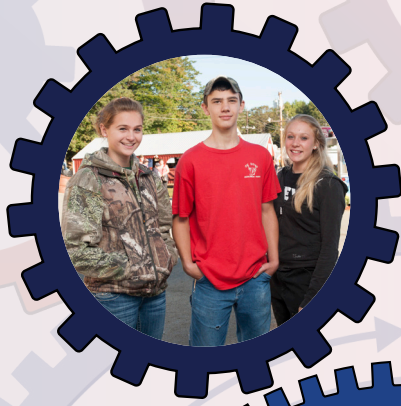


LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH

A Guide to Building Community and Bridging Divides



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About this Guide

This document, produced by New Hampshire Listens and designed by Laurel Lloyd at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire, is intended to help you create a plan of action for collecting civic health information, and can be a guiding charter to refer back to. Some of the categories below require deeper conversation, and when they do we have marked this with some tools to help you have those conversations.

About New Hampshire Listens

New Hampshire Listens is a civic engagement initiative of the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire. We envision a New Hampshire where everyone is connected, engaged, and heard in decisions that impact their lives and where all have equitable access to justice, opportunity, and liberty. We partner with public officials, organizations, and leaders in all sectors to gather broad input that can lead to improved practice and policy. We bring people together to talk, listen, and act so communities can work for everyone.

About the Carsey School of Public Policy

The Carsey School of Public Policy mission is to address pressing public issues by conducting research that is unbiased, accessible, and rigorous; offering education that provides students with research, policy, and political skills; and engaging with communities to bring people together for thoughtful dialogue and practical problem-solving.

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Introduction to Civic Health

We all want to live in a place we feel good about. For instance, none of us enjoy going to a public meeting filled with yelling and angry disagreement. And if there is a community crisis, like damage from a bad storm or a tragedy, we want our neighbors to help each other out so we can navigate the hard times. Most of us want to live in communities where people trust each other, where people feel their local government listens to them, and where lots of people care about the community. But we don't necessarily know how to build these types of communities. For instance, many of us grapple with the questions below:

- ▶ **How do we build meaningful relationships with others in our community?**
- ▶ **How do we live together harmoniously in communities where people come from different backgrounds or think differently than each other?**
- ▶ **How can we support opportunities for people to talk respectfully across divides?**
- ▶ **How do we ensure that local democracy is functioning with integrity?**
- ▶ **How do we build a culture where leaders are ethical and the way we make community decisions is fair for everyone?**

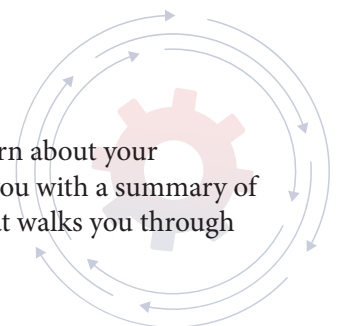
All of these questions relate to the “civic health” of a community. The term “civic health” may be new to many people. Civic health explores how “healthy” our communities are in a civic sense. Civic health refers to the behaviors, beliefs, and actions related to civic and political engagement, at the local, state, and national level. It measures factors like how much people vote, stay informed about important issues, help out neighbors, trust each other, volunteer, attend public meetings, and talk to people different from themselves. We have a video [here](#) sharing more information about civic health.

We think civic health information will help communities to thrive and for democracy to function at the local level. If we understand the civic health of a community, we can reduce polarization and encourage trust, resiliency, and connection. We have created a guide to help people in local communities collect civic health information so that you can better understand how your community is functioning civically and take actions to strengthen local civic life.

At the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire, we have been exploring how to collect important information about “civic health” for the past fifteen years. We have published three indexes about the state of New Hampshire’s civic health, in 2009, 2012, and 2020. These state indexes have shown us that NH communities can benefit from studying their civic health, identifying strategies for improvement, and then implementing these strategies at the local level. To learn more about New Hampshire’s statewide civic health work, click [here](#).

What’s in this Guide?

This guide provides communities with different tools and resources to help you learn about your community’s local civic health and take action to strengthen it. Below we provide you with a summary of the sections in this guide. We have also created a video that you can access [here](#) that walks you through this Local Civic Health Guide.



Guide Overview

Section 1: What is Civic Health?

The first section of the guide introduces readers to civic health, including definitions and descriptions. We also provide a summary of different kinds of ways to measure civic health so that you can begin to think about what you want to know about your community.

Section 2: Getting Started

This section provides you with tools for getting started on exploring civic health at the local level. It includes a template to help you create a strategy for civic health work, thinking through factors like who you want to reach, what you want to learn, and how you will share what you learn with others. In this section we also provide you with an exercise to better understand “who is in our community?” and “where in our community do people gather?”

Section 3: Building Equity into Your Process

Here, we have included an exercise that we suggest you do early on. It will help your working group thoughtfully discuss all the different people who live in your community. We have included an exercise that helps you to think through how to be thoughtful about all the people who live in your community, including people who may not feel welcome or respected.

Section 4: Collecting Information about Local Civic Health

This section is foundational for your project—and provides different methods of how to collect information about local civic health. You will find a guide to develop a civic health survey, information about how to host community dialogues, guidance for interviews and focus groups, and engagement techniques focused on the arts. We also provide a guide of how to use existing data already present about your community available from the state or your city or town.

Section 5: Analyzing Information: What Does it All Mean?

Once you have gathered some information, the next task is to sort through it and make sense of it. We have included a resource sheet of how to find people who might help you with data analysis, as well as a tip sheet of how you can do it yourself.

Section 6: Communicating the Results to the Public

After making sense of the information you have gathered, you will want to share it with the public. You might want to host a public presentation or community conversation, write a report or news article, or create a video. Some communities create dashboards so they can continue to track civic information over time. We have provided several tools to help you consider the best fit for your community in terms of publicizing what you have learned.

Section 7: Sustaining Your Work and Making Change

After exploring local civic health, you may be wondering what you could do next. We have created some exercises to help you address areas in need of improvement and sustain your work over the long haul. Ultimately, your work should lead to an increase of justice and wellbeing in your community.

Appendix A: Applying State Findings at the Local Level

This section shares interesting trends we saw at the state level in 2020 related to New Hampshire’s civic health. We provide some graphs and prompts that you can use to have conversations about how your local community is similar or different from statewide trends.



1 What is Civic Health?

Overview

This first section of the guide includes definitions and descriptions of civic health.

Defining Civic Health

In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index*, we define civic health as: “the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in activities that strengthen wellbeing, enhance interconnections, build trust, help each other, talk about public issues and challenges, volunteer in government and non-profit organizations, stay informed about their communities, and participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges.”

We have grouped civic health measures into three categories:

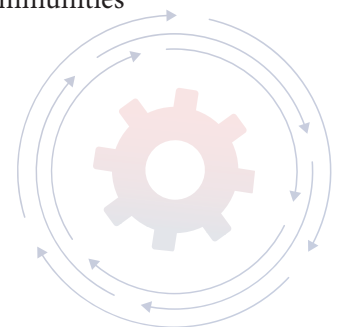
- ▶ Civic awareness and engagement
- ▶ Connecting in community
- ▶ Volunteering and giving

Below we elaborate on what measures make up each civic health category.

Civic Awareness and Engagement

Civic awareness and engagement refers to how people feel, learn about, and take actions related to political, societal, or local issues. Measures of civic awareness and engagement include:

- ▶ Receiving civics education
- ▶ Voting, including presidential, midterm, and local elections
- ▶ Engaging with public officials
- ▶ Attending public meetings
- ▶ Keeping up with the news
- ▶ Posting about the news online
- ▶ Trusting government and local media
- ▶ The degree to which people feel they matter and can make an impact in their communities
- ▶ Identifying obstacles and barriers to becoming engaged
- ▶ Media literacy and looking critically at news sources
- ▶ Transparency and accountability by local government and public institutions



Connecting in Community

Connecting in community includes how people interact and talk with others about important issues facing their community and the nation, and how much they trust and help out neighbors.

- ▶ Connecting with friends and family
- ▶ Connecting with neighbors
- ▶ Connecting with people of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background
- ▶ Doing favors for neighbors
- ▶ Helping out friends or extended family by providing food, housing, or money
- ▶ Getting together with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community
- ▶ Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends or family
- ▶ Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors
- ▶ Trusting the people in your neighborhood

Volunteering and Giving

The category “volunteering and giving” includes how much people are donating their time or money to serve their community or contribute to causes they care about. Measures of volunteering and giving include:

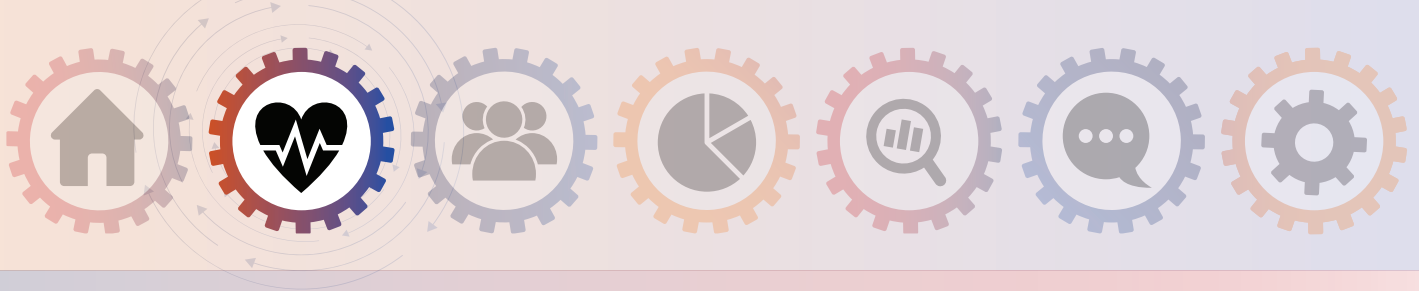
- ▶ Volunteering individually or as a group for an initiative or organization
- ▶ Charitable giving—donations of \$25 or more to non-political groups or organizations, such as a charity, school, or religious organization
- ▶ Political giving—donations of \$25 or more to political organizations, parties, or campaigns
- ▶ Group membership—participation in groups, including civic or service organizations, community groups, religious or spiritual communities, recreational groups, and political or advocacy groups

How to Strengthen Civic Health

Communities can improve their civic health by increasing opportunities to

- ▶ Connect with people different than themselves in ways that build trust and community
- ▶ Build skills to talk about public issues and productively address local challenges
- ▶ Remove barriers to engagement for groups participating less, such as youth or English language learners
- ▶ Access opportunities to volunteer or work with government and non-profit organizations
- ▶ Undergo civic education to learn how to participate and get local voices heard
- ▶ Offer training for people in public service about how to engage with the public
- ▶ Create programs that address disparities or threats in the community. For instance, if a community felt it was divided across politics, it might create a program to bring people on different sides of the political spectrum together to build a community garden or playground.





2 Getting Started

Overview

It can feel overwhelming to know where to start with civic health work. There are so many things you could explore, and so many conversations you can have to identify ways to strengthen and sustain your community's civic health. A good first step is to assemble a “working group” of about five people, ideally from different perspectives in the community, to simply chat about why you might want to gather information about local civic health, and how you could use that information.

We suggest this working group represents people from different political perspectives, professional and community roles, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, ages, genders, and other factors to ensure a diverse team. Consider including people in the working group who are “bridge builders,” who regularly connect across groups in your community. That being said, if you're uncertain about who to approach, the Community Mapping exercise included in this section is intended to help you identify other people in your community who might join your group.

The first tool in this section—**HOW TO CREATE A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH STRATEGY**—is intended to help your group think through the big picture of why a closer look at local civic health can be valuable. It includes questions about what you might want to learn, who you should involve in the process, what methods you want to use to collect information, and how you will share the information with the broader community. This strategy document will help you clarify your direction. For instance, you may want to focus on youth engagement specifically or you may want to start with a broad understanding of local civic health. Since plans evolve, we expect this will be a living document you will revisit and update during your civic health work.

The second tool in this section—**COMMUNITY MAPPING AND CIVIC TOUR ACTIVITIES**—includes a community mapping exercise, so your working group can identify all the populations in your community you want to reach. The Civic Tour allows you to assess local community spaces to see how much they discourage or encourage connection and healthy civic life.



HOW TO CREATE A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH STRATEGY

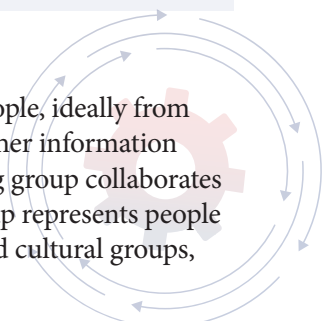
Goal: To create a strategy for your civic health work that includes why you are doing this work, how you will do it, and how you plan to share the results.¹

Instructions: This document is intended to help your local working group to create a plan of action for collecting civic health, and can be a guiding charter for your work to continually refer back to. Some of the categories below require deeper conversation, and when they do we have marked this with some tools to help you have those conversations.

What is a Working Group?

A good first step in your civic health work is to assemble a “working group” of 5 to 10 people, ideally from different perspectives in the community, to simply chat about why you might want to gather information about local civic health, and how you could use that information. We suggest the working group collaborates together to answer the questions in the sections below. We also suggest this working group represents people from different political perspectives, professional and community roles, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, ages, genders, and other factors to ensure a diverse team.

¹ The strategy template is adapted from Modus, a planning, design, and public engagement firm in British Columbia, Canada, <https://www.thinkmodus.ca/>.



What's the Point?

Why do we want to collect information about civic health? How will learning about our community's civic health be useful? Write a paragraph below summarizing "what the point is" behind embarking on this work.



For help exploring this issue, [check out our informative video on what civic health is.](#)

What Exactly Do We Want to Learn?

Consider some common goals for local civic health work below. Of these, what align most closely with what you hope to do? If none of these align, create your own learning goal.

- ▶ Do a comparison of how the local community compares with the state of New Hampshire civic health index. For reference, see the tool, [HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY COMPARE TO STATE CIVIC HEALTH TRENDS](#), on page 65.
- ▶ Gather data about the civic experiences of particular populations (e.g. people of color, youth, or low-income people).
- ▶ Gather data about particular aspects of civic health, such as voting, connecting with others, feeling like you matter, barriers to engagement, etc. (For a full list of these indicators, see page 46 or [go to this webpage.](#))
- ▶ Get people in the community talking about civic health and exploring this concept further.

Our learning goal(s) is:



Who Do You Want to Involve in the Process?

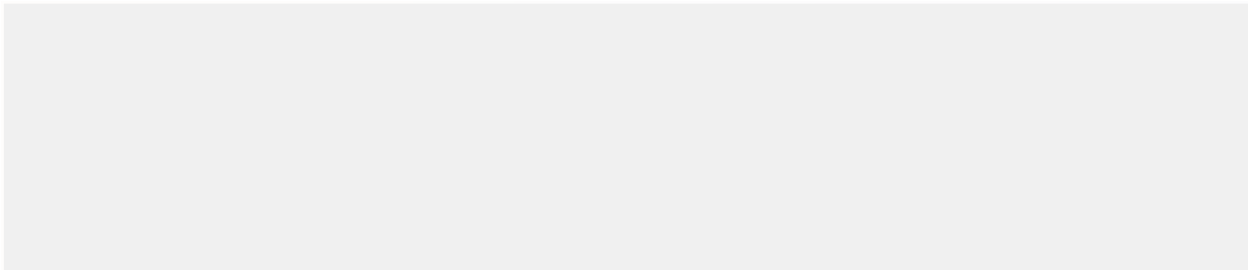
It's important to think through all the populations in your local community that affect or are affected by civic life—which is, generally, all of us! We have prepared a community mapping exercise on page 13 to help you think through who is in your community and who you want to engage in this process.



