide, Citizen-to-Citizen Coaching, and Storytelling. Third, we recommend a Civic Engagement Scale as a simple tool to measure initial outcomes. It is our hope that this service learning project will serve not only as an initial catalyst for Midland's goal of increasing civic engagement, but as a model for other cities and communities looking to utilize the science of positive psychology to effect large-scale change.

**Keywords**
positive psychology, civic engagement, social capital, mattering, fairness, belonging, character strengths, community

**Disciplines**
Community Psychology | Leadership Studies | Other Psychology | Psychology | Social Influence and Political Communication

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**Introduction**

How might positive psychology help a city flourish?  Positive psychology is the empirical study of optimal human functioning.  When Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) founded this field, they advocated for a science of well-being for individuals, communities, and organizations.  Though much of the research so far has focused on the individual, it is equally important to examine how to cultivate and scale flourishing at the societal level.  We partnered with the city of Midland, Michigan to explore how we might apply positive psychology research, insights, and interventions to promote a more thriving community.  **Specifically, our service learning project aims to foster inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement. Our first proposed step toward this goal is to evolve Midland's existing Citizens Academy (CA) beyond its current design to incorporate a more participatory, citizen-centered, and co-creative approach.**  The annual program educates about 25 city residents each year on municipal government functions and processes to spur volunteerism in leadership roles such as board and committee positions ("Citizens Academy," 2017).  While generally considered a success, it has fallen short of the originally envisioned degree of sustained civic involvement (M. Donker & J. Lynch, personal communication, January 26, 2017).

To that end, the objective of this paper is to present our evidence-based findings and practical recommendations for implementation.  We begin with a situation analysis and overview of Midland's context, strengths, challenges, and city leadership's desire to help residents become more engaged citizens.  Informed by the complexity and vast scope of possibilities uncovered in the analysis, our subsequent review of positive psychology research reveals that societies with strong social capital have higher civic engagement.  Accordingly, the literature review identifies several key constructs that mediate social capital for individuals and communities.  We culminate with a set of recommendations and appendix artifacts to enact the most relevant

contributing factors.  Our plan focuses on adapting the Citizens Academy as the initial point of application with incremental adjustments to its recruitment, content, and assessment.

## Situation Analysis

For our situation analysis, we conducted two 90-minute phone interview sessions with Mayor Maureen Donker, City Manager Jon Lynch, and Director of Community Affairs Selina Tisdale.  Additionally, we corresponded with them via email; administered an online survey between January 24-30, 2017 to Midland community members via Qualtrics and E-CityHall (the city government's online public engagement platform) receiving a total of 168 responses (Appendix A); and reviewed city strategic planning documents, websites, past consultant reports, and other relevant materials.

### Context

The city of Midland is a suburban community located in rural central Michigan with a population of about 42,000 residents (The Novak Consulting Group [Novak], 2014).  It is the home and global headquarters of the Dow Chemical Company (Dow), a Fortune 50 company and the primary employer undergirding the local economy.  Eighteen percent of city residents possess a graduate or professional degree, and this company town is one of the top producers of intellectual property patents in the United States (Novak, 2014).

Midland prides itself and relies on being a "community of choice"—that is, a desirable place where people will want and choose to work (M. Donker, personal communication, January 19, 2017).  To attract and retain top talent, Dow has made significant investments to support a good quality of life in the city with several attractive amenities.  The Dow Chemical Foundation gives approximately $4 million per year to the region (Novak, 2014).  Midland's value

proposition as a community of choice includes: robust arts and cultural entertainment centers; vibrant parks and recreation; top sporting facilities; a minor league baseball team and stadium; a strong public school system; a consistent ranking as one of the safest communities in the country; and a family-friendly environment ("Midland quick facts," n.d.).

**Four Strategic Pillars: "Exploring Our Future"**

Midland is proactive about its growth and improvement. In 2014, Midland County developed a strategic plan and identified its mission statement: "Together, Forward, Bold: An exceptional place where everyone thrives" (Novak, 2014). Those involved in its creation classified nine key performance areas: economic development; youth development and engagement; education; infrastructure and environment; arts, culture, entertainment, and recreation; diversity; community leadership; social services, poverty, housing, mental and physical health; and public safety (City Council County Commission, n.d.; Novak, 2014). Each target area had a committee of Midland residents responsible for facilitating their corresponding community goals (M. Donker, personal communication, January 26, 2017). Over time, however, many of these groups lacked structure or discontinued. Hence, city officials have since reviewed the nine categories and refined them into four strategic umbrella pillars, with the hope that reorganizing and refocusing the scope of work would get Midland back on track toward its vision for a thriving community. The city's updated performance categories are: building our livelihood, developing our talent, caring for our people, and enjoying our community (Appendix B; Midland County, 2017). The next steps for these strategic pillars are to structure category-specific community-led committees to generate relevant protocols, create organized systems, and set targeted goals. We will propose building from this effort in our subsequent application plan.

**Values and Strengths**

While the city of Midland does not have an official set of values, numerous strengths and themes emerged from our assessment.  Several official slogans on the city's website pointed the way, including "the city of modern explorers" and "the city of science and culture" ("Midland quick facts," n.d.).  Combined with the interviews with city officials and the community survey responses, these descriptions helped identify five recurring value themes: (a) Community: Midland residents value connection and collaboration with each other.  They believe they can achieve anything if they work together and serve the greater good.  (b) Generosity: Residents care and give freely of their time, energy, and resources.  They mobilize when there is a need or problem to be solved, and a philanthropic influence shines through.  (c) Curiosity: The status quo is insufficient for the residents of Midland.  The influence of the scientific method's systematic inquiry is always at work, and a love of learning and strong emphasis on education are evidenced by their schools. (d) Excellence: From education to public works, the arts and humanities to government administration, residents expect nothing less than outstanding performance.  (e) Fortitude: Despite the effects of economic uncertainty, Midland residents possess a tenacious spirit and a predisposition toward action.

**Challenges**

Although Midland is a community of many strengths, it is not without challenges.  Chief among them is the economic reliance and uncertainty around future employment with Dow, the world's largest chemical company (The Dow Chemical Company, 2017).  In 2016, Dow acquired the Dow Corning Corporation, leading to 700 job cuts in Midland (Thibodeau, 2016).  Additionally, Dow is on the verge of merging with DuPont, creating further stress around job security.  According to our survey results, community members cited this uncertainty due to the

Dow mergers as one of the main challenges facing Midland.

Furthermore, respondents pointed to the economic disparity between those who are employed by Dow and those who work elsewhere as an issue.  Mayor Donker and City Manager Lynch described a socioeconomic distinction perceived among residents depending on whether they work for Dow or not (personal communication, January 19, 2017).  While the city values generosity and has a strong philanthropic culture, many residents also believe that they need to work hard to help themselves instead of expecting assistance from others (M. Donker, personal communication, January 19, 2017).  The pitfall is that those who are most in need often feel marginalized and thus participate less in the decision-making process affecting the community.  This issue will be further expounded in the upcoming literature review and application plan.

**From Residents to Citizens**

Midland's city officials are seeking new methods to help residents transform into more involved, intrinsically motivated, and meaningfully engaged citizens (M. Donker & J. Lynch, personal communication, January 26, 2017).  They would like to enable residents to make the most of opportunities to partner with the city government to improve the community.  The mayor and city manager believe that the community will benefit from more proactive citizen ownership and commitment.  In fact, Midland already has existing initiatives with this goal in mind.