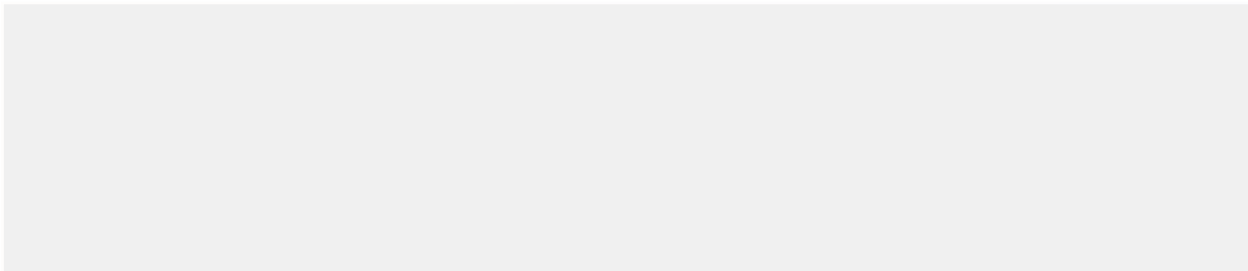
Everyone in your community is affected by civic health. People particularly interested and impacted by civic health might include school, government, and police leaders, New Americans, long-time local residents, youth, and many more populations.

There are two “whos” in civic health work. The first is “who” will be leading the work—a.k.a your working group who is likely leading the charge and reading this document. The second is “who” you want to collect data about and from, and who you want to engage in the process. After completing the stakeholder mapping exercise, please list below your “whos”:

- ▶ Who is the working group that will lead this project? What perspectives and background does each group member represent in the community? Consider role (e.g., town manager or mother of school-age children) as well as background (e.g., 70 year old hispanic conservative male or 25 year old white queer youth). You may decide to add members to your initial working group after conducting this exercise.



- ▶ Who are the communities that you most hope to learn about in this project? Consider roles as well as backgrounds, and list them here:



What Are Our Civic Health Methods?

We have provided several tools that you could use to collect information and have community conversations about local civic health, which are located in *Section 4: Collecting Information*. Please browse those tools and select one or more of those methods for your civic health strategy. You can also make your own methods if the ones we’ve created aren’t the right match, or if you want to do more.

Consider the list of tools below and identify which ones you would like to use in your project:

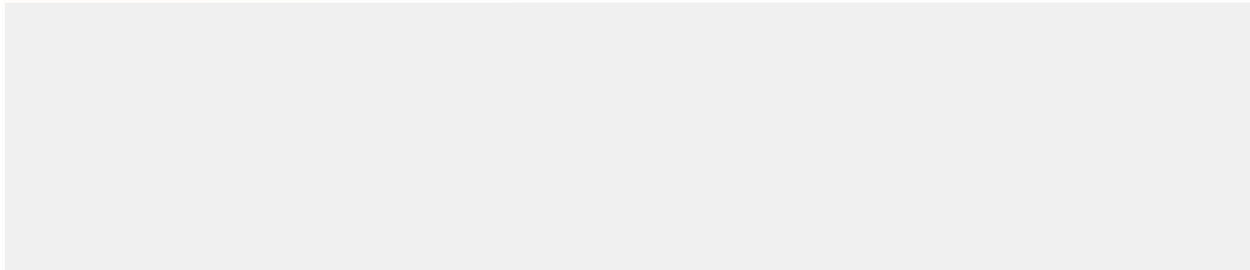
- ▶ Conducting a local survey to gather data, drawing off the **HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY** tool on page 37.
- ▶ Hosting a local dialogue using the **HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE** tool on page 28.
- ▶ Conducting one-on-one interviews with different community leaders
- ▶ Hosting focus groups with specific populations to learn about their experiences (e.g. youth or refugees or people with disabilities)
- ▶ Gathering data from existing resources
- ▶ Conduct a civic assessment, like those from the National Civic League’s Civic Index or the Healthier Democracies Participatory Governance Index
- ▶ Other _____

What Are the Key Values that We Want to Guide Our Civic Health Work?

The following values will guide how we plan, communicate, and implement our civic health project. Here are some sample values below to get your juices flowing.

- ▶ **Accessibility**, ensuring that multiple people in the community from different backgrounds can participate in the civic health data collection and meaning making.
- ▶ **Transparency** in how civic health data will be collected and used.
- ▶ **Accountability** in transparently reporting back to the community on the process and what we heard.
- ▶ **Equity** in hearing from groups who have not typically been represented in local civic life, potentially due to barriers or systems of discrimination.
- ▶ **Fun** in creating processes that people enjoy and find interesting and relevant.

Our key values are:



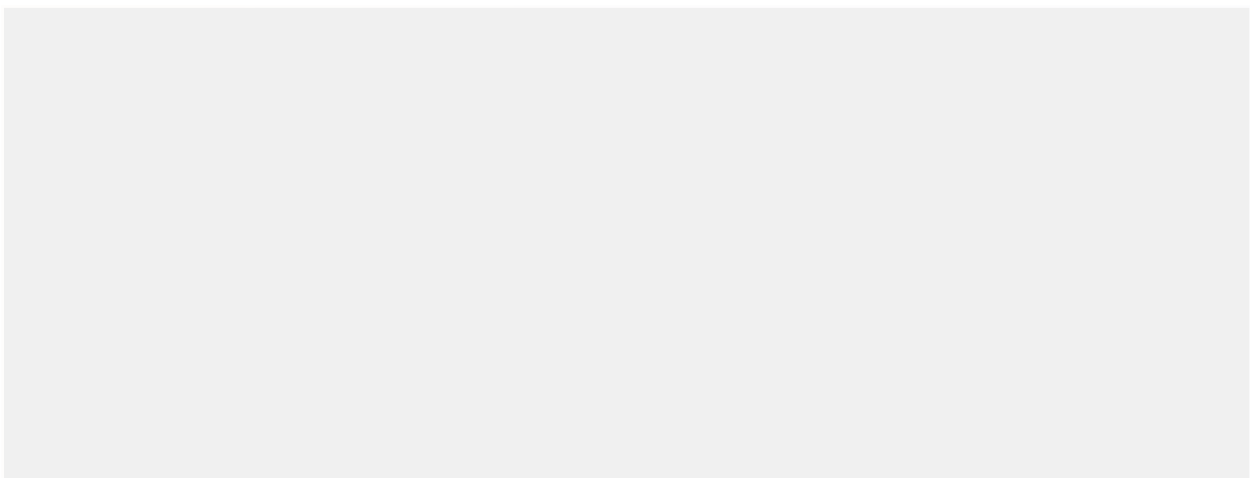
How Will We Make Sense of the Data?

What are the various streams of data you will have from this project? For instance, survey data could be one stream, whereas notes from a community conversation would be another.

Once you have collected civic health data, how will you make sense of it?

Do you have a team of people who will interpret the data, or will you hire a volunteer or consultant to assist you with data analysis?

How will you ensure that there is no bias in how the data is interpreted?



How Will We Share Information?

Once information about local civic health is collected and analyzed, how do you plan to share it with the community? For instance, you could:

- ▶ Post the results on your website
- ▶ Host a forum to share the results with the community
- ▶ Host a community dialogue to digest the results in small groups
- ▶ Create a report that you share with the community
- ▶ Work with local journalists to share information with the community



How Do We Plan to Use Civic Health Information?

It's also important to consider how you plan to use the civic health information, and to share this goal throughout the project. Here are some examples of how you could use civic health information:

- ▶ Inform a grant proposal or other funding to improve an aspect of local civic health
- ▶ Support changes in local policy to support an aspect of civic health (e.g. changing what time and where you hold public meeting, or changing policy to offer public meeting both online and in person)
- ▶ Support changes in programs and practice (e.g. shifting after school programming in schools to focus on civic education, or creating mobile voting booths near major employers)
- ▶ Simply learn and share information with the community, and encourage thought and conversation
- ▶ Catalyze a community-wide civic action plan that multiple institutions, organizations, and businesses contribute to

Key Issues, Risks, and Mitigation Strategies

Consider any issues or risks that may come up during your civic health work, and how you might address these challenges. See below for two examples and then make your own!

Issues and Risks	Mitigation Strategies
Covid Considerations The risk is that Covid rates may rise again, or even if they don't, not everyone in the community will feel comfortable with in-person interactions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Try to plan activities that allow for both in-person and online contributions.▶ Host in-person engagement events during warm weather seasons so people can interact outside.▶ Consider a pre-survey to gauge people's comfort with in-person engagement and follow up on the phone or video with people who are not comfortable engaging with others.
Inappropriate Input Some people may provide disrespectful comments during activities that are not moderated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Ensure that all activities are moderated, or facilitated.▶ Share "group agreements" across all activities to be clear about expectations of respect.



Issues and Risks	Mitigation Strategies
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COMMUNITY MAPPING AND CIVIC TOUR ACTIVITIES

Goal: This activity is intended to help a group of community leaders who are interested in civic health to learn more about who lives in the community and what places there are for people to come together. Civic health includes outcomes related to the quality of civic life in a community—things like voting, volunteering, talking to your neighbors, trusting local government, etc. Communities that have strong civic health exhibit lots of connection, participation, and positive activity, whereas communities with weaker civic health often experience isolation, distrust, and low participation. There are two activities in this exercise that are related:

The first is “community mapping,” where you can identify who the various populations are that you need to engage in your outreach and engagement. The second is a “civic tour” that will help you consider how local community spaces either encourage or discourage healthy civic life. Please assemble a group of at least 5 people, preferably from a range of perspectives and demographics in the community, to complete the tasks below.

Prep Work: Before doing this activity, you may want to find some information about who lives in your community. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau’s *Quick Facts* shows information about towns with populations of over 5,000. If your town is smaller than 5,000, you may want to ask the town hall if they have data about the different ages, races, genders, and other characteristics of people who live in the community.

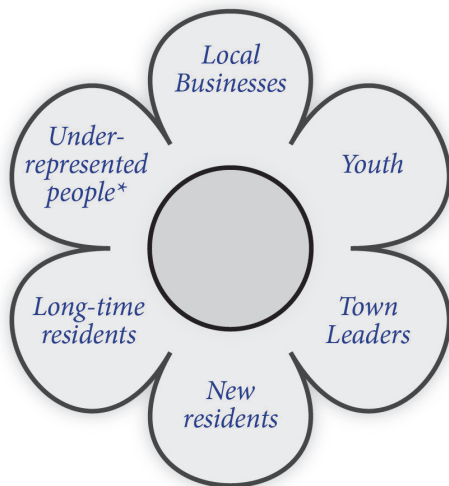
PART 1 – COMMUNITY MAPPING

Step 1: Creating a Primary Flower Map

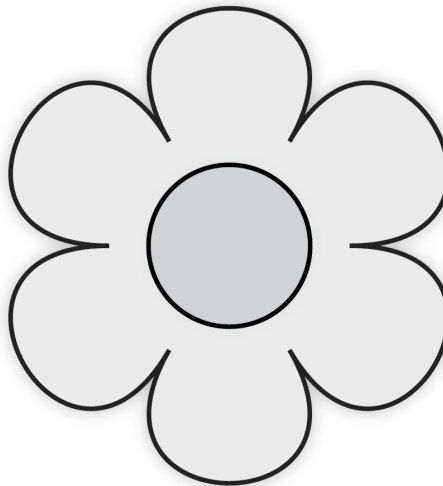
Please try to think of categories of people in your community who affect or are affected by civic life. At this point, do not identify specific organizations (like the Boys and Girls Club) but keep it to broader categories (like youth). You want to think of “categories of people” such as groups or sections of the community that share a similar characteristic, personal background, or career (e.g. business owners, low-income people, the Muslim community, the people who work in the trades).

See the sample flower, then create your own flower petals using the template on page 20.

Sample Flower



Create Your Primary Flower



**Such as people whose voices aren't often heard including BIPOC populations, low-income people, LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities*

Step 2: Making Secondary Flowers

Now take each petal from the Primary Flower and make it the center of a Secondary Flower. Within each Secondary Flower, brainstorm all of the groups that are connected to the theme of the Secondary Flower, and make these brainstormed groups the petals. For instance, see the Secondary Flower example—the theme is “town leaders,” and the petals describe groups connected to town leaders.

You will likely create 5 to 12 Secondary Flowers depending on how many petals you had on your Primary Flower. You should have a Secondary Flower for each petal on your Primary Flower. Sometimes, you may be able to combine two petals from the Primary Flower into one Secondary Flower.

Example of Secondary Flower

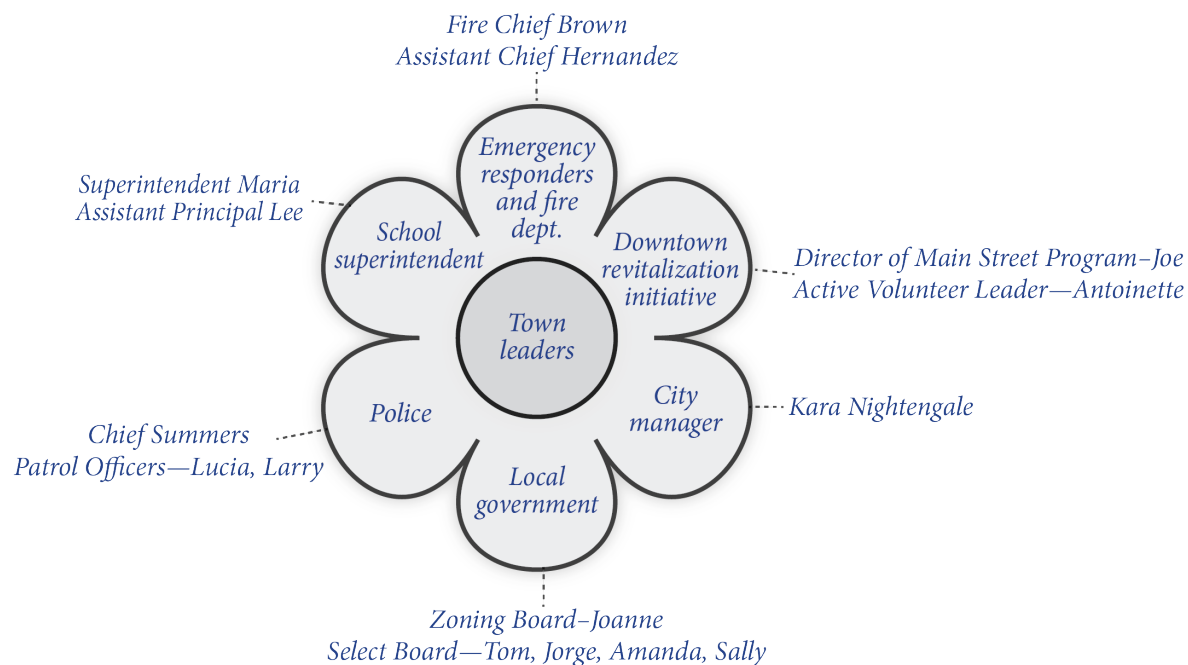


In the example above, the “town leaders” show a flower of people who affect civic life in the community. You want to make sure you also have flowers of people who are affected by civic life such as youth, seniors, people with disabilities, families, immigrants, people of color, republicans, democrats, women, etc. You might want to think about which populations you feel very connected to and which populations you feel disconnected from, as well as which populations are most vulnerable in the community and which wield the most power. Hopefully you can have a mix of all these factors!

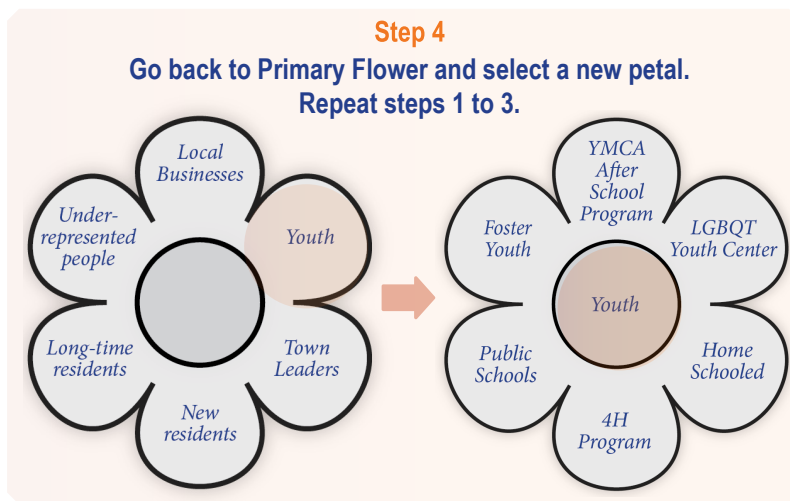
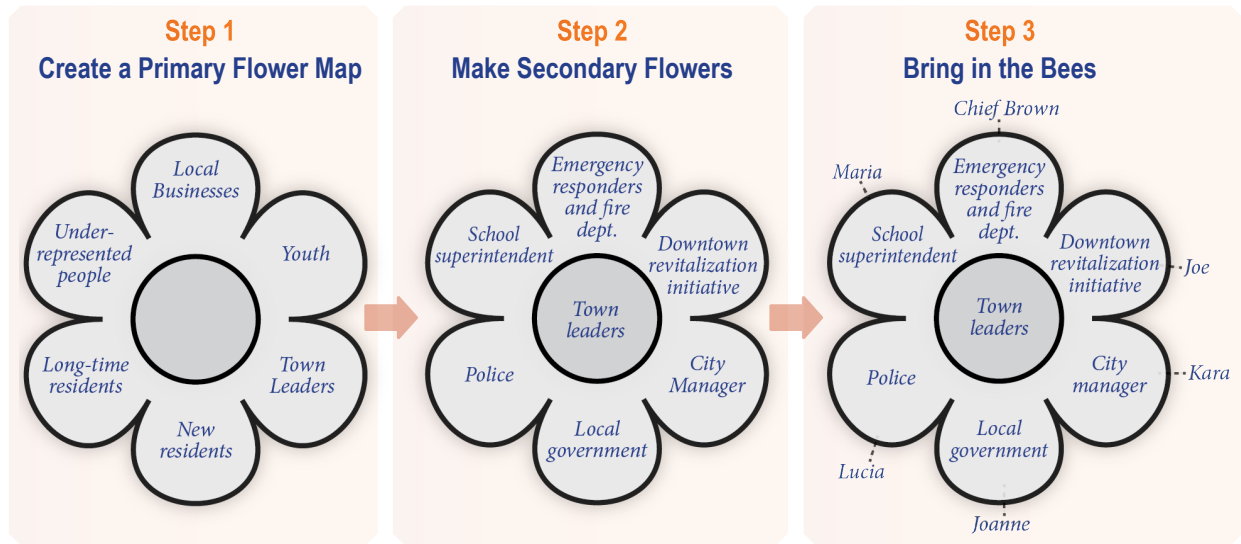
Step 3: Bring in the Bees

Don’t worry, these are friendly bees! Now that you have created each of your Secondary Flowers, you should surround each petal of the Secondary Flower with names of people who represent those groups in your community. For instance, if one of your Primary Flower Petals was “Town Leaders” and one of your Secondary Flower Petals from your Town Leaders theme was “fire department,” then at this point you might start to brainstorm actual names—like Chief Brown and Assistant Chief Hernandez, who serve as the Secondary Flower’s “bees.” Repeat the “bees” exercise for each petal of each Secondary Flowers until you have lots of bees buzzing around your Secondary Flowers.

Example of Secondary Flower with Bees

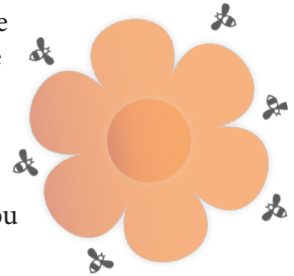


Growing Your Garden



Step 4: Looking at the Garden

- ▶ Out of the groups (Primary and Secondary Flowers) and individuals (bees) that you have listed, where do you feel like your group has strong connections already established that you can leverage to get people involved in local civic health work?
- ▶ Out of the groups and individuals listed, where do you lack connections? What relationships could you build, and who could you strategically build them with to bring those populations into your process?
- ▶ For instance, if you have identified that you want to bring underrepresented people into the process, and one of the populations you want to prioritize is lower income people, could you work with the local affordable housing agency leaders to figure out how to best engage these populations?
- ▶ What does this “garden” tell you about civic life in your local community? Where do you think some of your flowers experience strong civic health, and where do you think some flowers struggle and experience weak civic health?



PART 2: CIVIC TOUR

Purpose: The goal of the Civic Tour is to assemble a diverse group of people from your community to walk through public spaces together and evaluate how they help facilitate or may pose barriers to healthy civic life.

Step 1: Reflecting on Community Places

Ask your group to look at the garden exercise and consider the spaces and places that people from your garden have to connect. Consider the following questions:

Where in your community do people physically have an opportunity to come together? For instance, this could be a park, school, library, or community center. List out all the places.

Step 2: Identify Tour Places

Of the places you listed, now select 3 to 6 locations to conduct a Tour. Before you do this, your group that has been working on the flowers may want to take a look at that exercise to see if there are other people in the community who represent other aspects of the “flowers” that you want to bring into your group for the Tour. These individuals may have different perspectives and add helpful insight to your group.

To begin the Tour, ask individuals who work in the places you have selected to give you a tour. So for instance, if you listed out the town green, a grange hall, the police station, and the library during Step 1, now determine if you want to visit some or all of those places during the tour. Plan the Civic Tour for a date in advance that your group can all attend.

Step 3: Collecting Information

Reconvene your group, perhaps with some new individuals joining the local civic health efforts, and do a walk through of these places, preferably all on the same day, but it could span a couple of days within a week. The group should take notes about how the place connects to local civic health, and draw on the following questions. A notetaking template is also provided below for your convenience that corresponds to these questions.

- ▶ How does this place encourage connection in our community?
- ▶ How does this place discourage connection in our community?
- ▶ Does the place encourage people from different backgrounds to come together?
- ▶ Does the place feel like it attracts some kinds of people more than others?
- ▶ When you think back to all the flowers in your garden (or people in your community), are there groups that are missing from this space? If yes, why do you think they are missing?
- ▶ Is the place welcoming or unwelcoming? In what ways?
- ▶ How could it be more welcoming?
- ▶ Is the place accessible to all people in the community? Are there barriers to access for some groups?

Step 4: Digesting the Findings

Bring your group together to talk about each of your findings through the Civic Tour. What did you learn about the places in your community? Overall, do you have places that facilitate strong civic health, or do your places lack what they need to support healthy civic life? How could you work to build upon or change your places to make them stronger points of connection for all people in your community? What did this exercise tell you about civic health overall in your community?

Note-taking Form for the Walk About

If you like, feel free to use the note taking form below as you conduct your Civic Tour.

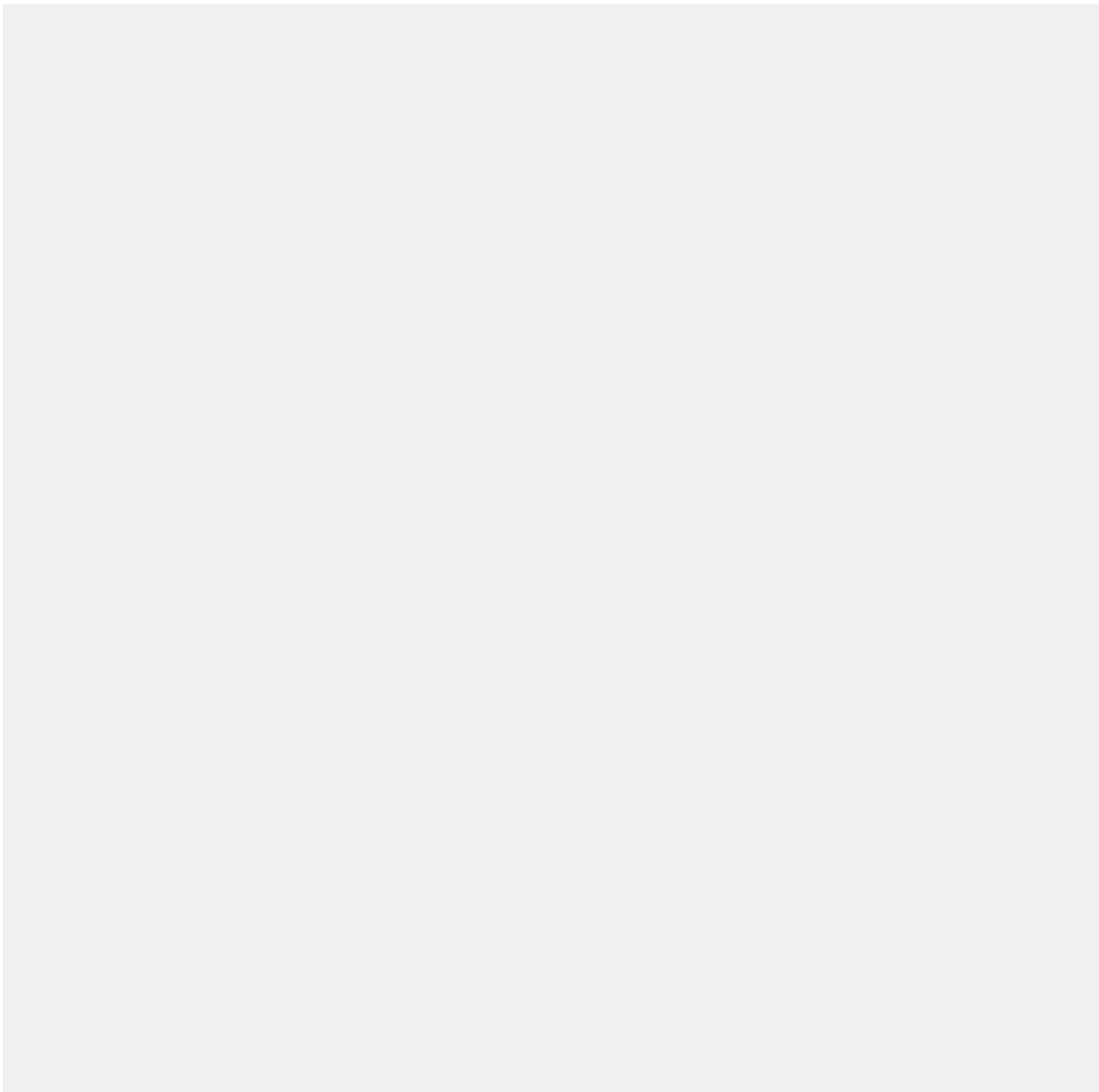
Question	Notes
Encourages connection?	Yes No Why?
Discourages connection?	Yes No Why?
Encourages connection across different backgrounds?	Yes No Why?
Attracts certain populations?	Yes No Why?
Populations missing from space?	Yes No Who is missing?
Welcoming or unwelcoming?	Wecoming Unwelcoming Why?
How could it be more welcoming?	Describe
Accessible to all people? Barriers to access?	Yes No Barriers:



Taking Action

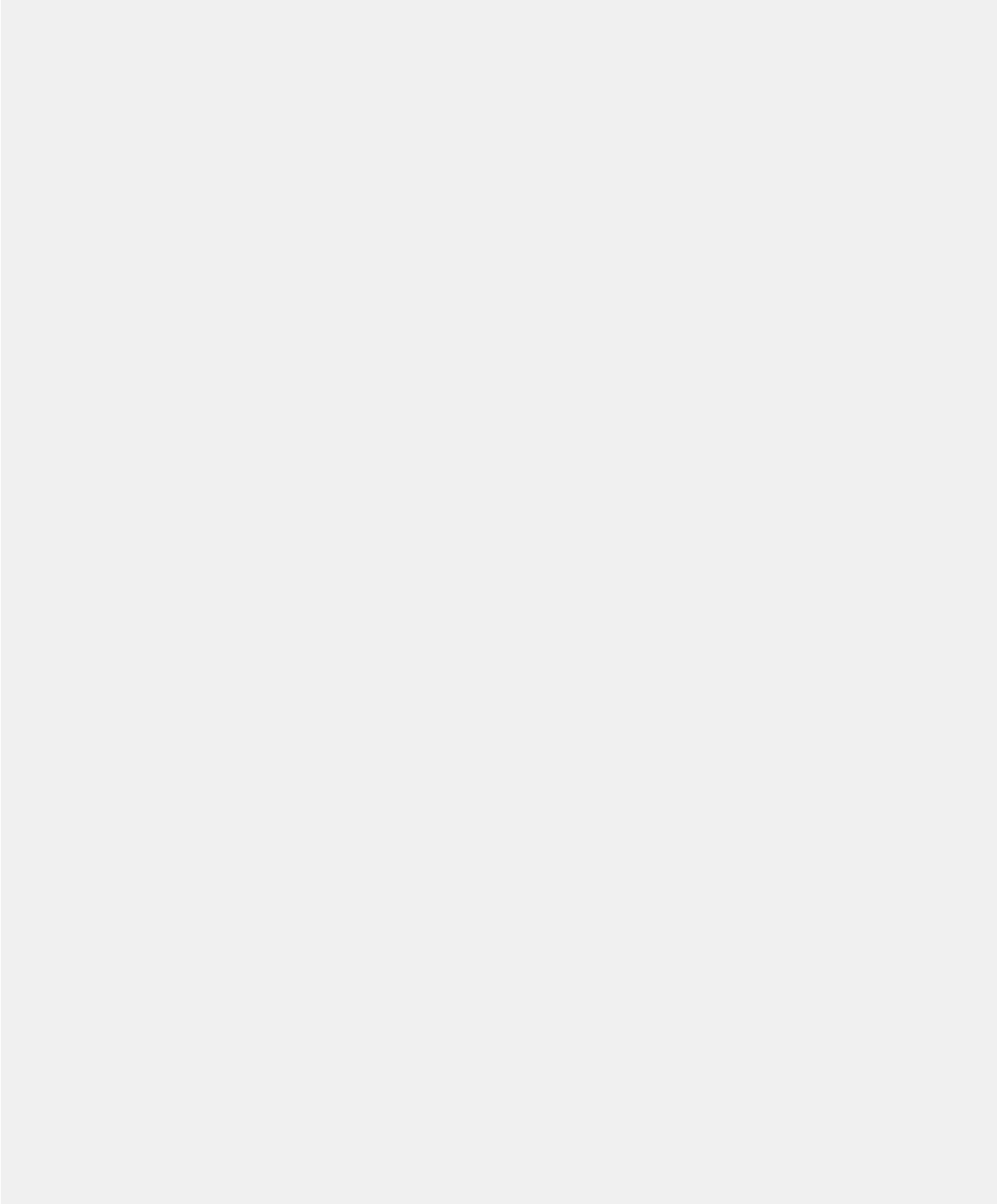
Here are some ways you can use the activities above to make an impact at the local level.