For over a decade, the city government has been running a civic leadership program called the Citizens Academy (CA) ("Citizens Academy," 2017; Haynes, 2016).  The goal is to create a cadre of people in the community with a deeper understanding of municipal operations and a heightened regard for civic duty (Appendix C; Tisdale, 2017).  The mayor herself is a product of the program and an example of its success—a citizen who subsequently joined the city council in 2007 and was elected mayor in 2009.  While the CA has drawn some new

volunteers for city boards and committees, the number has not been sufficient and the level of

participation quickly wanes after graduation (M. Donker, personal communication, January 19,

2017).  There is a core group of residents who remain actively and repeatedly involved in city

initiatives and policy-making, and the CA captures those who are already inclined toward civic

engagement.  However, city officials aim to expand and include a more varied pool of

participants to become proactively involved (J. Lynch, personal communication, January 26,

2017).  This will be our primary area of focus moving forward.

## Literature Review

Based on our situation analysis, we aim to explore how positive psychology can be used

to foster inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement.  This literature review begins

by identifying social capital as the augur of civic engagement and proceeds with an examination

of empirical constructs we believe to be critical in fostering rich social capital.

### Manifesting Civic Engagement

To consider the mechanics at play within civic engagement and how to increase it in

Midland, it is important to first understand the concept itself.  Civic engagement and social

capital are often considered synonymous terms in academic literature.  However, we differentiate

between the two and consider civic engagement as a manifestation of social capital (Grillo,

Teixeira, & Wilson, 2010).  Social capital is the connection among individuals and within and

between social networks, along with the disposition to create and maintain social networks

(Grillo et al., 2010).  While represented in social institutions like families, churches or bowling

leagues, social capital is the cohesion between individuals and within these networks, not the

intuitions themselves per se (Fukuyama, 2001).  Social capital is also what prompts people to act.

Three basic forms of social capital facilitate individual and collective action: Obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms (Coleman, 1988).

Subsequently, the action people take in the interest of public concern is their civic engagement.  Civic engagement refers to the feelings of belonging, actions and efforts, and the experience of investment and ownership in one's community at local, regional, national, or international levels (Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998).  Examples of civic engagement include volunteering, protesting, boycotting, voting, or running for political office.  Developmental system theory characterizes civic engagement as person-context interaction (Zaff & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2011).  This perspective is useful in framing social capital as the alchemic basis for the actions of civic engagement.  Since the cohesion of social capital can be difficult to measure uniformly, civic engagement is often used for measurement by proxy (Fukuyama, 2001).  To that end, we can examine civic engagement at the individual and structural levels.

The individual-level explanation of civic engagement is represented in two ways: social psychological and economic accounts.  From the psycho-social perspective, civic engagement is a product of social trust—the degree to which the obligations and expectations of social capital engender trust amongst and within groups (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Coleman, 1988).  By contrast, the socioeconomic perspective is concerned with the economic effects on individuals (Costa & Khan, 2004).  Central to this perspective is that poorer groups possess less social capital or desire to create civic networks because of factors such as education, social mobility, and their fundamental preoccupation with economic survival (Knack, 2002).  Economic disparity between groups, akin to our observations in Midland, erodes trust between groups and in the political system at large (Glaeser, Laibson, Soutetter, & Scheinkman, 2000).  The structural perspective to civic engagement is more holistic and focuses on the role of broad material structures such as the

influence of technology, economic conditions, shifts in social classes, generational dynamics and

their effects on individual behavior.  This line of research is rich with documented instances of

the forces deteriorating social capital and decreasing civic engagement (Putnam, 1995; Uslaner,

2004).

Understanding civic engagement as an outgrowth of social capital means that

communities with greater social capital also have more civic engagement (Grillo et al., 2010).

Armed with this insight, we contend that increasing civic engagement in Midland is possible by

cultivating its social capital.  In the sections that follow, we identify and target the salient

psychological constructs that are the key ingredients and influencers of social capital.

**Mattering, Fairness and Social Justice**

Well-being is a positive, desirable state encompassing multidimensional life domains,

including interpersonal, community, occupational, psychological, physical, and economic levels

(Prilleltensky et al., 2015).  Community psychology studies the interconnected relationship

between individuals and social systems, and how to foster collaboration among citizens and

communities with respect for diversity (Dalton, Hill, Thomas, & Kloos, 2013; Evans, Rosen, &

Nelson, 2014).  In addition to positive psychology's focus on leveraging existing strengths and

assets to build capacity for positive change, it is also important to recognize how a sense of

mattering, fairness, and social justice affect wellness (Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014).

The construct of mattering contributes to how we make meaning in life across its many

domains (George & Park, 2016).  Simply put, mattering entails feeling valued (recognition) and

adding value (impact) (Prilleltensky, 2014).  This self-concept affects human thriving because of

our fundamental need to feel significant and acknowledged, as well as to make a difference in

our community (Thomas, 2011).  Mattering builds a sense of agency, self-worth, and self-

efficacy that our actions have an impact, and it helps us adapt to challenging times (George &

Park, 2016).

Research shows that experiences and perceptions of fairness substantially affect well-

being (Prilleltensky, 2011; Prilleltensky, 2013).  Distributive justice (the "what") refers to getting

a fair share of outcomes—that is, an equitable distribution of rights, resources, benefits, and

burdens in society.  Procedural justice (the "how") refers to a fair, transparent, informative,

participatory, and respectful decision-making process.  Individuals want a voice in the processes

that affect their lives, and they feel indignity, disrespect, anger, exclusion, and marginalization

when they do not feel heard (Prilleltensky, 2013).  Some of the disparity we observed in Midland

could be explained by feelings of inequality where people feel marginalized and unheard.

Similarly, social justice relates to allocation principles, procedural norms and rules that

protect the rights of groups and individuals, and treatment of fellow human beings with mutual

respect and dignity (Jost & Kay, 2014).  Positive psychology can help frame social justice

beyond an idealized outcome to a relational process by promoting social action and

empowerment through individual and institutional strengths (Diaz, 2014; Yager-Elorriaga &

McWhirter, 2014).  Meaningful participation in community groups and activities fosters

empathy, efficacy, social justice, and social cohesion through shared emotional commitment and

reciprocity (Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005).

An organizational justice analysis of 14 multisector community health alliances sheds

light on how Midland might build consensus among diverse citizens.  The analysis found that

members' perceptions of fairness in the decision-making process are key to fostering agreement

on vision and strategies (Hearld, Alexander, Bodenschatz, Louis, & O'Hora, 2013).  By

engaging community members early on, leaders can evoke a sense of fairness to increase

participation, achieve consensus, and sustain momentum.  A transparent, inclusive process that enhances and sustains perceived fairness builds trust and develops positive capacities of individuals and organizations (Greenberg, 2007).

**Belonging, Bonding and Bridging**

In addition to fairness, fostering Midland's social capital requires creating a shared sense of belonging—the trust and camaraderie felt amongst a group with shared values and goals (Yuval-Davis, 2006).  As a community defines its citizens' rights and entitlements, members assess if they and others meet the defined criteria and are therefore entitled to belong (Yuval-Davis, 2006).  As aforementioned, social capital and connections help determine civic action. When individuals feel strongly associated with others in the community, they are more inclined to act (Larsen, Harlan, Bolin, Hackett, & Hope, 2016).

An inclusive environment helps deepen a sense of belonging.  It is important to note that the perception of any context is based on individual interpretation of that context and current policies (Oxoby, 2009).  Therefore, policymakers are encouraged to create inclusionary policies that are proactive in approach and that anticipate possible precursors to exclusion (Oxoby, 2009). If individuals feel excluded, it is generally because they have been denied access to opportunity, which leads to feelings of stigma and isolation (Oxoby, 2009).  Once they feel excluded, it is hard to recover and transition to a state of inclusion (Becker, 1998).