- ▶ If the Community Mapping reveals that certain populations are not involved enough in the community, could you approach some people in that community to talk about why this is? Doing so may help you to create partnerships, identify needed programs, or address barriers.
- ▶ As you tour different civic spaces, is there a way to reflect with the community about what you've learned? Could you host an open house or online meeting where people who did the Civic Tour share some of their observations for others in the community to comment on?
- ▶ The Civic Tour may identify needed renovations or new spaces so that the community can come together. Can you take these concerns to a city council or selectboard meeting to share what you've learned and continue the conversation?

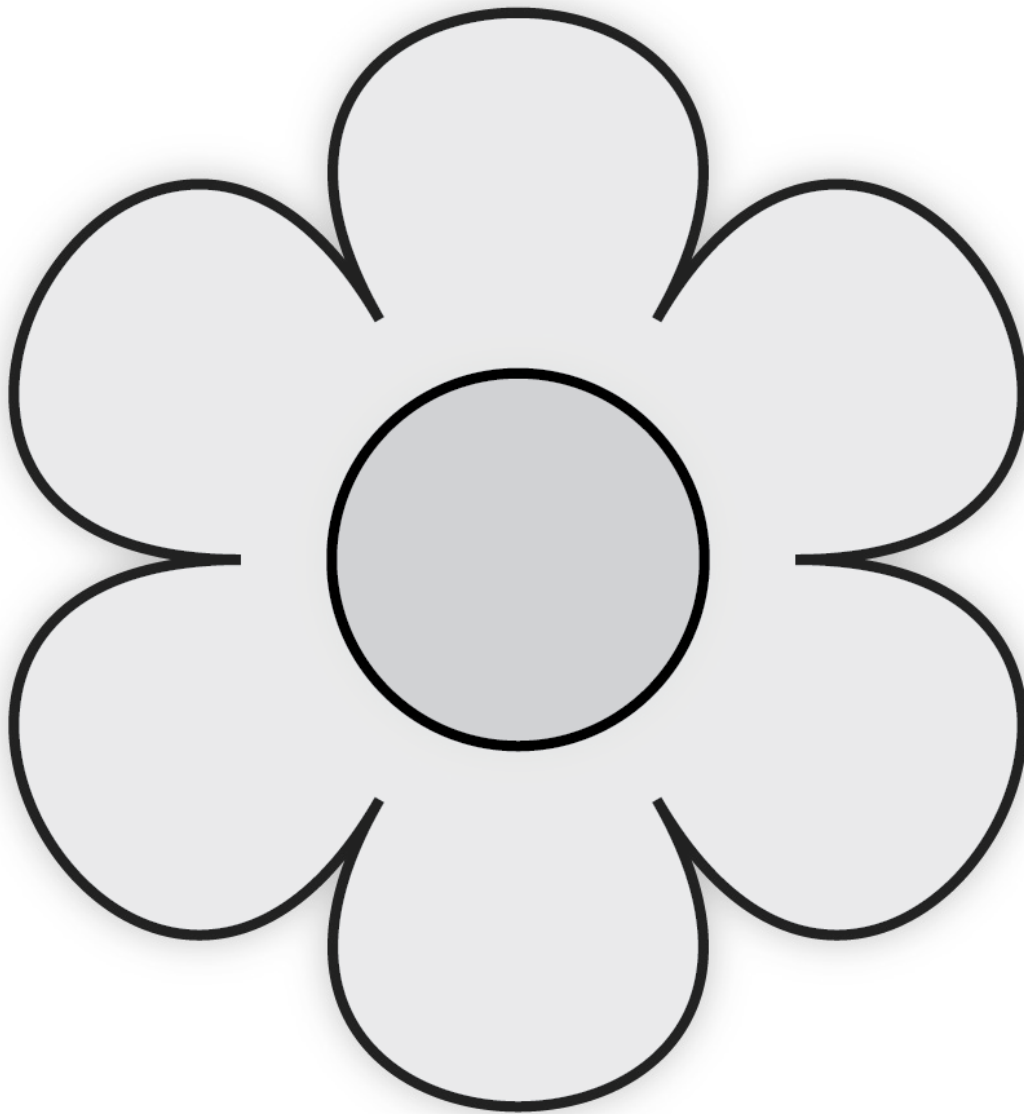


Conclusion

We hope this section of the guide has helped you get started with your work. Hopefully upon completing this section, you have identified a group to lead the vision for local civic health work, and you have created a strategy for your work. You have also started to think about who is part of your community, and what local spaces exist to bring the community together.



Flower Template





3 Building Equity into Your Process

Overview

In this section, we will help you think more deeply about how to ensure your process is one that considers fairness and equitable participation across many groups in your community. Take time as a group to reflect on and discuss stereotypes, personal biases (we all have them), and power dynamics present in the community.

Creating a Working Group

If you haven't already done so through the community mapping activity in *Section 2: Getting Started*, we recommend that you take some time to create a community working group for your civic health efforts. We recommend a group of 5 to 10 people who represent many different political identities, professional backgrounds, ages, races, genders, and abilities.

Identify groups in a community who are often unheard and unseen by others or have not had as much voice or power in public decisions. Include young people, older people, people of color, people across the political spectrum, lower-income people, people with disabilities, and people who may not feel welcome or respected. Make sure your work shows the complexity of people living and working in your community and how they engage (or maybe are missing the opportunity to participate) in civic life.

If you don't know people outside of your social circle and aren't sure how to approach these new folks, don't worry! Here are a list of strategies below you can use to bring in new perspectives to your civic health work:

- ▶ Approach a leader of a community organization in your local community or in the region that you know serves some of the populations you would like to reach out to but don't know yourself. An example would be the local director of an NAACP chapter or YMCA. Ask that leader if they would be willing to sit down for a coffee or video call so that you can share more about civic health and why you are hoping to reach the populations they serve. The leader may be able to make recommendations of people to engage in your process.
- ▶ Host an event aimed at attracting a particular population that you don't have many relationships with—like a welcome evening for New Americans who are living in the area or a cookout at a skate park for youth. You could have a table with information or make an announcement about your civic health work there to inform people about how to be part of your work.

Going Beyond the Usual Suspects—Who's Not Showing Up and Why?

The Community Mapping exercise in *Section 2* helps you consider the different kinds of people present in your community so that you can talk with them about civic health. We suggest that you intentionally listen to groups who traditionally have had less voice in your community. For instance, New Americans, refugees, and immigrants often offer valuable insights into public engagement, yet they may be less likely to attend public meetings traditionally held in municipal buildings and may prefer to meet at a trusted community center. Go to where people gather and keep updating the spaces and places you identify in your Community Tour. All of this will help you to gain a broader understanding of civic health in your community.



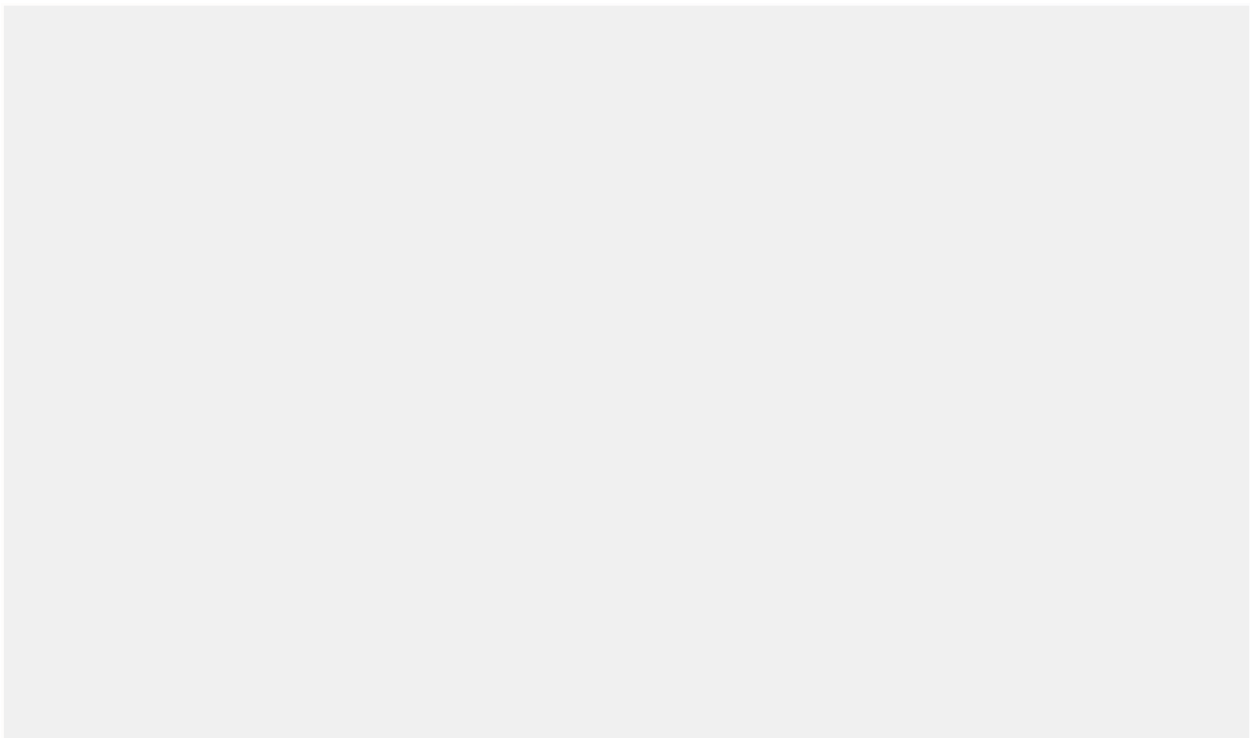
People have a number of reasons why they do not participate in civic and community events. You may hear or think that people do not care, but this is a common misconception. People engage and choose not to engage for a number of reasons. We know that people may not attend public meetings because they work second or third shifts. They may have children or other loved ones who need their care at home. Transportation is often a big reason people cannot access community resources—a well known infrastructure issue that affects overall civic health. People who aren't turning up to engagement opportunities may not trust the process or may find the engagement opportunities offered seem boring and not worth their time. Learning the reasons behind why people do and don't engage in your community is important.

It's also important to recognize that some communities have hurtful histories that impact why people don't want to engage in community life. This can be at all levels of community. For instance:

- ▶ An interpersonal conflict between a school superintendent and a parent may result in a parent feeling unwelcome at school events.
- ▶ In a community where there has historically been a lot of discrimination and hateful acts, like a hate group pamphleting a neighborhood—people of color may not feel comfortable attending community events.

Getting to know your community, including the good, bad, and ugly, is important to moving forward. Communities where one group dominates and others don't have much power can get complicated as there will always be groups that are frustrated with those dynamics. Relationships matter a lot. We find once the relationships are built across differences in the community, difficult conversations and change become easier, and civic health can grow.

Overall, we highly recommend you collect information about civic health at the local level. We also recommend your working group makes a strategy for listening and engaging all different types of people, including folks who have been frustrated with community life or who are not very present in it. Understanding the forces behind their actions will help you as community leaders to address civic health in the future.





DO LESS, DO MORE: STRATEGIES FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Goal: This tool is a way to explore ways to build equity into your civic health work.

Building Equitable Opportunities

Civic health outcomes require attention to fairness for them to be successful. For instance, if there are not equitable opportunities for voting, it affects who votes and who doesn't and can influence elections. Civic health outcomes can also affect inequities. For instance, if you don't trust others in your community, you may be less likely to want to see the same opportunities for everyone.

Building equitable opportunities for engagement in your communities is an ongoing and intentional process. Opportunities need to be designed collaboratively. Your working group needs to include processes for:

- ▶ building trusting relationships
- ▶ sharing power
- ▶ working collaboratively with different community populations
- ▶ reflecting on history and lessons learned

Equitable engagement can feel overwhelming at first. The good news: local leaders willing to work collaboratively can pave the way to systems change. Together they can consider their own leadership practices and habits to take steps forward together.

This “do less, do more list” encourages us all to be more reflective of patterns and practices. It is a list you can use to think through different challenges or dynamics you are seeing in your community, and is a way of reframing your thinking.

More and more, we are seeing people in organizations and communities demand authentic engagement in the decisions that impact their lives. And when it comes to rethinking a decades-old status quo, it's hard to know where to begin. The shifts in the table below can help you model equitable community engagement. These shifts can set the stage for more fair and equitable communities. The suggestions are low-cost, high-impact modifications. They are invitations for replacing “default” modes of engagement with opportunities to be more inclusive and creative. Even if you select just one thing to focus on from the list below, you'll be on your way to developing habits that can foster authentic engagement, collaboration, transparency, and social trust.

Do Less	Do More
“Why don't they ever come to things”	“How can we involve them in developing events?”
Emailing	Face to face conversations
Explaining why	Asking why
Relying on the same folks	Connecting with new and different groups of people
Designing and facilitating all the meetings	Building others' capacity to lead
Making assumptions	Looking for your own potential biases

Hosting events at the offices of government or organizations	Hosting events in the community
Marketing and public relations on behalf of who is leading the engagement (helping the public to “buy in”)	Inviting personal stories and listening to community experiences related to the topic
Looking for a quick fix or clear resolution	Sitting in discomfort and allowing the issue to be complex
Setting the agenda	Finding out what is important to others
Waiting to share something until it is a finished product	Bringing others in to design, refine, and communicate about a work-in-progress
Getting everyone on board	Embracing and exploring disagreement
Having all the answers	Admitting “I don’t know” or “I’m still learning”
Collecting and analyzing survey data behind closed doors	Sharing and making meaning of data with the people surveyed
Feeling stuck and overwhelmed	Confident in small concrete actions

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Taking Action

This section may cause you to do some reflection about the way local systems and policies are structured that discourage or encourage participation from people. You may also identify some personal skills you want to work on.

- ▶ When you think about the way the community has historically structured meetings or events, are there ways you could do it differently to make things more accessible, welcoming, and fair?
- ▶ Have you learned anything about yourself through this section that you want to reflect with a friend or colleague about?
- ▶ Do you want to learn about the experiences of someone else in your community after doing this exercise? How might you approach that person?



Conclusion

We hope this section of the guide has helped you to reflect on how to hear from everyone in your community. Knowledge is power, and understanding your community is key to strengthening civic health. Continual reflection on social equity can help us all create communities where everyone feels welcome, listened to, and valued.



4 Collecting Information About Local Civic Health

Overview

This section provides different methods of how to collect information about local civic health. These methods can help you understand where the strengths, assets, and challenges are in your community. In addition to information about how to host community dialogues, interviews, focus groups, and arts engagement techniques, you'll find tools to assist you. When gathering data, we suggest you have an end goal in mind. Data can easily become cumbersome. You can start small or use an approach that divides the work or is tiered and grows over time.

What Are Options for Collecting Data About Local Civic Health?

In every community there is an opportunity to collect quantitative data, which is usually easy to count numerically or display in a graph. There is also an opportunity to collect qualitative data, which includes stories, written feedback, and information on a person's experiences. Both of these sources are valuable in different ways. We suggest collecting data about local civic health by selecting one or more strategies from the list below:

- ▶ **Surveys**
- ▶ **Interviews**
- ▶ **Focus groups** with select populations who share a common experience (like youth or mothers or Ukrainian refugees)
- ▶ **Community dialogues**
- ▶ **Citizen photographers** who take picture of civic strengths or weaknesses
- ▶ Drawing on **existing community data** (like voting records by age)
- ▶ Using **existing civic assessments** with a group of community members to try to evaluate how your community is doing civically

Quick Glance at the Tools in This Section

HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE 28

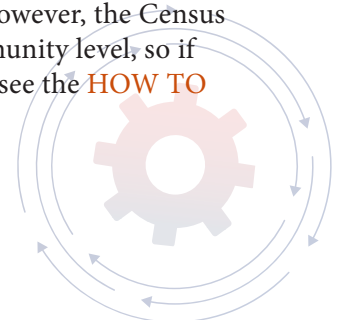
SAMPLE CIVIC HEALTH DIALOGUE GUIDE 32

HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY 37

YOU'VE ALREADY GOT INFORMATION! HOW TO EXPLORE EXISTING DATA ABOUT CIVIC HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY 46

Surveys

A common strategy to gather information about local civic health is a survey. We were able to write the statewide *2020 NH Civic Health Index* from survey data from the U.S. Census. However, the Census is not able to draw enough information about civic health at the very local community level, so if communities want survey data, they would have to run their own survey. Please see the [HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY](#) tool on page 37.





Interviews and Focus Groups

If you are interested in the experiences of certain people or groups in the community, you may want to conduct interviews or focus groups. Interviews are usually conducted with one or two people who are asked questions about their personal experience. Focus groups are usually conducted with a small group of people (4 to 10) who share a common experience, such as being under 30 or from a similar cultural group or work sector. Here are some sample interview and focus questions below you could draw upon:

- ▶ In what ways do you think people connect with others and participate in your community?
- ▶ In what ways do you see people being civically engaged—attending public meetings, voting, and paying attention to news?
- ▶ What factors do you think impact why people do not participate in community life?
- ▶ What do you think are some of the largest strengths in the community?
- ▶ What do you think are some of the largest weaknesses in the community?
- ▶ Have you participated in a community event where you were asked to share your point of view? What motivated you to attend? What was your experience like?
- ▶ What organizations or groups in the community do you think are doing the best job of encouraging people to participate and connect? Why?
- ▶ Do you feel like you matter to your community?
- ▶ Do you trust others in your community?
- ▶ Do you trust your local government?



Community Dialogues

By putting people in your community in dialogue about civic health, you may be able to explore how different people experience the community, where there are common themes, and where there is divergence. There is a lot of value in bringing people who are different and people who are alike in the community to talk about their civic experiences together. By listening to the experiences of others, this may help people to identify a common challenge or positive experience, or to share how their experience or thoughts differ from others.

We feel that the process of talking together about civic health can help build collective understanding about the issues. When planned thoughtfully, it is also an exercise in itself that builds local community across differences. We have provided several tools to help you lead a local conversation about civic health. You may even want to consider doing a series of conversations about civic health that build upon each other over the course of a few months. For instance, the Goffstown Public Library led a “civic series” in 2022 to help community members to explore civic health from many different angles. We have included two tools for community dialogues, including a tip sheet that outlines how to design a community dialogue process and agenda (page 28) and a sample guide for discussing civic health (page 32). The community dialogue process and agenda includes a list of sample “group agreements” for a dialogue conversation.

Or, if you want to keep it very simple, you could take the *2020 NH Civic Health Index* and use it to have a broad based conversation about how local people feel the statewide trends compare to their experience at the local level. In *Appendix A*, we provide some data points from the *2020 NH Civic Health Index* that may make for good local conversations. For instance, an organization in Georgia who wrote the *Georgia Civic Health Index*, called Georgia Family Connection Partners, took the statewide data findings to different counties to engage local people in dialogues about how their experiences locally compared with the state results.



Civic Photographers

Sometimes, pictures speak louder than words. There is a strategy called Photovoice that leads community members through taking photographs about a local community issue to help people think and talk about it. We all have different ways of making sense of big challenges and developing opportunities for change. We think using photography and other mediums helps people document strengths and challenges they see in local civic life. Interactive discussions with a local exhibit in a library, gallery, or school could also help generate engaging dialogue among a diverse group of community members. If you would like to explore these strategies, we recommend the following resources:

- ▶ The University of Kansas Community Toolbox, “Implementing Photovoice in your Community”
<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/photovoice/main>
- ▶ The Rutgers Organization, “Photovoice Factsheet”
<https://rutgers.international/resources/photovoice-factsheet/>



Tapping Existing Community Data

There is already data collected that may be helpful to you in understanding civic health at the local level. This could include datasets like local voting records and maps, public meeting minutes, the number of food pantries in town, arrest maps, and the proportion of seasonal residential/vacant homes. We have assembled a guide for you that shares many common datasets available at the state or local level in New Hampshire. Consider what information you may already have right at your fingertips! Please see the tool, [YOU’VE ALREADY GOT INFORMATION! HOW TO EXPLORE EXISTING DATA ABOUT CIVIC HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY](#), on page 46.



Using Civic Assessments as a Group Exercise

There are organizations who have created civic assessments for community leaders. These assessments include ways to evaluate how well people think their community is doing on a range of different indicators. We have identified two of these that we think are particularly useful. If you want to use these tools, we suggest you assemble your civic health working group and take a couple of hours to move through each assessment together. The first assessment we recommend is the *National Civic League’s Civic Index*. This tool is not to be confused with the Civic Health Index, although it has a similar name. The Civic Index examines how much “civic capital” communities have, meaning formal or informal relationships, networks, and capacities that communities have to make decisions and solve problems. Examples include assessing if leaders are transparent and collaborative, and if there is a culture where people work together on community problems instead of being confrontational. You can download the tool [here](#).

The second tool we recommend is the *Participatory Governance Index*, created by Public Agenda. The Participatory Governance Index examines how much of a commitment local governments have to community engagement practices, like funding, policies, and staff. It also examines how many programs and meaningful engagement opportunities your local government is offering. You can download the tool [here](#).



HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Over the years we have learned a couple key components that are helpful in designing an opportunity for community dialogue. These include considering how to frame the dialogue questions and prepare for a dialogue event, facilitation tips, and how to structure the dialogue process flow.

Framing and Preparation

In community dialogues, one of our key goals is to broaden our understanding of community issues and experiences. We are helping people generate their own new understandings of a situation through exchanges with each other. We are listening to understand. Here are a few starting questions to consider during framing meetings and preparation:

- ▶ What issues are important for your community's civic health? What is a question or topic that will bring people together across differences?
- ▶ What is needed to allow for an open and respectful dialogue for all group members? Remember, you can't control everything, but community-building is essential to a strong and meaningful dialogue.
- ▶ Who is the invitation to participate in dialogue coming from?
- ▶ Are there accessibility considerations to take into account so everyone can participate? Can differently abled people access the meeting space? Do you need to provide language translations or larger font print guides?
- ▶ Where will the dialogue take place? (community center, faith-based center, school, town hall, coffee shop, library, online etc.)
- ▶ How large do you want participant groups to be for the discussion? We generally find groups of 8–10 people work best if you want to provide lots of space for different voices to be heard.
- ▶ Will you provide facilitators for the groups, or will participants facilitate themselves using the discussion guide?

Agenda

Creating an agenda that people can follow along with can help to create transparency in the process. You could display an agenda on large paper or a projected slide, or provide participants with a paper agenda for the conversation.

Group Agreements

State some agreements for a dialogue before the group begins a conversation. These include guidelines such as respecting each other, listening, sharing talking time, etc. We have provided a sample "Group Agreements" list at the end of this document.

Creating a Dialogue Process (What Goes in the Agenda?)

Note: Below are some components we think create a good dialogue process. We have also created a sample dialogue guide that you can adapt or use, on page 32.

Meaningful Introductions

Beginning with meaningful introductions is another essential component of a community dialogue. By designing time for participants to meet and get to know one another we preserve our humanity and build a space for openness and opportunity for trust building. As a facilitator of a dialogue event, how will you

welcome everyone to the dialogue space and/or circle? This can be related to the reason for convening or a more human-personal icebreaker question (ex. What song are you listening to on repeat lately? What community hats do you wear?). We suggest outlining one or two introduction prompts in your dialogue guide.

Goals For Today

Stating a clear goal for the dialogue is useful to participants so that they know where to focus the conversation. You may want to include this goal at the top of a dialogue agenda for participants and facilitators to refer to.

Facilitators may also want to ask participants about their personal goals for the dialogue. Is there something the group would like to accomplish by the end of the meeting? Somewhere you'd like to end up?

Providing Background Information

Will participants need any background to be able to engage in the dialogue? Any clarification of language, history, context? You can provide some common information, like charts, a glossary of terms, or short articles, for participants to refer to during the conversation.

Exploring the Topic

Provide a range of questions and prompts to lead participants through a good discussion. You may want to have some key questions that you hope participants will discuss in the conversation. For meaty questions, you should allow ten to thirty minutes for participants to talk, especially if you want to make room for multiple voices.

When using big questions, provide smaller sub questions to help break down a big question. For instance, a big question might be something like:

- ▶ *What do you think the strengths and challenges are in your community when it comes to local civic life?*

Sub questions that help break this down might include:

- ▶ What would you identify as strengths of how people in the community connect with each other?
- ▶ What would you identify as strengths in terms of how local government interacts and collaborates with the public?
- ▶ What would you identify as challenges related to how people in the community connect with each other?
- ▶ What would you identify as challenges in terms of how the local government interacts and collaborates with the public?

Going Broad and Going Deep

You may want to include both broad and deep questions in your dialogue guide. We often recommend starting with brainstorming—where you lay out many issues related to a topic, and then later on selecting two or three of the brainstormed issues to focus a conversation in depth. For example, you may start with a breadth prompt like—what do you think are all the civic issues you face as a community?

A list of civic issues might include factors like voting, volunteering, public service, charitable donations, keeping people informed, trust, festivals and fun events, etc.

In a depth phase, you might decide to focus on a couple of key topics from the brainstormed list, like voting or trust. We generally suggest that the group decides what issues they want to focus the conversation on, but you may have questions that help lead the group to certain priorities you want to make sure they discuss.

Moving Toward a Goal or Shared Understanding

Toward the end of the dialogue, you likely want the group to focus on some takeaways, next steps, or priorities that they want to share with others. We generally don't aim for groups to have consensus, but you may ask groups to talk together about what the key issues they named in the conversation were, even if there wasn't agreement about those issues. For instance, if a group talked about voting and some people felt that they didn't want to use electronic voting and others felt they did, you could just report out that part of your conversation explored the pros and cons of electronic voting. If groups had differences of opinion, they might ask for next steps like further conversations about the issue, more information, or talking with experts about the subject.

Summary and Closing

At the end of the conversation, we recommend some kind of activity to give the dialogue closure. This could be as simple as asking each group member to share one word that summarizes how they are feeling, or you may ask each group member to identify a takeaway or next step. If there is a facilitator, they should thank the group for their participation. You may ask people to sign a contact list or complete an evaluation at this time.

Facilitation Tips

At the beginning of the conversation, facilitators may want to acknowledge the types of relationships that are in the room (Is someone another person's boss? Do participants know each other? What is the spectrum of political views? What is the obvious or seen (and not so obvious or unseen) diversity of the space?)

If the group conversation gets tense or some group members are talking much more than others, the facilitator may want to refer to the group agreements shared at the beginning of the conversation, take a quick break, or move on to a different question.

Sometimes structure is helpful for groups to enable multiple group members to share their thoughts. For instance, a Round Robin requires each group member to go around and share an idea. Popcorn allows for each group to self-select when they want to speak (or pop) but requires each participant to share before opening up the conversation to general group discussion. Free flowing discussion can have great benefits, but if the conversation is tense, going off topic, or favoring some voices more than others, structure can help.

Sample Group Agreements

- ▶ Share air time so everyone gets a chance to be heard.
- ▶ Be respectful and use respectful language.
- ▶ If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.
- ▶ It's okay to disagree, but don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.
- ▶ Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.
- ▶ Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them.
- ▶ If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.
- ▶ Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
- ▶ It's okay to put issues like race and class on the table.
- ▶ We all share responsibility for making the group productive.
- ▶ Listen to each other.

Tips for Hosting a Dialogue Event

1. Always greet people when they arrive.
2. Take time for meaningful introductions.
3. Point out bathrooms and all logistics that help make folks comfortable.
4. Always review group agreements.
5. Let participants know they are part of something bigger; be clear about how their voices will make a difference.
6. Support your facilitators—it is hard work to remain attentive and fair-minded. A moderator should be available to check in with facilitators.
7. Always prepare for differences that make a difference (political, racial, social class, education, etc.). All voices are equal.
8. Be prepared for direct questions and assume transparency is the best approach when answering questions about your project.
9. Ask participants to complete an evaluation, and always debrief with facilitators and the planning group.
10. Have fun and maintain a sense of humor!



SAMPLE CIVIC HEALTH DIALOGUE GUIDE

Sample Title: Taking a Pulse on Our Community's Civic Health

Partners List

Communities could add a list of who is involved in steering this effort or organizational logos. Make it clear who is hosting the event.

Sample Media Note

We are delighted to have this event covered by the press and local bloggers and want to balance that with our participants' ability to discuss this topic in a safe environment, share an incomplete thought, or convey a personal story as a part of this process. We respectfully request that all representatives of the media (formal and informal) please ask permission to tape, photograph, identify, or quote an individual participant directly. We are happy to answer any questions about this request.

Purpose Examples

(The steering committee identifies together and adapts the conversation guide for the purpose and phase of their work.)

- ▶ Gather information from the community related to civic health and community engagement.
- ▶ Learn about the history of engagement and civic life in the community.
- ▶ Share findings to inform actions we could take to strengthen civic health.
- ▶ Gather a specific group (such as stakeholders in the community who work with youth and youth themselves)

A general outline for the steering committees to consider:

- ▶ Time for people to sign in, grab some food, settle, and chat, etc.
- ▶ Welcome and Purpose (xx min)
- ▶ Reviewing Information (if needed)
- ▶ Small Group Conversations (or other engagement that includes people in dialogue with each other) (xx min)
- ▶ Large Group Sharing and Report Outs (xx min)
- ▶ Closing Remarks and Next Steps (xx min)

Sample Detailed Outline

Gathering in and refreshments—in person or virtual? (15 min)

- ▶ Welcome and sign in at registration table
- ▶ Enjoy some food at your tables.
- ▶ Please join your small group for the introduction and to start the dialogue immediately thereafter.

Welcome and Overview of “What is Civic Health? What do we know about New Hampshire?” (10–15 min)

Welcome and thank you for joining today’s conversation that will help us begin our work to better understand our community’s civic health and what we can do to improve opportunities for engagement among the people who live here.

What is Civic Health?

(Provide some shared learning and grounding where everyone at the conversation. For instance, everyone watches the “What is Civic Health in NH video.” It is important to provide an inclusive time that supports everyone’s shared understanding.)

Civic health includes the behaviors, beliefs, and actions related to civic and political engagement, at the local, state, and national levels. It refers specifically to the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in civic activities that strengthen the networks of relationships among people who live, learn, and work in a community. The National Conference on Citizenship defines civic health as, “the way that communities are organized to define and address public problems.” Often public problems or needs are addressed through civic activities like:

- ▶ Voting
- ▶ Volunteering and community service
- ▶ Connecting with others
- ▶ Attending public meetings
- ▶ Staying informed and talking about issues
- ▶ People believing they matter and can make an impact
- ▶ Feeling trust in institutions and community

Participation in civic activities encourages people to:

- ▶ enhance interconnections
- ▶ build trust
- ▶ help each other
- ▶ talk about public issues and challenges
- ▶ volunteer in government and non-profit organizations
- ▶ stay informed about their communities
- ▶ participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges

(2020 NH Civic Health Index and NCoC webpage on Civic Health)

Today's Conversation (10 min)

During our time today, we look forward to your questions, concerns, ideas, and hopes for our work together to help make YOUR COMMUNITY NAME a welcoming and inclusive community and we welcome all perspectives. Some of the key questions at the heart of our conversation today are:

- ▶ What do you care about related to civic health?
- ▶ What's most important to our community?
- ▶ What do we know and what do we want to learn to strengthen civic health?