Building a sense of bonding can play a role in cultivating social capital among homogeneous groups of people by being cognizant of who is left out (Larsen et al., 2016).  The concept of bridging entails finding the value of connections between socially heterogeneous groups, and it may be useful for Midland residents to expand their circle of engagement (Larsen et al., 2016).  While bridging is more complicated and delicate, it also creates greater social

inclusion (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2007). Bridgers feel compelled to act when they sense

that their community is not functioning well. They also have strong social and emotional

neighborhood bonds (bonding), believe they can impact change, and are knowledgeable about

the system (Larsen et al., 2016). Bonding in a community is influenced by education, ethnicity,

and the amount of time one has lived in a neighborhood, while both education and social status

affect bridging (Larsen et al., 2016).

**City-Level Interventions**

In considering the various research implications for Midland, we also reviewed other

city-level interventions and how some cities are exploring ways to measure residents' well-

being. Warner and Kern (2013) produced a report for Santa Monica, CA focused on the

importance of creating such an index. The measure, they argue, will allow policymakers to track

the impact of their work on the well-being of their residents. In April 2015, Santa Monica

published its first report, identifying community, place, learning, health, and economic

opportunity as the key dimensions of well-being that they will measure going forward (City of

Santa Monica, 2015).

Character strengths are a key component of many positive psychology interventions, and

they are just beginning to be examined at the city-level. Character strengths are positive,

universal personality traits and characteristics that describe how we think, feel, and behave, and

that help produce positive outcomes toward human flourishing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

They are descriptive, not prescriptive, and character comprises a plurality of strengths which can

be developed and arise depending on context (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011).

Niemiec (2013) summarizes many of the findings on how character strengths are associated with

well-being. Though most scholarship to date revolves around individuals, Park and Peterson

(2010) explore city strengths—those occurring at an urban level across American cities. They note that strengths were grouped differently across cities and were predictors of entrepreneurship and political voting. This research stops short of identifying specific strengths as positively correlated to civic engagement. More recently, Niemiec partnered with the city of Cincinnati, OH to create city-wide strengths-based interventions (personal communication, February 2, 2017). Although still a nascent endeavor, *Strong Cincinnati* aims to cultivate interventions based on the science of character strengths to foster thriving and well-being in the city (Strong Cincinnati, 2016).

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is another positive approach with implications for cities. AI posits that the act of asking affirmative, generative questions creates positive changes for organizations and communities (Stavros, Godwin, & Cooperrider, 2016). This approach helps broaden perspectives and redirect the focus away from challenges and constraints toward imagining possibilities and co-creating new opportunities. Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) describe how the AI 4-D cycle—Discovering existing strengths, Dreaming of the future, Designing ideal possibilities, and Delivering next steps—can spark collaborative change. This iterative process creates sustainable momentum by avoiding traditional top-down solutions and leveraging an entire system's existing strengths and resources.

Building resilience skills on a community-wide level—such as establishing a collective identity and cultivating a shared sense of purpose—helps communities handle challenges and bounce forward toward flourishing (Houston & Houston, 2015; Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Resilience protects against stressors such as disillusionment, isolation, pressures to conform, burnout, and uncertainty (Anthony-McMann, Ellinger, Astakhova, & Halbesleben, 2016; Kirmayer, Sehdev, Whitley, Dandeneau, & Isaac, 2009). Per the uncertainty-identity theory,

identifying with a group in times of change, such as with the Dow mergers in Midland, is an effective way to curb uncertainty that reflects upon one's self-concept (Hogg, 2010). Group identification validates a personal worldview because members often share common perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. In a study of community resilience programs, strong leadership that promulgated the connections and interdependencies within the community experienced the most successful outcomes (White, Edwards, Farrar, & Plodinec, 2015). Facilitating the acquisition of these skills for Midland residents might enhance their capacity to increase their social capital toward a more thriving community.

## Application Plan

While the opportunities are vast, we selected the most relevant positive psychology constructs and an initial point of application that we deem is best equipped to launch these first steps: Midland's existing Citizens Academy (CA). **The objective of our application plan is to evolve the Citizens Academy beyond its current format through incremental adjustments to recruitment, access, content, and measurement to foster inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement.** This application plan begins with recommendations for augmenting access and recruitment efforts for the academy to foster a sense of mattering, belonging, and inclusivity. We then introduce a citizen-centered approach to the program content framed around the city's four strategic pillars that will enhance collective purpose, co-creative agency, and fairness. The appendix sections include proposed methods to measure progress (Appendix D & E), as well as supplemental artifacts with specific instructions for new content implementation (Appendix F through I).

**Recruitment Toward an Inclusive and Accessible Academy**

**Who else can be present.** As a precursor to increasing civic engagement within the CA, we recommend that Midland first ensure that all residents feel welcome and included via concerted outreach and recruitment efforts. As a conduit for the city itself, the CA can be a guiding beacon to engage residents with one another, the city, and something larger than themselves. In practical terms, we advise that CA organizers mindfully monitor what groups of people are not involved among the participants, actively seek residents who represent those voices, and invite them to join the program. We suggest forming a communication outreach task force of CA ambassadors who would oversee this process. Guiding questions include: Who is missing from the CA? What other voices should be represented? Can we identify precursors to exclusion and enabling factors for inclusion?

The goal of this effort is to encourage participation by residents encompassing all levels of engagement, education, types of employment, and length of time living in Midland. As research shows, all residents ought to feel that they belong, matter, and that their voices are heard (Oxoby, 2009; Prilleltensky, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2006). On both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, mattering builds a sense of agency, self-worth, and confidence that one's actions have an impact (George & Park, 2016). When all voices are present, social capital increases and leads to more inclusive civic engagement.

Based on our situation analysis research, the groups below are an initial list of who might be recruited to join the CA. We encourage Midland residents as experts of their community to seek other underrepresented groups and continue asking, "Who else can be present?"

- **New residents.** Newcomers to Midland, regardless of how long they have been living there, should be invited to join the CA and build their social network in the city.

- **Highly-engaged citizens.** The CA can harness the existing energy and commitment of those who are already actively engaged, ensuring that this group remains a positive and multiplying force in the community.

- **Disengaged, unengaged, and differently-engaged citizens.** The CA can offer new ways to engage residents who feel isolated, unaffiliated, apathetic, or skeptical about Midland's community initiatives, and/or who are already engaged in other forms.

- **Diverse perspectives.** The CA and community at-large will benefit from embracing a diverse array of perspectives, voices, and opinions (racial, economic, educational, age, political, etc.), including those who may not agree with current city policies or leadership.

- **Citizens affected by Dow mergers.** Including residents who are directly affected by the Dow mergers can reveal unexpressed concerns and pressures, elucidating new ways for the community to build resilience and support one another through economic uncertainty.

- **Small business owners and citizens not employed by Dow.** It is equally important to involve those who do not work for Dow and might feel marginalized as a minority voice. Providing them a seat at the table is crucial to future economic sustainability and growth.

- **Midland natives, from recent college graduates to retirees.** Recent college graduates may not choose to remain or return to Midland if they do not plan to work for Dow, so they need other professional growth opportunities in the city. The CA can provide new avenues for commitment to Midland's community. Although no longer part of the work force, retirees can also continue contributing to the city's social capital.