Additional Sample Questions: Broad Framing for an Initial Gathering

The working group can think about what is an essential or inclusive question that is at the heart of your conversation goals.

- ▶ How do we make sure our community can be a place where everyone feels:
 - » They belong?
 - » Their voices are heard?
 - » Opportunities to live, learn, work, pray, and play are available to everyone?
 - » They can build trust with others?
- ▶ How do we define healthy civic life and engagement in our community?
- ▶ How do we ensure our community fosters belonging? What are our priorities for improving civic life among the people who live here?

Sample Goals (10 min)

- ▶ Take a pulse check of our civic health here in COMMUNITY NAME.
- ▶ Identify gaps or missing information that could support plans for strengthening civic life and community.
- ▶ Explore different indicators of civic health (e.g. voting, trust) to better understand challenges in civic life.
- ▶ To share personal stories about your community and identify assets and barriers to participation in civic life.

About the process: This conversation is...

- ▶ Designed to focus on what is important to you.
- ▶ Organized to allow everyone to both speak and listen in small, facilitated groups where ideas can be explored, differences understood, and preferences for action expressed.
- ▶ Respectful of your time. We will keep time and respect yours by ending on time.

Sample Group Agreements

- ▶ Share air time so everyone gets a chance to be heard.
- ▶ Be respectful and use respectful language.
- ▶ If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.

- ▶ It's okay to disagree, but don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.
- ▶ Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.
- ▶ Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them.
- ▶ If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.
- ▶ Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
- ▶ It's okay to put issues like race and class on the table.
- ▶ We all share responsibility for making the group productive.
- ▶ Listen to each other.

Introductions in Small Groups (15 min)

- ▶ Please share your
 - » Name
 - » A few community (formal and informal) hats you wear

What Are Our Experiences? Understanding Ourselves and Each Other? (15 min)

The facilitator can select from the prompts below:

- ▶ Describe an event that has shaped your experience living in [community name]. (Something that made you feel like [community name] is your community/home.)
- ▶ From your experience, in what ways has civic health, community engagement, or a sense of community changed in the past 10 years or so?
- ▶ Turn to your neighbor and talk for a few minutes about where and how you prefer to engage in civic life—formal and informal institutions.
- ▶ Are there areas where you'd like to have a voice but do not feel it is accessible? It's okay if you don't want to be involved in "civic life" at all—all perspectives are welcome!
- ▶ What does a thriving community mean to you? Describe to your partner what this looks like.

Small Group Conversation/Dialogue Questions (55 min)

The facilitator can select from the prompts below:

- ▶ What does community feel like to you? Do you feel connected to your community? What about other communities?
- ▶ What barriers do you experience to feeling a sense of community?
- ▶ What kind of environment do you live in? (Neighborhood; urban setting; apartment building / housing complex; house on a remote piece of land). Does this environment impact your sense of community?
- ▶ What matters to you most about the future of your community? What feel like the most pressing concerns?
- ▶ Do you feel aware of when community decisions are being made? How do you find this information?
- ▶ Do you feel that you are able to participate or have a say in these community decisions, if you'd like to?

- ▶ What are some spaces that facilitate community connections and community engagement? Do these spaces exist in your community? What are they like for you?
- ▶ Where is an easy place to engage in community-decision making and where are more challenging places to access? Why is that?
- ▶ Do you feel connected to your community leaders (elected and volunteer leaders)? Do you feel represented by your community leaders?
- ▶ Have you engaged in community decision-making (school board; town hall; focus group; etc.) before and felt like your opinion mattered there? Have you felt not seen in that space?

Large Group Report Out (20 min)

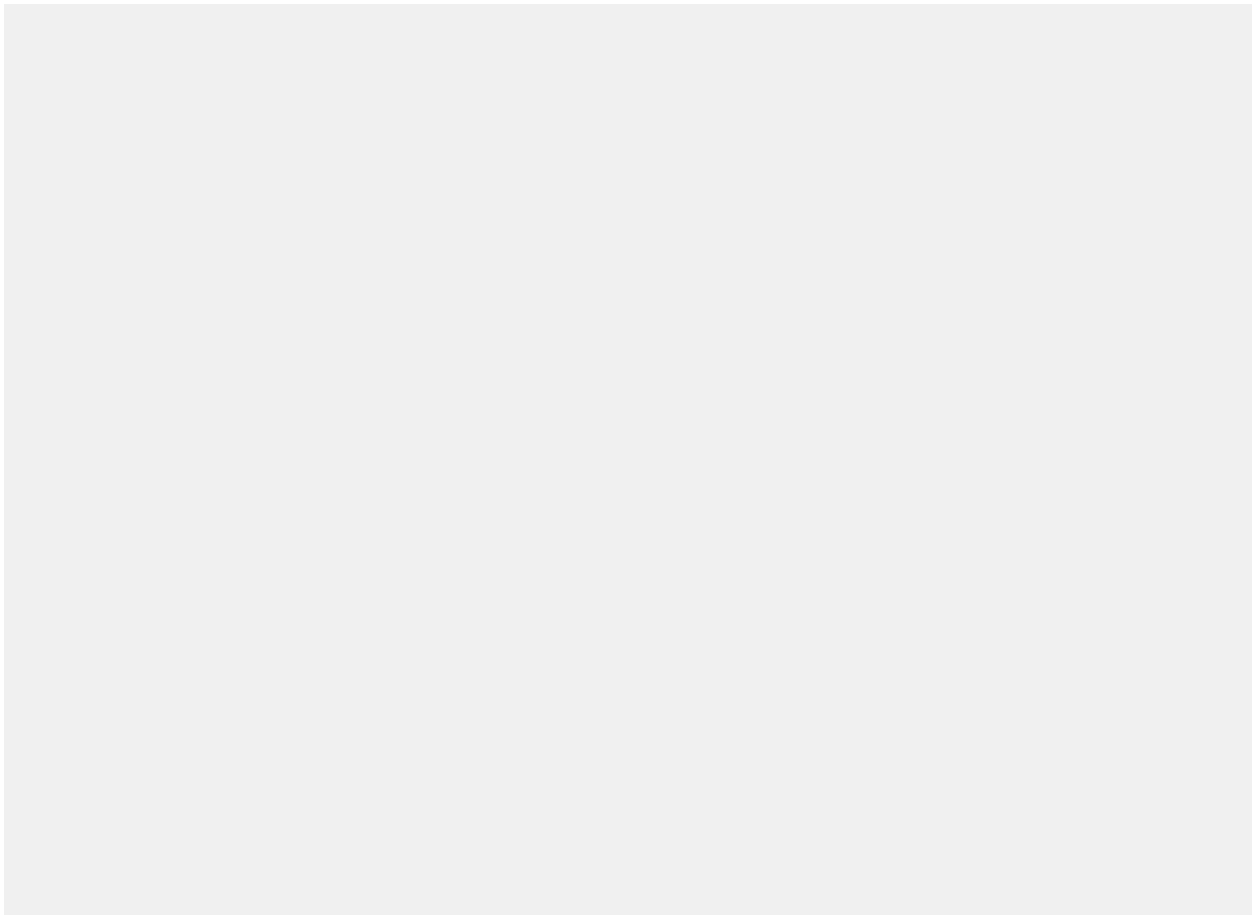
Each group will be asked to provide a few *very brief* comments for the large group. If you are asked to speak for your group, please be brief and share what has been compiled by your group, including common ground and divergent views. (You will have two minutes!)

Closing Remarks and Thanks

Sample: Our goal with these conversations is to give people an opportunity to address concerns and fears, to increase understanding, and to consider constructive ways to solve problems in your community.

Thank you for participating!

We will...





HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY

Goal: This tool provides communities with guidance on how to design a local civic health survey, including how to design the survey, questions to ask, and tips around data collection and analysis.

Planning a Survey

Ask: When is a community survey a good choice?

A survey can be a good choice when you want to learn some straightforward information from a mix of people. Although carefully designed large-scale surveys can be very accurate with predicting results of elections or tracking public opinion, that kind of survey takes a lot of technical knowledge and money to implement. Most communities aren't prepared to take that on.

Instead, communities might treat a survey as offering a “floor,” or a minimum number of residents affected by specific issues. For instance, if 20 people report not voting, and 15 say it was because polling place hours were inconvenient, it's not necessarily important that the 20 people represent the entire community (which, of course, they likely do not). Rather, that 15 residents cited a common issue provides a place for potential investigation and follow-up. We wouldn't know how many the issue truly affects, but we would know it is “at least” 15.

Ask: When is a community survey not a good choice?

A survey is not a good choice if you need to hear from everyone in your community, to get detailed perspectives, or if you think that internet access, reading comprehension, or other community features might make a survey difficult for residents.

Designing a Survey

Ask: What do I really want to know?

When doing a survey, it can be tempting to include a big mix of questions to learn about a lot of different topics, or just because some questions are interesting! However, choosing only questions directly and clearly linked to your main question keeps a survey short and yields the best response rates. In addition, if you avoid collecting personal information that isn't strictly necessary, it can make respondents more comfortable.

Ask: Do I need this question?

The longer the survey, the less likely people are to start it or finish it. However, there is no “right” cutoff for survey length: it depends on the questions you ask and the method you use (e.g., phone versus paper). In general, people can click an online survey question more quickly than they can write a response on paper or speak a thought aloud on the phone.

As a rule of thumb, most people can answer four online survey questions per minute. You might try to keep an online survey to **fewer than 20 questions**, which is often answerable in **five minutes**.

Implementing a Survey

Ask: How will people take the survey?

There are lots of ways to collect data, including an online tool, a paper questionnaire (mailed or in person), or by phone. Often online surveys are cheapest, although they can be hard for people without internet

access or technology skills to access. A paper survey can be expensive to implement if mailing to all households in a community but reaches those without internet access. A phone survey takes a long time but can offer respondents a chance to ask questions. Your team could canvass an area and knock on doors to do verbal surveys, but it will require volunteer time and some people may not welcome canvassers at their home. Using a mixture of survey methods, like an online survey with a paper option, may be a good fit.

Since online surveys are often one of the most efficient data collection methods, the below table overviews three of the most popular online tools and compares their pros and cons.

	Pro	Con	Link
Google Forms	Free; easy to use	Need Google account; limited customization; not secure	https://docs.google.com/forms
Survey Monkey	Allows some complex questions; free version (up to 10 questions & 100 respondents); includes template questions	Not much visual customization	https://www.surveymonkey.com/
Qualtrics	Very customizable	Expensive; harder to use	https://www.qualtrics.com/free-account/

Ask: Who is important to hear from, and how will I reach them?

When conducting a survey, some people will enthusiastically participate, and others won't even know the survey is happening. The latter are especially important to hear from since they are more likely to be left out of other opportunities to weigh in too. Leveraging local knowledge about where people congregate, who might be missing, and how to reach them through existing networks is an approach with established successes. You may also want to partner with local organizations to disseminate your survey, especially ones that reach certain populations. For instance, if you wanted to reach youth, partnering with a school or a youth organization might help you to get more youth responses.

Analyzing Data

Ask: What will I do with the data I gather?

This question should shape the data collection process, so that you only collect items you plan to use. When analysis begins, think carefully about who the data came from. Without a careful random sample, the findings will not be representative of the community. This means that differences between groups or over time can be a result of missing respondents, and not necessarily reflective of the real world. As described above, it can be helpful to ask questions that can provide a meaningful “floor,” or a minimum number of residents affected by specific issues. For instance, if 20 people report not voting, and 15 say it was because polling place hours were inconvenient, it's not necessarily important that the 20 people represent the entire community (which, of course, they likely do not). Rather, that 15 cited a common issue provides a place for potential investigation and follow-up. We wouldn't know how many the issue truly affects, but we would know it is “at least” 15.

Although we would discourage calculating specific percentages, which can give a false impression of precision, if they're necessary, also consider who the percentage is calculated among – all respondents? Registered voters? People with children? Using the right denominator will change the calculation in important ways. It's also important to make sure the denominator you choose is clear when you share your findings. For example, rather than saying that among survey respondents “70% reported voting”, specify that “70% of registered voters reported voting.”

Ask: How do I share my findings?

The most important goal for sharing any results is to focus on answering specific questions for identified groups in short and tailored ways. Long reports don't catch attention, and while they might include a little something for everyone, that means that any one reader will find a lot that's *not* for them. Instead, thinking about who wants the answers you're putting forth and how to deliver that in a short, focused way is key. A one-page flier or a single graphic for social media often goes a lot further than a long report.

Example Community Questions and Related Items

After all the technical consideration of a survey, you may now be wondering what a survey could tell you. To illustrate how you might use a survey, we provide some example questions that a community might have and identify a few tested survey questions that could help answer each one.

Example question	Why aren't more people showing up to vote?
Survey questions	1. Were you registered to vote in the [specify which—2020 presidential; 2022 town, etc.] election? » Yes (skip to Question 3) » No (move to Question 2)
	2. <i>If not registered:</i> What was the <i>main</i> reason you were not registered to vote? » Did not meet registration deadlines » Did not know where or how to register » Did not meet residency requirements/did not live here long enough » Permanent illness or disability » Concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic » Difficulty with English » Not interested in the election or not involved in politics » My vote would not make a difference » Not eligible to vote » Other reason

	<p>3. <i>If registered:</i> In any election, some people are not able to vote because they are sick or busy or have some other reason, and others do not want to vote. Did you vote in the election held on [date of specified election]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes (end here) » No (move to Question 4)
	<p>4. <i>If registered, did not vote:</i> What was the main reason you did not vote?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Out of town or away from home » Forgot to vote (or send in absentee ballot) » Concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic » Illness or disability (own or family's) » Not interested, felt my vote wouldn't make a difference » Too busy, conflicting work or school schedule » Transportation problems » Didn't like candidates or campaign issues » Registration problems (i.e., didn't receive absentee ballot, not registered in current location) » Bad weather conditions » Inconvenient hours, polling place or hours or lines too long » Other
<p>Pair with data from other sources like:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Voter turnout to identify percent of registered voters casting a ballot (request from municipality) » Location and hours of polling places to identify potential barriers to voting (available from the NH Secretary of State at https://app.sos.nh.gov/Public/Reports.aspx) » Number of public meeting attendees to identify engagement beyond voting (request from town planner)
<p>Example question</p>	<p>How are people engaging with the community?</p>
<p>Survey questions</p>	<p>5. Have you ever worked on a community project, such as a one-day litter cleanup or [include one or more relevant examples]?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No

	<p>6. Have you ever worked with people in your community to fix or improve something in your neighborhood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Yes» No
	<p>7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I know how to become involved and participate in problem solving in my community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Strongly agree» Somewhat agree» Neither agree nor disagree» Somewhat disagree» Strongly disagree
	<p>8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I feel like I matter to other people in my community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Strongly agree» Somewhat agree» Neither agree nor disagree» Somewhat disagree» Strongly disagree
	<p>9. How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live? Would you say: a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact, or no impact at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">» A big impact» A moderate impact» A small impact» No impact at all

	<p>10. During the past 12 months, how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other such as house sitting, watching each other's children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Basically every day » A few times a week » A few times a month » Once a month » Less than once a month » Not at all
Pair with data from other sources like:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of library card holders as a measure of community involvement (request data from public library) » Number of public events per month as a measure of community participation opportunities (request list from town recreation department, library, chamber of commerce, town Facebook page)
Example question	How are people engaging politically? (beyond voting)
Survey questions	<p>11. Have you ever signed a petition?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
	<p>12. Have you ever attended a political meeting or rally?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
	<p>13. Have you ever participated in any demonstrations, protests, boycotts, or marches?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
	<p>14. How interested are you in politics and national affairs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Very interested » Somewhat interested » Only slightly interested » Not at all interested

	<p>15. During the past 12 months, did you contact or visit a public official—at any level of government—to express your opinion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
Example question	How do people feel about living here?
Survey questions	<p>16. Do you expect to be living in your community five years from now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
	<p>17. Would you move away from this neighborhood if you could?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Yes » No
	<p>18. Overall, how would you rate your community as a place to live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Excellent » Good » Only fair » Poor
	<p>19. Do you think that your community will get better or worse as a place to live in the next 12 months, or will it stay the same?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Better » Stay the same » Worse
	<p>20. How likely do you think it is that you may be the victim of a crime in the next 12 months?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Very likely » Likely » Neither/depends » Unlikely » Very unlikely

	<p>21. If public officials asked everyone to conserve water or electricity because of some emergency, how likely is it that people in your community would cooperate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Very likely » Likely » Neither/depends » Unlikely » Very unlikely
	<p>22. How many years have you lived in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Less than one year » One to five years » Six to ten years » Eleven to twenty years » More than twenty years » All my life
<p>Pair with data from other sources like:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Town housing sales data (request from County Registry of Deeds, town clerk, and/or tax collector) to identify extent of resident turnover » Rank of municipal property tax rate in state (available from the Department of Revenue Administration (https://www.revenue.nh.gov/mun-prop/municipal/property-tax-rates.htm) to consider push/pull factors influencing community connectedness
<p>Example question</p>	<p>How do people feel about community leadership?</p>
<p>Survey question</p>	<p>23. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the people running my community don't really care much what happens to me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Agree strongly » Agree somewhat » Neither/depends » Disagree somewhat » Disagree strongly

<p>Pair with data from other sources like:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Public meeting comments to identify challenges/opportunities (request from town planner) » Posts/comments on municipal social media page to identify challenges/opportunities
<p>Example question</p>	<p>How much do people tend to trust government?</p>
<p>Survey questions</p>	<p>24. How much of the time do you think you can trust the <i>national</i> government to do what is right?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Just about always » Most of the time » Some of the time » Hardly ever
	<p>25. How much of the time do you think you can trust the LOCAL government to do what is right?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Just about always » Most of the time » Some of the time » Hardly ever
<p>Example question</p>	<p>How much do people tend to trust others in their neighborhood?</p>
<p>Survey question</p>	<p>26. Think about people in your neighborhood. Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Trust them a lot » Trust them some » Trust them only a little » Trust them not at all



YOU'VE ALREADY GOT INFORMATION! HOW TO EXPLORE EXISTING DATA ABOUT CIVIC HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Goal: *This tool offers communities a menu of potential existing data sources that you may already have present at the local level that may help identify and understand local challenges and opportunities.*

Existing Data Sources

There are many existing data sources that are useful in understanding civic health in your community. Given the expensive and time consuming nature of collecting original data with a survey, it may be worthwhile to focus on using data that already exists. An additional advantage of existing data is that they are often more comprehensive. For example, a list of registered voters in a municipality is a complete list, whereas a small-scale survey can only tell you about the people who responded to the survey. Even if your community is conducting a survey, integrating existing data sources alongside survey results can provide more detail and context than a survey alone.

In the menu below, potential indicators are listed with their source and are rated on how easy they would be to find and use. Note that some are a few clicks away, while others would require a more substantial time investment and/or data analysis skills to obtain and use.

Menu of Potential Indicators and Data Sources

Section 1. Civic Engagement & Infrastructure

Indicator 1. Percent of Adults Registered to Vote

Required items Municipal population by age; voter registration list

Source: Census Bureau; Municipality

Easy to find? Yes; Varies by municipal record keeping policy, staff availability

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 2. Voter Turnout in Most Recent Election

Data source: Municipality

Easy to find? Not sure, depends on what municipality can share

Easy to use? Not sure, depends on what municipality can share

Indicator 3. Location & Hours of Polling Places

Data source: NH Secretary of State ([here](#))

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 4. Number of Polling Places Per Capita

Required items: Number of polling places; total population

Data source: NH Secretary of State ([polling places](#)); Census Bureau

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes, although calculations required

Indicator 5. Public Meeting Comments & Agendas

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? No: Challenging to analyze data

Indicator 6. Accessibility of Public Meetings

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? No: Challenging to analyze data

Indicator 7. Number of Public Meeting Attendees

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)
Easy to find? Not sure, depends on if these data are collected
Easy to use? Yes

Section 2. Community Resources

Indicator 8. Presence of Public Schools

Data source: NH Department of Education ([here](#))
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 9. Presence of Food Pantries

Data source: UNH Extension Food Access Map ([here](#))
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 10. Presence of Public Libraries

Data source: NH State Library ([directory](#); [map](#))
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 11. Number of Library Card Holders

Data source: Local public library
Easy to find? Not sure, depends on what data is available through the local library
Easy to use? Not sure, depends on what data is available through the local library

Indicator 12. Presence of State Park(s)

Data source: NH State Parks ([here](#))
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 13. Presence of a State Park "Group-Use Area" or Pavilion

Data source: NH State Parks ([here](#))
Easy to find? Yes
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 14. Presence of Local Recreational Spaces

Data source: Municipality (recreation department)

Easy to find? Depends

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 15. Offerings and Availability of Local Recreational Spaces (hours open, location, etc.)

Data source: Municipality (recreation department)

Easy to find? Depends

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 16. Presence of Local Public Events

Data source: Municipality

Easy to find? Depends

Easy to use? Depends

Indicator 17. Presence of Town/Municipality Facebook Page

Data source: Facebook

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 18. Examining the Content of Town/Municipality Facebook Postings

Data source: Facebook

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? No: Challenging and time consuming to analyze data

Indicator 19. Presence of Town/Municipality Subreddit Page

Data source: Reddit

Easy to find? Depends, may not exist

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 20. Examining the Content of Town/Municipality Reddit Postings

Data source: Reddit

Easy to find? If subreddit exists, yes

Easy to use? No: Challenging and time consuming to analyze data

Section 3. Community Needs

Indicator 21. Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility Rates

Data source: NH Dept of Education ([here](#))

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 22. Truancy

Data source: NH Dept of Education ([here](#))

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes, although not clear how they would be used

Indicator 23. Graduation Rates

Data source: NH Dept of Education ([here](#))

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 24. SNAP Enrollment

Data source: Through NH DHHS (likely not be available at municipal level)

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 25. WIC Enrollment

Data source: Through NH DHHS (likely not available at municipal level)

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 26. Identification of Unmet Need

Data source: Town welfare officer

Easy to find? Varies

Easy to use? Varies

Indicator 27. Presence of Homeless Shelter(s)

Data source: Town website (also searching Homeless Shelters Directory ([here](#)), Shelterlist.com, etc.)

Easy to find? Depends on what town website provides

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 28. Availability of Homeless Shelter(s)

Data source: Town website, shelter website (may need to call if details not available)

Easy to find? Depends on what town website & shelter website provide

Easy to use? No: Time consuming to analyze data

Indicator 29. Arrest Logs

Data source: NH State Police Justice Information Bureau, Criminal Records Unit; individual municipalities

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes, although not clear how they would be used (perhaps could help identify community challenges and track them over time)

Section 4. Other Community Characteristics & Regulations

Indicator 30. Property Tax Rates

Data source: NH Department of Revenue Administration ([here](#))

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 31. Proportion of Seasonal Residents/Vacant Homes

Data source: Maybe compare voter records (if available from town) with property tax records (if available from town or NH County Registers of Deeds)
Easy to find? No
Easy to use? No

Indicator 32. Estimated Resident Turnover

Data source: USPS change of address form data
Easy to find? Somewhat, data can be requested
Easy to use? No

Indicator 33. Minimum Lot Size [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities
Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 34. Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities
Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 35. Availability of Developer Incentives [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities
Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents
Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 36. Acres in Conservation Easements [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities, National Conservation Easement Database ([here](#))
Easy to find? Depends on what municipalities have readily available
Easy to use? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Indicator 37. Landlords Who Accept Section 8

Data source: Municipalities (local housing authority)
Easy to find? Depends on what municipalities have readily available
Easy to use? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Indicator 38. Child Care Providers Who Accept Subsidies

Data source: NH Connections ([here](#))
Easy to find? Somewhat—requires searching and reviewing each center's page
Easy to use? Yes



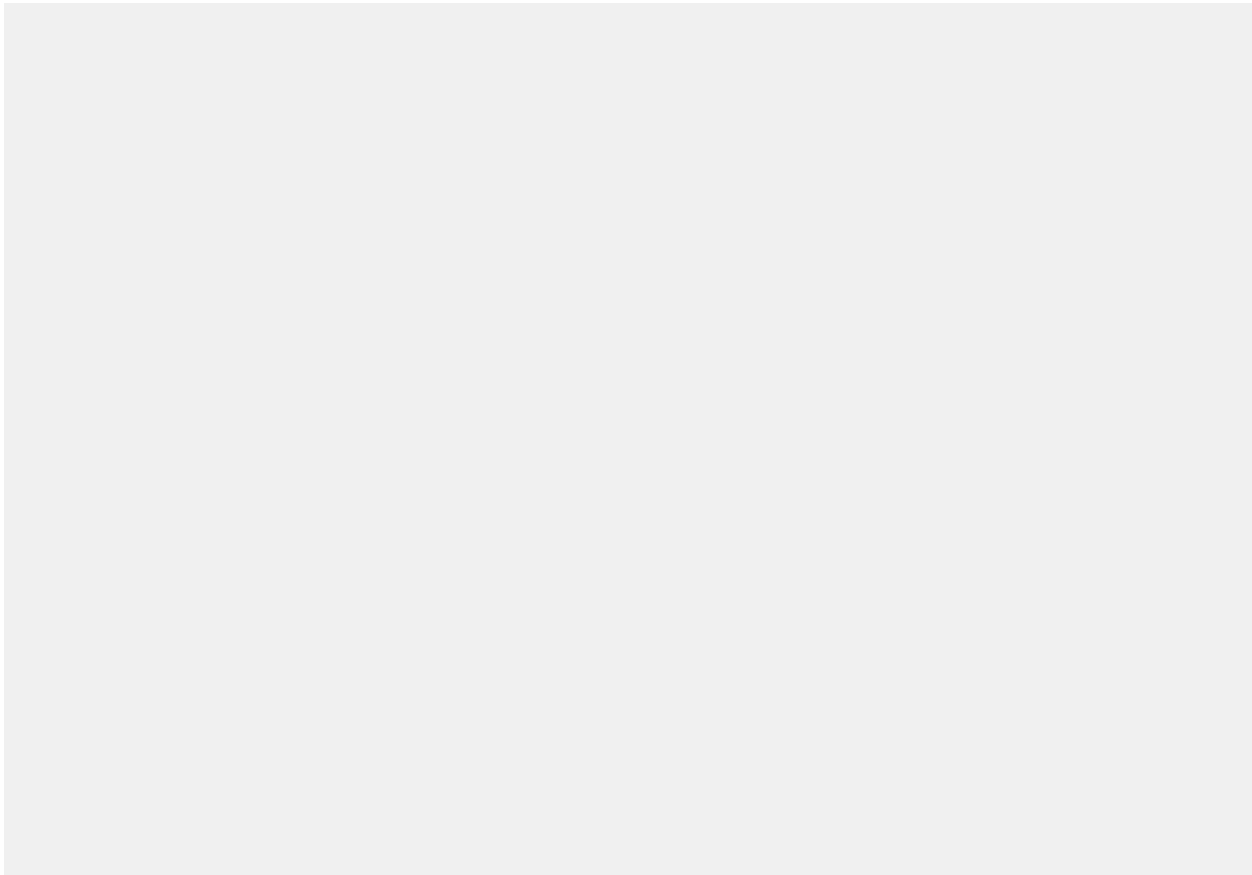
Taking Action

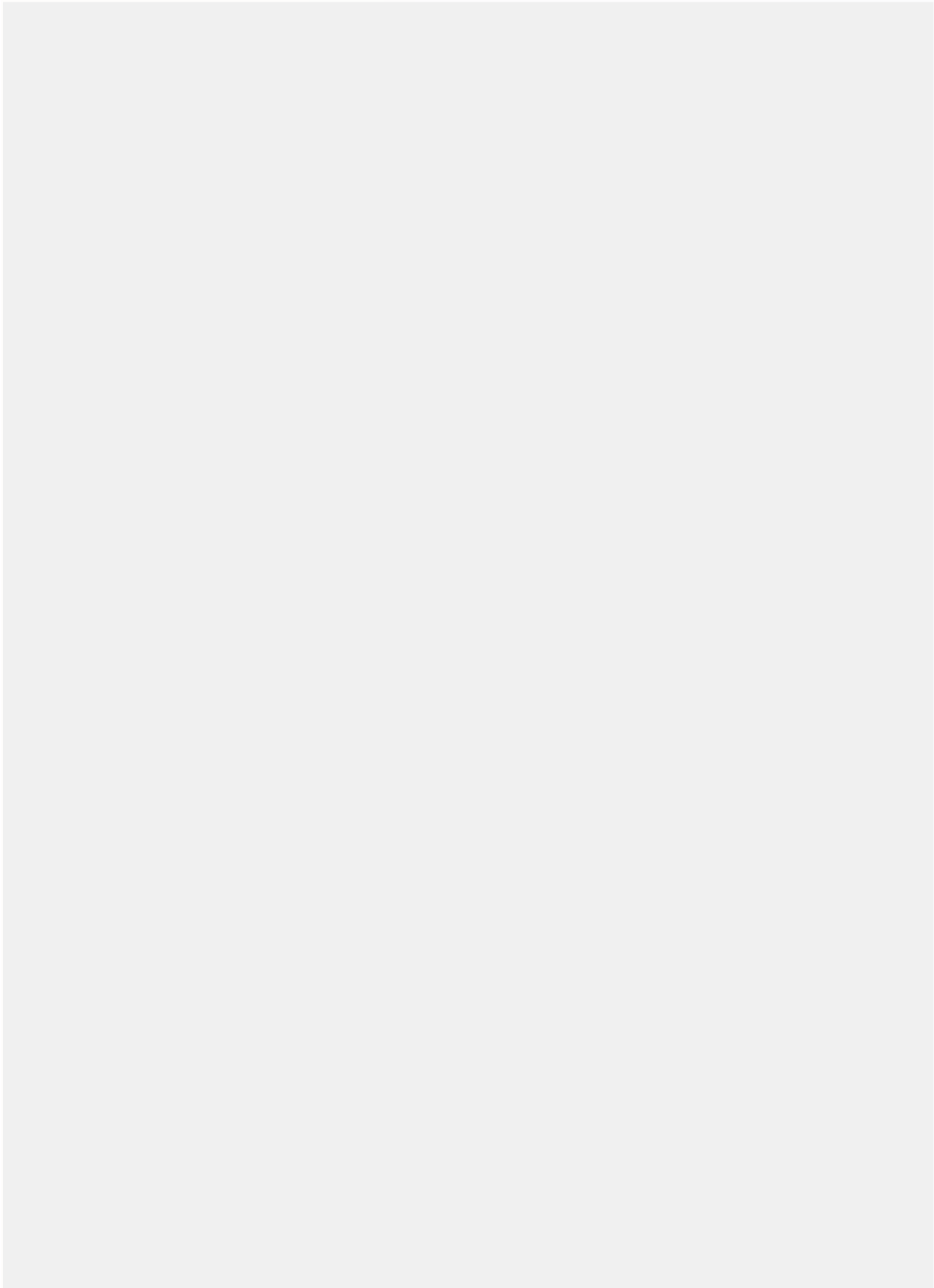
After collecting information about local civic health, you will likely have a lot of rich insights about how to improve things at the local level.