    **Selecting facilitators and ambassadors.** To effectively expand outreach and inclusion as outlined above, we recommend that organizers carefully select people who can serve as facilitators during the CA, as well as ambassadors who can extend its reach. Specifically, we

recommend inviting CA alumni who represent a variety of perspectives to return and help

facilitate class sessions.  Re-engaging with alumni helps renew, sustain, and strengthen their

sense of civic duty as they give back, apply what they learned, and share their experience.  These

new facilitators can also serve as "bridgers" between the current participants and others in their

circles of influence, thus building collective social capital.

We also recommend calling on community influencers and other leaders to leverage their

roles as social influencers and connectors.  Though they may not have the time or inclination to

lead or facilitate CA sessions, they can serve as ambassadors to spread outreach through their

networks and by word-of-mouth, thereby increasing the range of who feels included (Larsen et

al., 2016).  Individuals and groups that command respect from a cross-sector span of the

population, such as those from public and social service sectors, religious institutions, education,

PTA, non-profit organizations, private corporations and businesses, law enforcement, and the

United Way can be useful allies in broadening the pool of CA participants.

**Alternative modes of engagement.**  In addition to varying the mix of participants and

selecting effective facilitators and ambassadors, it is important to diversify the modes of outreach

and engagement with residents.  The remainder of this paper will present a new citizen-centered

approach and set of content recommendations for the CA.  Before we elaborate on those

incremental adjustments, this section offers a few alternative ideas to increase access and to

engage citizens aside from full participation in the CA itself.  We recognize that the full program

is a large time commitment, and it may not be the most feasible learning format for all.

We suggest that the CA share its content with residents who cannot join the entire

program through several alternative mechanisms.  The CA can allow residents to sit in on one

session, previewing it to spark interest for future participation; organize a "Midland Welcome

Wagon" for new residents with past and current CA participants, who can distribute information packets with key CA content; or host a workshop featuring a CA alumnus or ambassador who can facilitate a condensed CA session. We also suggest informing residents about the updated academy by hosting brief overview sessions for larger audiences a few times a year in locations such as community centers, churches, or schools, live streaming the information sessions, and posting the recordings on the city government's website. CA organizers might also incorporate a suggestions forum into these expansion sessions to hear from more residents' voices.

**Expanding access.** Additionally, we recommend increasing the CA's accessibility for those who are unable to participate in the entire program by offering an abbreviated version of it on platforms that appeal to various demographics searching for engagement activities, such as meetup.com, Facebook, eventful.com, and downtownmidland.com. Over time, these different modes of engagement can help cultivate a stronger collective identity and sense of purpose for Midland residents. Developing a sustained understanding of what the community stands for fosters connection during times of challenge and uncertainty (Hogg, 2010).

An emphasis on inclusivity also necessitates considering new and creative ways to accommodate a larger number of CA participants. As previously discussed, the CA can allocate existing spots in its current structure for underrepresented perspectives. CA organizers might also hold special abbreviated sessions that experiment with other formats, such as weekend CA "camps," social media CA groups, or online webinars. Depending on resources, organizers might also hold multiple cohorts per year by leveraging the alumni facilitators to curb administrative overhead. Regardless of the city's ability to manage more participants, a mindful sensitivity to inclusion and perceived exclusion will make the CA more accessible to every resident, thereby increasing Midland's social capital and cultivating civic engagement.

**Approach and Content for a Citizen-Centered Academy**

Beyond recruitment and access, we introduce a participatory and co-creative approach to cultivate a more citizen-centered academy. In this section, we recommend incremental adjustments to the program content, utilizing Midland's four strategic pillars as a guiding framework. We also propose a series of four new exercises with corresponding appendix guides to weave into the CA curriculum, including: Strengths and Values, Community Exploration Guide, Citizen-to-Citizen Coaching, and Storytelling. We offer this new framework with the intention that it will lead to mutually valued outcomes among Midland residents by: (a) making content delivery less didactic and more interactive; (b) giving residents the ability to engage in program content in experiential, hands-on ways; (c) creating space for discussion and bi-directional learning between city leaders and residents; (d) providing opportunities for residents' self-directed exploration of municipal and community topics that align with their interests and strengths; and (e) leveraging the CA as a means to collectively imagine Midland's future.

The new activities are designed to be interwoven into the existing CA, so we do not advise increasing the program's duration beyond the 10 sessions. Rather, we suggest that organizers examine what is currently working well based on their experience and participants' feedback, and trim other content accordingly. We defer to the organizers' expertise to determine how to best incorporate and adapt our recommendations to fit the CA.

**Building on the four strategic pillars.** As a guiding framework for the following content interventions, we recommend that the CA integrate Midland's existing four strategic pillars into the curriculum at the outset. As aforementioned in the situation analysis, these four pillars to foster a thriving community include: building our livelihood, developing our talent, caring for our people, and enjoying our community (Appendix B; Midland County, 2017). Early in the CA's agenda, we recommend explaining the process that defined these pillars and

discussing participants' perspectives on them.  This step can help bridge any disconnect with residents who were not able to participate in the original 2014 strategic planning process and foster a sense of co-ownership.  Transparency and inclusion in the decision-making process is key to creating a sense of fairness and procedural justice, which increases participation, builds trust, facilitates agreement, and sustains momentum (Greenberg, 2007; Hearld et al., 2013).

We then propose that participants organize into four different working groups, one per strategic pillar, based on their strengths and intrinsic interests (see more details below).  CA facilitators can help ensure that groups have a diversity of strengths, backgrounds, perspectives, expertise, and experience.  These pillars will serve as a lens for each group to keep in mind as they conduct the following exercises to discover their strengths, explore the community and gather insights, co-create solutions, and share stories.  Working together toward their chosen pillars will also give participants a shared purpose as they progress through the CA.

## Specific Interventions

**Strengths and values exercise.**  As mentioned in the literature review, character strengths are positive, universal personality traits and characteristics that describe how we think, feel, and behave, and these traits are stable and consistent over situations and time (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).  We recommend that participants take a pre-class assessment before the first CA session and follow the provided exercise (see Appendix F – Strengths and Values Exercise). The Values in Action (VIA) Classification is a widely-used, research-based survey that describes universally-valued strengths and virtues that enable the good life (Niemiec, 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).  The survey results reflect the character strengths that a person most frequently values and puts into action across situations.

Based on their top strengths and interests, we recommend that CA participants self-

organize into four strategic pillar working groups during the first session.  Knowing character

strengths will help participants self-identify with one of the pillars, as well as provide them with

a common vocabulary to talk about themselves with their fellow working groups.  For example,

those who rank high in "love" and "kindness" strengths might lean toward the "caring for our

people" pillar, to capitalize on those qualities.  Those with signature strengths of "perspective"

and "prudence" might connect with the "building our livelihood" pillar focused on economic

development and infrastructure.  Those with "hope" and "love of learning" strengths might be

drawn to the "developing our talent" pillar focused on education.  Those with "creativity" and

"appreciation of beauty and excellence" strengths might prefer the "enjoying our community"

pillar.  Operating from character strengths increases well-being and makes people more capable

of overcoming obstacles, maintaining social connections, and building on successes (Bowers &

Lopez, 2010; Elston & Boniwell, 2011).  This framework of strengths and pillar-based groups

provides an additional layer of purpose and engagement throughout the CA.

  **Community exploration guide.**  Once participants form into their working groups and

discuss the intersection between their interests and strengths, the community exploration guide

will help them explore their communities in the context of their chosen pillar (see Appendix G –

Community Exploration Guide Materials).  This exercise can occur in tandem with the regularly

scheduled CA sessions.  The community exploration guide materials will help participants

broaden their perspective and deepen their understanding of the city's objectives with questions

that enable them to see through their neighbors' point-of-view.  The questions explore what

organizations are currently working in a strategic pillar's domain, who the current initiatives

serve, who is not being served, and who could potentially be harmed by the initiatives.  The

prompts also help participants elicit stories about what is working and what is not, discover

potential root causes, imagine ideal scenarios, and call for specific ideas on how they can be part of making these future visions a reality.

After a few weeks of community exploration with this exercise, CA participants can review, share, and synthesize their findings within their groups to reveal underlying patterns, community needs, and meaningful insights. The working groups can then discuss what they learned as an entire class to spark ideas, foster connection, and generate new opportunities. This approach fosters camaraderie and self-transcendent behavior through collective investment and ownership in a shared community-oriented goal (Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Working with an integrated sense of purpose also leads to positive feelings, collective identity, neighborly actions, and more productive outcomes (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012; Haski-Leventhal, Ben-Arieh, & Melton, 2008).

**Citizen-to-citizen coaching.** Next, we propose a generative peer-to-peer approach for participants to voice needs, co-create solutions, and get immediate practical help. A citizen-to-citizen coaching activity enables participants to cultivate a culture of giving and expand their social networks and resources by leveraging one another's strengths, wisdom, and ingenuity (see Appendix H – Citizen-to-Citizen Coaching). Giving is a style of interacting that focuses on others' needs and how we might add value by sharing our knowledge, skills, ideas, and connections with others (Grant, 2013).

In this exercise, participants gain and share insights through quick round-robin consultative rounds in which individuals form groups of three, and they take turns having one person ask for help on a specific area from two others who act as coaches. We encourage city officials to join this exercise as an opportunity to convey what assistance or partnership they need from citizens to be successful, and vice versa. It is an invitation to express needs and to

receive feedback, questions, and requests.  This activity can be integrated into any of the existing

CA sessions or in the context of the pillar workgroups.  This reciprocal exchange can uncover

and clarify misunderstandings and demystify latent needs and opportunities.  Meaningful

participation in this type of activity also fosters empathy, efficacy, social justice, and social

cohesion through shared emotional commitment and reciprocity (Peterson et al., 2005).  This

exercise underscores how a relational process can build trust and support, empower individuals

to self-organize, and strengthen social action through individual and institutional strengths (Diaz,

2014; Yager-Elorriaga & McWhirter, 2014).

   **Storytelling exercise.**  Finally, a storytelling exercise can be done during an in-class CA

session, or as a homework assignment in tandem with the community exploration guide (see

Appendix I – Storytelling Exercise).  For this activity, ask participants to divide into pairs and

share a story with each other about a time when they felt valued and recognized in the

community, and when they felt that they contributed toward the greater good.  The participants

then debrief the experience in pairs and with the bigger group, sharing how it felt both to tell the

story and to listen to the story.  CA facilitators should encourage participants to reflect on

whether any insights or patterns emerged from the stories.

   Similar to the citizen-to-citizen coaching exercise, this storytelling exercise can be

integrated into any of the existing CA sessions.  Individual and community challenges are often

complex, without easy answers or quick solutions.  Stories can be an effective means for

residents and city officials to share existing efforts within the community and to reframe

opportunities that can affect positive change.  Stories also help capture the various types of civic

engagement already occurring that may not be immediately obvious, measured, or valued.

Moreover, storytelling facilitates bonding, bridging, and a sense of mattering by developing a

culture of deep listening and conversation. It helps foster empathy, compassion, and mutual respect by providing new perspectives (Bloom, 2013). Finally, it provides an avenue for CA participants to sum up their experiences of Midland at its best.

## Conclusion

The pursuit of community-wide well-being brings forth many opportunities for the application of positive psychology, and the city of Midland presents a unique prospect to explore human flourishing at scale. While our proposal is by no means comprehensive and admittedly excludes addressing economic uncertainty and other material challenges facing Midland, our aim is to provide a foundational first step from which inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement can emerge. Our recommendation to leverage the existing Citizens Academy considers the complex scope of possibilities and draws on the foregoing situation analysis and literature review.

The core of our findings indicates that communities with robust social capital have higher civic engagement, and research shows that a sense of mattering, fairness, and belonging are key factors to cultivate social capital. To that end, our application plan and appendix artifacts offer proactive ways to infuse inclusionary and citizen-centered approaches to the CA's recruitment, content, and assessment. The collaborative outreach efforts serve as bonding and bridging agents among residents, city officials, and other groups they encounter during this enriched program. The participatory method enables a more diverse representation of residents to shape what matters to the community and co-create Midland's future. We hope these insights and recommendations will help manifest Midland's vision of tomorrow: "Together, Forward, Bold: An exceptional place where everyone thrives" (Novak 2014).

**Appendix A – City of Midland Community Survey Questions**

*[Situation analysis: Online survey questions administered between January 24-30, 2017 to Midland community members via Qualtrics and E-CityHall]*

1. **Describe your role in the Midland community.**

2. **Think of a time when Midland had a high point when the city was most alive, engaged or effective. What do you think were the reasons for this?** In other words, what were the breakthroughs, innovations, or insights for this high point, initiative, or experience? What made Midland come alive at this time?

3. **What about Midland brings out the best in its residents?** In other words, when do people in Midland feel most engaged in the community? What enables people to bring their best to Midland?

4. **Imagine that you wake up tomorrow, it's 2027 and the community of Midland is thriving. What do you see that is new, different, and better about Midland?** In other words, tell us what's happening when the community has become what you most want it to be (in relation to Midland's citizens, community, organizations, businesses, government, recreation, churches, and/or leaders). What does it look like?

5. **What are the three things you'd never want to change about Midland?** In other words, what is at the core of making Midland, "Midland"? What do you value most about Midland?

6. **What do you think are the biggest obstacles to community well-being in Midland?** In other words, what are the biggest challenges you see to Midland becoming the best version of itself?

7. **Anything else come to mind?** In other words, anything else you think may be relevant for us to know?

8. **Would you be open to a potential follow-up interview?** If yes, please provide your contact information below. (Name, Email, Phone, Title)

**Appendix B – "Exploring Our Future" Document (Midland County, 2017)**

*[Situation analysis: Overview of Midland's existing four strategic pillars]*

**Exploring Our Future: Category Names**
**January 9, 2017**
*Midland's Mission: Together-Forward-Bold. An exceptional place where everyone thrives.*

Proposed Category Name: **Building Our Livelihood**

| | |
|---|---|
| Key performance areas: | *Economic development, infrastructure* |
| Description: | Midland County creates and sustains competitive advantages for existing and future businesses.  We are well-connected and invest in our physical and technological infrastructure. |

Proposed Category Name: **Developing Our Talent**

| | |
|---|---|
| Key performance areas: | *Talent, education, youth development and engagement* |
| Description: | Midland County offers high quality education and learning opportunities throughout life.  Our community nurtures a skilled workforce and places high value on post-secondary learning.  We provide opportunities for children and youth to realize their hopes and dreams. |

Proposed Category Name: **Caring for Our People**

| | |
|---|---|
| Key performance areas: | *Human services, social services, poverty, housing, mental and physical health, public safety* |
| Description: | The Midland community provides a coordinated and comprehensive system of supportive health and human services so that all may thrive.  We encourage self-sufficiency and accept our individual responsibilities to collaborate to create the safest community in the country. |

Proposed Category Name: **Enjoying Our Community**

| | |
|---|---|
| Key performance areas: | *Arts, culture, entertainment, recreation, diversity, community leadership, environment* |
| Description: | Midland County is a vibrant hub of arts, culture, entertainment and recreational opportunities.  We are committed to equality and inclusion, and we welcome, embrace and accept all people.  We are a sustainable community that values and protects its natural resources. |

**We develop, nurture, and benefit from extraordinary leaders who work together to create community success.**

**Appendix C – 2017 Citizens Academy Current Course Outline (Tisdale, 2017)**

*[Situation analysis: Current Citizens Academy curriculum]*

*Session 1: Wednesday, January 11*
**Topics:** Welcome, Brief History of Midland, and City of Midland 101
**Host:** Maureen Donker, Mayor; Gary Skory, Midland County Historical Society Director; Jon Lynch, City Manager
**Location:** City Council Chambers, Midland City Hall, 333 W. Ellsworth St.

*Session 2: Wednesday, January 18*
**Topics:** County Government 101, County-wide Elected Officials, Midland County Courts, and the Juvenile Care Center
**Presenters:** Bridgette Gransden, Midland County Administrator/Controller; Ann Manary, Midland County Clerk; Michael J. Beale, Midland County Circuit Court Judge; Scott Stephenson, Midland County Sheriff
**Location:** Midland County Jail, 101 Fast Ice Drive

*Session 3: Wednesday, January 25*
**Topics:** City Finance 101 and the Midland Fire Department
**Presenters:** Dave Keenan, Assistant City Manager; Chris Coughlin, Midland Fire Chief
**Location:** Fire Station One, 816 E. Haley St.

*Session 4: Wednesday, February 1*
**Topics:** Engineering and Utilities
**Presenters:** Brian McManus, City Engineer; Joe Sova, City Utilities Director
**Location:** Midland Water Plant, 2607 Bay City Rd.

*Session 5: Wednesday, February 8*
**Topics:** Parks & Recreation and Public Services
**Presenters:** Karen Murphy, City Director of Public Services
**Location:** Municipal Service Center, 4811 N. Saginaw Rd.

*Session 6: Wednesday, February 15*
**Topics:** Midland Police Department, City Human Resources, and City Attorney's Office
**Presenters:** Cliff Block, Midland Police Chief; Carol Stone, City Director of Human Resources; Jim Branson, City Attorney
**Location:** Law Enforcement Center, 2727 Rodd St.

*Session 7: Wednesday, February 22*
**Topics:** Planning & Community Development, Downtown Midland, Economic Development, and Senior Housing
**Presenters:** Brad Kaye, City Director of Planning & Community Development; Selina Tisdale, City Community Affairs Director; Becky Church, Midland Tomorrow Vice President of Operations; Kim Samborn, City Senior Housing Manager
**Location:** Washington Woods Senior Housing, 821 Cambridge St.

***Session 8: Wednesday, March 1***
**Topics:** Geographic Information Systems, Midland Community Television, and the Library
**Presenters:** Dan Brumm, City GIS Technician; Melissa Barnard, Grace A. Dow Memorial Library Director; Matt Richardson, Manager of MCTV and Library Communications
**Location:** Grace A. Dow Memorial Library Community Room, 1710 W. St. Andrews

***Session 9: Wednesday, March 8***
**Topics:** City Communications and Coffee with City Council
**Presenters:** Selina Tisdale, Community Affairs Director; City Council Members
**Location:** Currie Municipal Golf Course Clubhouse, 1300 Currie Pkwy.

***Session 10: Wednesday, March 15***
**Topics:** "Who Wants to Be a Midlandaire?" Game Show and Graduation
**Location:** City Council Chambers, 333 W. Ellsworth St.

**Appendix D – Measurement**

*[Application plan: Measurement recommendation]*

In any application of positive psychology, it is important to measure the efficacy of the proposed interventions.  At the core of our proposal, we recommend adjustments to the Citizens Academy (CA) program.  Based on our research, our application aims to utilize key positive psychology constructs to increase Midland's social capital and thereby bolster civic engagement. In this appendix section, we identify a usable scale to measure the impact of our recommended changes on CA graduates.

Civic engagement is a complicated construct to measure since varying definitions and conceptualizations exist.  As our literature review indicates, we argue for defining civic engagement as a manifestation of social capital (Grillo et al., 2010).  Indeed, an examination of measures of social capital that contribute to overall civic engagement yielded a diverse range of measurement instruments, from assessing volunteerism and community involvement to quantifying trust and social networks (Prewitt, Mackie, & Habermann, 2014).  It is important to take these various approaches into consideration.  However, to implement a more immediately usable measure, Doolittle and Faul (2013) examine two distinct aspects of civic engagement— attitude and behavior—in their Civic Engagement Scale (CES).  The CES consists of 14 items that distinguish between respondents' personal beliefs about community involvement and their actual actions.  Because of the brevity of this survey and the practical nature of its results, we recommend it as a good starting point in assessing the civic engagement of CA graduates.  We expect this measurement tool to be a significant addition to, but not a replacement for, Midland's current approach of tracking when graduates are appointed to municipal boards and commissions (J. Lynch, personal communication, March 11, 2017).

We recommend a four-step approach to administer the CES measure: an assessment of

past CA alumni, a pre-intervention assessment of current participants, an immediate post-assessment, and a long term follow-up (Doolittle & Faul, 2013). First, CA organizers should administer the CES once to past CA alumni. This can serve as a baseline to measure the effects of our proposed adjustments to the CA with future alumni. Second, on an ongoing basis as a pre-intervention assessment, CA organizers should administer the CES to CA participants at the start of their first day. This will establish baseline data to compare against the effects of the program on each individual participant. Third, on their last day, participants should take the CES once again. Analyzing pre-and post-CES assessments provides CA organizers with the ability to compare changes in attitude or behavior of the participants influenced by the program. Comparing these scores to those of previous alumni may also indicate any effects of our proposed interventions to the CA. Fourth and finally, CA organizers should administer the CES to CA graduates six months to a year after their participation. It is possible that the participants' behavior civic engagement score might increase between the immediate post-assessment and the long-term follow-up.

The goal of this measurement instrument and approach is to detect a small test of change. While we cannot attribute improvements in the CES measure directly to the changes to the academy, the improvement can serve as an indicator of sustained civic engagement in Midland. On the other hand, a decrease would provide a valuable opportunity to explore what aspects underperformed and what modifications might increase engagement.

While we offer a brief survey scale for measuring the direct effects of the updated CA on participants' civic engagement, it is important to keep additional modes of measurement in mind. CA organizers and city officials can offer supplementary opportunities for citizens to share feedback on the CA after participating. In the spirit of creating inclusive and generative civic

engagement, listening to both the concerns and positive feedback of CA graduates will allow organizers to continue tweaking the program in iterative ways that further increase civic engagement. Indeed, immediate measurement is often the most useful for applied interventions of positive psychology because it allows for responsive adjustments in the moment (L. Brandwene, personal communication, March 5, 2017).

Furthermore, we suggest that CA organizers consider incorporating a question after the CES scale about the programs' inclusiveness, to further broaden its reach and increase social capital (Oxoby, 2009). One way to do this is to ask participants to consider who is not present in the program, and then include these groups in subsequent CA recruitment efforts for the following years. In addition, city officials might want to expand disseminating the CES to citizens regardless of their participation in the CA. Although a broadened pool of respondents means that increases in engagement cannot be solely attributed to participation in the academy, positive results over time could indicate a potential spread of the CA's impact across Midland. Consistently applying these measurements should allow CA organizers to reliably and systematically examine the efficacy of our recommendations to foster inclusive, sustainable, and generative civic engagement in Midland.

**Appendix E – Civic Engagement Scale (Doolittle & Faul, 2013)**

*[Application plan: Measurement scale recommendation]*

## Appendix

### The CES

*Attitudes.* In this section, there are eight statements that are designed to measure an individual's civic attitudes. For the purpose of this study, civic attitudes have been defined as the personal beliefs and feelings that individuals have about their own involvement in their community and their perceived ability to make a difference in that community. Please indicate the level to which you *agree* or *disagree* with each statement.

| | Disagree | | | | | | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel responsible for my community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. I believe I should make a difference in my community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. I believe that I have a responsibility to help the poor and the hungry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. I am committed to serve in my community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. I believe that all citizens have a responsibility to their community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. I believe that it is important to be informed of community issues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 7. I believe that it is important to volunteer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8. I believe that it is important to financially support charitable organizations | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

*Behaviors.* In this section, there are six statements that are designed to measure the behaviors that indicate a level of civic engagement. Civic behaviors have been defined as the actions that one takes to actively attempt to engage and make a difference in his or her community. Please indicate the level to which you have participated on a scale from *never* to *always*.

| | Never | | | | | | Always |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am involved in structured volunteer position(s) in the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 2. When working with others, I make positive changes in the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 3. I help members of my community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 4. I stay informed of events in my community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 5. I participate in discussions that raise issues of social responsibility | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 6. I contribute to charitable organizations within the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Appendix F – Strengths and Values Exercise**

*[Application plan: Content exercise]*

(Adapted from Niemiec, 2016)
Identifying character strengths and values helps participants connect their own identities and intrinsic motivations to the rest of their experiences within the Citizens Academy (CA). Operating from an individual's character strengths increases well-being and makes people more capable of overcoming obstacles, maintaining social connections, and building on successes. Knowing character strengths will help participants understand why they might want to focus on one of Midland's four strategic pillars, and give them better language to talk about themselves with their fellow working groups. Prior to the first CA session, facilitators will have printed lists of the character strengths. CA facilitators will also describe each of the four strategic pillars and have locations in the room for participants to self-organize into their chosen pillar at the completion of Part A.

***Recommended Pre-Class Assessment (to be completed prior to the first CA session):***
- Instructs participants to go to viacharacter.org and take the Values in Action (VIA) character strengths assessment. It will be up to the participants whether to take the free version or the paid version of the survey with a longer analysis.
  - Note: For those who complete this pre-class assessment at viacharacter.org, the top 5-7 resulting character strengths reflect those strengths that they most frequently value and put into action across situations (hence the name "values in action"). The rest of this exercise supplements these findings by exploring other strengths that they may value but may not put into action.

***In-Class Part A – Values in Action Toward Selecting One of the Four Strategic Pillars:***
- Ahead of the first session, facilitators will print copies of the full list of the VIA Classification of Character Strengths for each of the participants to explore this topic in-class. Pre-existing formats are available at: http://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths/VIA-Classification
- Participants will mark those strengths that they most value within themselves and that are fundamental to their core with a "V" for value.
- Then, they will mark those strengths that they most frequently observe and currently put into action with an "A" for action.
- Participants will select one of the four strategic pillars that they believe best aligns with the strengths they most value and want to put into action.
  - Note: Midland's four strategic pillars are: building our livelihood, developing our talent, caring for our people, and enjoying our community.
- Participants will then organize into small working groups by their chosen pillar. CA facilitators can help guide this process for those who need and want assistance, and to ensure that each working group is diversified and sufficiently represented. Each pillar working group does not need to have the same number of people, and any difference in size can give city officials an indication on where residents' interests and preferences lie.

***In-Class Part B – Strengths Discussion within Each Chosen Pillar Working Group:***
- Once in their breakout working groups by pillar, each group will have a small discussion about their character strengths.  Questions for group discussion can include but are not limited to:
    - Think about a time when you felt most alive or most yourself, what character strength(s) were you exhibiting? / Think about a time when you really shined and were functioning at your best, what character strength(s) were you exhibiting? / Think about a time when someone really "got" you, what did they see in you?
    - Think of a time when you were anxious, stressed or struggling; what strengths did you use to move forward?
    - What character strength(s) did you select as being in line with your values that perhaps are not showing up in your actions?  What can you do to help close this discrepancy?
    - What character strengths strength(s) are calling you to your chosen pillar?  What character strength(s) will you bring to your pillar working group?
    - What character strength(s) do you bring (or hope to bring) with you here to the CA?  To Midland?
    - How might you use your character strength(s) to connect with others?  To connect with those whom you already know?  To connect with others in your community with whom you may not regularly interact?
    - How might you use your character strength(s) to better engage with your community?  To better engage with Midland?

**Appendix G – Community Exploration Guide Materials**

*[Application plan: Content exercise]*

The following Community Exploration Guide will help Citizens Academy (CA) participants broaden their perspective on their chosen strategic pillar.  The included worksheets and prompts are designed to help participants see the city's objectives through their neighbors' point-of-view, then to synthesize their findings to reveal meaningful needs and insights.

*Instructions for CA Organizers and Facilitators:*
- After the strategic pillars have been covered, the strengths exercise conducted, and pillar groups have been created, supply participants with these handouts to conduct their community exploration around their respective pillar goals.
- Allow for a few weeks to conduct the 3-5 interviews of friends, neighbors, or other peers.
- Before participants synthesize the findings on their own, facilitate a discussion during a CA session using a few questions from the Synthesis Prompts document to help participants think about meaningful patterns in their interview responses.
- Discuss in-class how these perspectives can help frame their CA experience and greater civic engagement.

## COMMUNITY EXPLORATION GUIDE

### OBJECTIVE

Write out the detail of the pillar objective you chose.

### DISCOVER: Reflection

Based on the explanation of your chosen pillar you heard during the academy, what programs, initiatives, or organizations support this aim in Midland today?

How effective do you think the city is today in fulfilling this objective?

Who stands to gain the most from this objective? Why? Could anyone be un-intentionally harmed by this objective? How might that be avoided? Who's not being served that ought to be?

### DISCOVER: Peer Interviews

Next, have a conversation with 3 - 5 friends or neighbors. Read the description of the pillar objective to your interviewee. Then, use the questions in the Peer Interview Worksheet to guide your interview.

### SYNTHESIZE

Now review your interview notes and your own reflections. Use the prompts on the Synthesis Guide to help you identify patterns, missing pieces, and areas of opportunity.

# PEER INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

(Read the description of the pillar objective to your interviewee): What do you think that means?

_____

_____

_____

What programs, organizations or other initiatives do you think currently support [the pillar objective]?

Who stands to gain the most from this objective? Why? Could anyone be un-intentionally harmed by this objective? How could that be avoided?

Who stands to gain?

Who may be harmed?

Who's not currently being served by this objective that should be? Why?

**PEER INTERVIEW WORKSHEET // 2**

Tell me a story about one of these organizations, programs or initiative's successes. Now tell me a story about a time where there was a missed opportunity. What was the root cause of the success? Of the missed opportunity?

Success story

Cause:

Missed opportunity story

Cause:

Imagine you wake up and 10 years have passed. You love the scenario you wake up to with regard to [the pillar objective]—what is it? What do you see that's new, different, better, and successful? How do you know? What do the services and programs look like? What would you most value and most love to be a part of in the scenario? What's happening with residents? What's happening with city services, technology, the community, churches, community organizations, etc.?

What are three things that can be done right away to help make your 10-year vision a reality?

## SYNTHESIS PROMPTS

Review your notes from your peer interviews and your own reflections. Use the prompts on this worksheet to help identify patterns in interview responses, areas of opportunity, and underscore shared and unique visions of the future. Record your notes in another location.

---

What about your interviews surprised you? Which responses did you least expect? Why? Which responses were most consistent with your own perspective?

Did your friends and neighbors identify the same organizations and initiatives that are currently working on the pillar objective? How effective do they think Midland is at pursuing the objective today?

Who did people say this objective serves? Who could it harm? Who doesn't it serve but should? Are the people that it could harm the same as the people it should be serving?

Review the stories you heard. Were the success stories consistent? Different? Were they diverse, but capture a similar theme?

Review the stories you heard. How many areas of opportunity did the missed opportunity stories reveal? How were they similar?

Review the root causes of the stories you heard. What were the similarities? Do you see an overarching theme amongst them all?

What are the commonalities in your 10-year vision? Differences? What do these visions tell you about Midland? Try writing a tagline that summarizes the overlapping themes of the visions.

How did people's 10-year visions draw on the success stories and account for the opportunity stories they told? What do the similarities and differences tell you?

Compile, then categorize the aggregated list of ideas for immediate action toward the 10-year visions. What do the categories tell you about the suggestions? What do they implicate might be missing?

Who are the common groups, people or organizations that have come up in the responses? How are they being described? What responsibilities do they have in the explanations you heard?

Think again about the people this objective's programs and services ought to be serving: How might you learn more about the people and their situations? What aspects of their context might you learn more about in order to make programs, initiatives, and organizations more effective?

---

As you continue through the Citizens Academy, use your observations as a lens for what you learn. You now have a unique perspective on one of Midland's key objectives that extends beyond your own purview. How will you incorporate this perspective into your Citizen's Academy experience? How will it change your involvement in community and civic life?

**Appendix H – Citizen-to-Citizen Coaching**

*[Application plan: Content exercise]*

(Adapted from Grant, 2013; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014)
Peer-to-peer consulting offers an environment for citizens to generate and exchange creative ideas quickly. Participants can voice their needs, co-create solutions, and get immediate practical advice (30 minutes - 1 hour). This activity enables participants to cultivate a culture of giving and to expand their social networks and resources by leveraging one another's strengths, wisdom, and ingenuity.

*Instructions for this In-Class Exercise:*
- Invite participants to reflect on a clear and specific question, challenge, idea, or area of need for which they would like to receive advice.
- Ask participants to divide into groups of three with people whom they don't already know well or who have a diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, expertise, and experience. Have them sit facing each other in a triangle.
  - Note: City officials and Citizens Academy organizers are encouraged to join this exercise as an opportunity to convey what assistance or partnership they need from citizens to be successful, and vice versa. It is an invitation to express needs and to receive feedback, questions, and requests.
- For each round, one participant is the "client" and the other two are "coaches".
  - Note: Please clarify to all participants that the expectation is not for them to commit to providing follow-up help beyond this brief exercise (unless they voluntarily elect to do so). It is simply meant to be a quick round-robin consultation to spark fresh ideas, form connections, and gain new perspective.
- The client spends 1-2 minutes sharing a question, challenge, need, or action idea.
- Coaches ask clarifying questions for 1-2 minutes.
- Coaches provide feedback and generate ideas, suggestions, and advice for 5-6 minutes.
- The client spends 1-2 minutes thanking and appreciating the consultants for their advice and sharing the most valuable takeaway from the exchange.
- Instruct participants to switch roles at the end of the round. After three rounds, all participants will have played the client once and the coach twice.
  - Note: If more time is needed to resolve issues, remind participants to ask more concrete and clear questions.
  - Also, note that two rounds of 10 minutes per person is more effective than one round of 20 minutes per person.
  - Facilitators can choose to do another set of rounds by having participants form into a different group of three and repeat the exercise, to expand perspectives and multiply connections. This exercise can also be repeated at a later session.
- After three rounds, have all the groups reconvene to debrief and share about the experience. In the debrief, discuss what it felt like to ask for help in this setting; what participants found most surprising about asking for help; did the help come from the sources they expected; what might this reveal about asking for help; how might this change the way they look at community support systems?

## Appendix I – Storytelling Exercise

### *[Application plan: Content exercise]*

(Adapted from Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014)
Storytelling is an exercise to facilitate bonding, bridging, and a sense of mattering that develops a culture of deep listening and conversation. Individual and community challenges are often complex, without easy answers or quick solutions. Storytelling helps foster empathy, compassion, and mutual respect by providing new perspectives. It also helps capture the various types of civic engagement already occurring in the community that may not be immediately obvious, measured, or valued. This activity can be done during a Citizens Academy session or as a homework assignment for participants to conduct with others in the community.

### *In-Class Exercise:*
- Ask participants to group into pairs with someone they do not know well, and invite them to share a story with each other about **a time when they felt valued and recognized in the community,** *and* **when they felt that they contributed toward the greater good.**
  - Note: Feel free to use or adapt the suggested prompts below.
- Instruct the listening partner not to interrupt or try to resolve anything. Rather, the listener only asks questions for clarification or elaboration, such as "Tell me more, go on, what else, and then what happened?" Practice listening without making judgments or attempting to respond right away.
- Ask the pair to switch roles and repeat the exercise.
- Afterwards, ask partners to debrief the experience and share with each other how it felt both to tell the story and to listen to the story. Reflect on whether any insights or patterns emerged from the stories.
- Debrief as a wider group in class. Invite a few volunteers to share something surprising that they heard from their partner.
  - Note: People do not recount their partner's whole story during the discussion; they simply share an insight or takeaway.

### *Alternative In-Class Format:*
- As an alternative to grouping participants into pairs, you can use storytelling to conduct speed introductions and have people quickly get to know each other, along the lines of speed dating.
- Divide the group in half and arrange chairs in two concentric circles, with the chairs facing each other. One half of the group sits in the inner circle of chairs and remains in place throughout the activity. The participants seated on the outer circle rotate every six minutes.
- Each person shares a three-minute story that answers one of the suggested storytelling prompts below. The group facilitator or timekeeper calls time after each 3-minute turn, and after six minutes, those seated on the outer ring move over one chair clockwise. Repeat until the outer group goes around in a full circle.
- Note: This speed introduction format works well for groups who do not know each other well to learn new things about one another through quick storytelling. Unlike the first exercise above, however, this alternative format does not give participants enough time to

engage in deep listening and conversation.

***Homework Assignment (can be done with the community exploration worksheet):***
- Ask participants to interview a community member, neighbor, leader, activist, volunteer, or someone else. Encourage them to reach out beyond their familiar social circle, or assign them to interview someone that the group identifies is not represented in the room.
- The participants will ask their interviewee to tell them a story that answers one of the suggested prompts below.
- Debrief and report back on the assignment as a wider group in class. Invite a few volunteers to share something they found insightful or surprising that they heard.

***Suggested Storytelling Prompts (select one or adapt the questions to form new ones):***
- Tell me about a time when you felt heard, seen, or respected in the community. What made you feel valued and recognized?
- Tell me about a time when you or someone you know contributed toward the greater good of the community.
- What does community engagement mean to you? How do you like to get involved with and contribute to your community? Describe an example of what you do (or don't do) and why.
- Who do you know that is very active in the community, and how so/in what way? Who do you know that celebrates others who give to the community, and how do they show appreciation?
- Tell me about a time when the city was engaged, most alive, and working well together? When was the city its best self?

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