- ▶ If you conducted a survey, you may want to compare your findings to the *NH 2020 Civic Health Index* to identify similarities and differences with state trends.
- ▶ As you gather information, you are probably hearing a lot of good ideas of how to improve local civic health. Can you host a follow up event after collecting information to connect these good ideas to concrete actions? These actions might include changes in local policies, new programs, or experiments you want to try out to improve civic health.
- ▶ Do you want to establish a committee or staff person who is responsible for collecting civic health information over time, so you can track how your community is doing for the long-haul?

Conclusion

In this section, we have explored many ways you could collect information about local civic health to help you learn about your community and design interventions to improve civic life. These approaches include using existing data sources, running a community survey, facilitating community dialogues, interviewing local people, conducting a focus group for people with a shared experience or background, and Photovoice, where local people act as civic photojournalists. We don't expect you would use all of the above strategies to collect information, but we hope these are a useful list for you to choose from as you do your civic health work, or that these spark new ideas for you to learn more about your community!







5 Analyzing Information: What Does It All Mean?

Overview

Anyone can look at data and make some meaning of it, although working with someone specialized in data analysis will likely help to strengthen your work. We recommend a combination of working with people specialized in data analysis and asking people with lived experiences to talk about the meaning of your results. This section provides a list of different resources you could use to analyze the data you collect about civic health. We provide some tips on how to do this on your own, but it would be better if you can find someone to help you with this important step.

Making Sense of the Data: How to Conduct Analysis or Find Someone to Help

Goal: To help communities make meaning of the data they've collected by sharing analysis tips.

Introduction

Once you have collected data about civic health, the next step is to analyze the information you've collected. While collecting data is a challenge to itself—knowing how to analyze the data is an entirely different issue. Data analysis comes in many shapes and sizes and knowing how to use different data to improve civic health outcomes is a key step.

One aspect of data analysis is sorting the data into categories. Another aspect is interpreting it—which includes making meaning of the data, identifying themes and next steps. Below we have shared some general tips for data analysis as well as some tips on how to find someone who has experience with data analysis to help you out as this is a specialized skill set.

It's probably best to identify someone locally or bring in a data analysis specialist to help you with this step of your work. Data analysis is a specialized skill that takes training and experience to develop. Below we share some resources on how to find people to help you with this step of your work. If you truly can't find anyone to volunteer or have no budget to compensate a specialist, we also briefly provide some general tips for doing data analysis on your own.

If You're Doing It On Your Own

If you don't have this capacity locally either because there's no one in your community who can help or you don't have the funds to hire someone, here are some tips of how to take on data analysis yourself.

It's always better for more than one person to analyze data since people will likely categorize information and interpret it in slightly different ways. The first step may be to look for someone in your community who has some experience working with data to see if they would be willing to volunteer or be paid to analyze the data. You may want to look for a person who has experience such as:

- ▶ Quantitative and/or statistical data analysis
- ▶ Qualitative data analysis



- ▶ Experience working in Excel
- ▶ Someone who has had research methods courses

If you can't find a person like this at the local level, here are some tips for doing your best with data analysis.

- ▶ Assemble a team of about 2 to 4 people to read through the data you've collected and to try to categorize it and identify themes. Consider including people who have different perspectives on civic life in the community, or different lived experiences.
- ▶ Read through all the data once first, then read through it a second or third time to identify categories and themes
- ▶ Do your analysis independently and then share it with your colleagues to see where you agree and where you differ
- ▶ Ask yourself—am I seeing the data in this way because it's what it says, or because I want it to say these things?
- ▶ If you are afraid of bias in your interpretation, you could share preliminary data results with others who may represent different identities or perspectives and see how they interpret the data results.

Resources

Finding Volunteer Data Scientists

Volunteer NH and United Way

The Volunteer Digital Galaxy platform, supported by Volunteer NH and United Way helps to match organizational needs with individuals seeking volunteer opportunities. Organizations can create specific calls for skill sets available in their local community and region.

Catchafire

Catchafire is a network of volunteers, nonprofits, and funders working together to solve urgent problems and lift up communities. Catchafire connects industry expert or pro bono support to projects that are beyond the skillset of your organization. Catchafire will match you with exactly the right professional to get it done. Catchafire recruits volunteers to work on projects related to CRM, program monitoring and evaluation, conducting data analysis, and other data needs.

DataKind

DataKind brings together top data scientists with leading social change organizations to collaborate on cutting-edge analytics and advanced algorithms to maximize social impact. Their programs build upon one another and are designed to meet organizations where they are. From evening or weekend events to multi-month projects, all are designed to provide social organizations with the pro bono data science innovation team they need to tackle critical humanitarian issues in the fields of education, poverty, health, human rights, the environment and cities.

Universities

Local universities may be able to help you with data analysis – professors might take your project on as part of their class to help students learn, or sometimes students are looking for volunteer or paid experiences to grow their data analysis skills. Below are some different departments where university faculty, staff, and students may be able to help you out.

UNH Cooperative Extension

UNH Extension works in four broad topic areas: Youth and Family Development, Community and Economic Development, Natural Resources and Food and Agriculture. While their expertise is not data analytics they do help communities collect data and tell stories through data. They may also be able to connect communities with data partners.

UNH Carsey School of Public Policy

The Carsey School of Public Policy holds a range of expertise in data analysis. These include working with administrative data, census data, demographic information, program evaluation and much more. These services are provided for various fees dependent upon the work request. The Carsey School also has three graduate programs in which students complete applied projects. Working with program directors communities may be able to leverage graduate student expertise to accomplish data needs.

The UNH Center for Business Analytics

Center for Business Analytics brings together the knowledge and expertise of academics and industry professionals working in the business analytics field to address high-level data science/analytics problems. The center serves as the hub for the Business Analytics Initiative serving to coordinate, integrate, and foster diverse research, teaching, experiential learning, and industry engagement activities across the Initiative. The Center steers many initiatives that utilize student talent in communities to provide data analysis services.

Local, Regional and National Partners

Regional Planning Commissions

Regional Planning Commissions support municipalities on any number of planning and community development initiatives. The planning commissions have access to data and analysis expertise that may help a community better understand their civic health. They provide data analysis services to their member communities through geographic information system (GIS) mapping in areas related to transportation, the environment and zoning and tax information.

Data Science for Social Good

The Data Science for Social Good Summer Fellowship is a 12-week program that trains students and recent graduates while giving them the opportunity to work on a data science project with a government or nonprofit partner that will have a meaningful impact on the partner's community. They look for social good organizations (typically but not limited to government agencies and nonprofit organizations) that are ready and eager to collaborate on a data science project with a team of bright, motivated students and recent graduates mentored by a full-time team of senior data scientists, project managers, and other technical staff on a project that will have a meaningful impact on the communities they serve. Their ideal project partners approach them with a high-priority problem, where they have the resources and commitment to make an impact but need data analytics support.

The Data Innovation Project

The Data Innovation Project (DIP) is part of the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service and was established in early 2016 with support from the Maine Economic Improvement Fund. Their mission is to increase the capacity of mission-driven organizations to be data-informed by providing expert, accessible guidance and tools to build internal organizational capability to develop, sustain and use data to improve outcomes. They have worked with scores of organizations, nonprofits, foundations, and community collaboratives throughout the state of Maine on a range of projects—from multi-site, multi-year evaluations, to small data collection efforts, to customized capacity building trainings.

DIY Toolkit

GovLaunch

GovLaunch is a free Wiki for governments to “Find the tools, inspiration and resources you need to build a smarter government.” By sharing data tools, projects and stories governments learn from each other to create the change they want in their communities.

Displaying Your Data

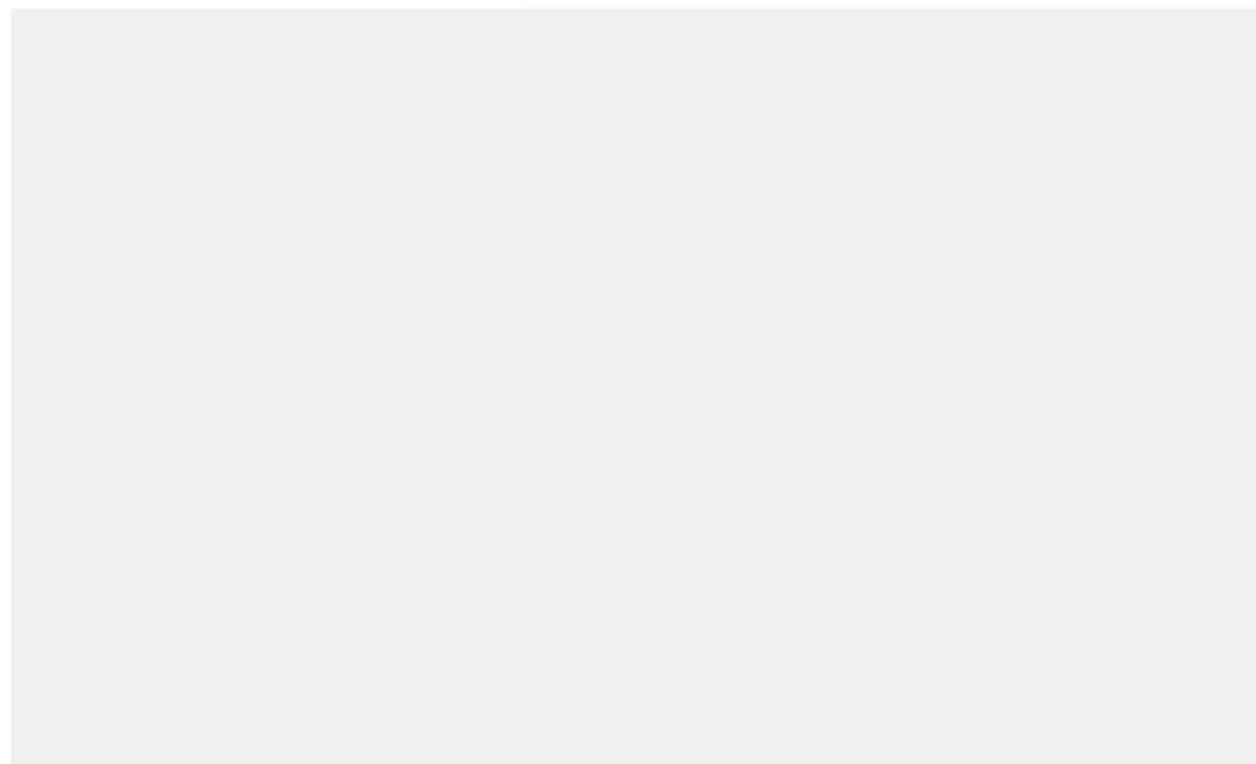
There are many ways to display data results, but some common ways to do so include:

- ▶ Creating a bar graph
- ▶ Displaying information in a pie chart
- ▶ Displaying themes in a table



Taking Action

How can you make analysis interesting to the community? Consider having a “data party” where you invite lots of people from different backgrounds to help you sift through the data and make meaning of it.



Conclusion

There are many resources in the state that can help you to categorize your data, identify themes, create graphs, and interpret the information you have collected in meaningful ways. Feel free to reach out to us for suggestions or services. We have staff and faculty who can help and a network of partners and fellows who could also support your work. Remember, the goal of tracking civic health data is to keep track of trends and if you try interventions, to show improvement over time.



6 Communicating Results to the Public

Overview

In this section, we share thoughts about where you may want to host civic health information in your local community—such as a link on a town web page. We also provide examples of how you could display the results of civic health data, including case studies and community profiles. Lastly, we share some examples of dashboards so you could continue tracking civic health data over time.

Communicating Civic Health Information with the Public

It's important to think through where you will house civic health results for the long-term so that the public can continue to draw upon these resources for ongoing improvement efforts. You could create a dedicated website where the report and relevant data could be maintained and updated, either as a stand-alone site or as a part of another public and trusted site (e.g., the public library or town offices). Given political controversies these days, it's important to identify a home for civic health data that is a trusted entity, so that people don't feel the host of the information is biased. This might be a municipal office, a nonprofit coalition such as a Main Street program, a Chamber of Commerce, a 4-H Club, a Y, or similar resource that is seen as being inclusive and nonpartisan. Ideally a website that hosts civic health information would be connected to related local data that affects civic engagement, such as information from the city planning department, SAU office, or public health office.²

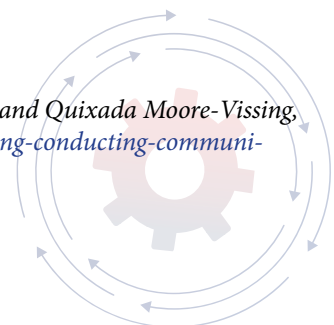
Over time, civic health information could be used in a variety of ways, including:

- ▶ Informing city/town strategic plans
- ▶ Helping city or town managers to make decisions about community programs, public spaces, and policies
- ▶ Providing information about where attention is needed to strengthen civic health in the community that town select boards or city councils can shape policy around
- ▶ Informing local nonprofit and volunteer organizations' priorities and strategies

Selecting a Homebase for the Work, Findings and Recommendations

- ▶ Consider a trusted entity whose purpose is to serve the full community inclusively and nonpartisan, such as:
 - » Local library
 - » Municipal offices
 - » Nonprofit coalition

2. See *Designing and Conducting a Community-Based Civic Health Index*, Bruce Mallory and Quixada Moore-Vissing, March 25, 2021, Carsey School of Public Policy, <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/designing-conducting-community-based-civic-health-index>



- » Chamber of Commerce
 - » 4-H Club
 - » YMCA / YWCA
 - » Regional Planning Commissions
 - » Local hospital community fund
- ▶ Determine who will maintain the information: time commitment, funding, community inclusion, technical upkeep/maintenance

How Should We Share the Data Itself?

There are lots of creative ways to share information with the public, and you may want to consider more than one strategy to do so. Here are some suggestions we have for sharing local civic health information:

- ▶ A video
- ▶ A community dialogue
- ▶ A public presentation with slides
- ▶ A written report with graphs and charts

Considerations When Sharing Information Publicly

Here are a few tips to consider when you are creating public facing documents.

- ▶ Accessibility—If hosting online, ensure there are also ways for people to access the information that don't have consistent internet access
- ▶ Readability—Avoid too technical wording, make easily readable for all in community
- ▶ Languages—Ensure product is available in all languages spoken in community and is correctly translated

What Are Effective Ways to Display Information?

We have seen civic health information displayed in many different ways. These include the following:

- ▶ **Community profiles and brief summaries**—Community profiles are generally short documents of 1–2 pages with bulleted information about civic health. These are a quick way to learn about civic health at a glance, but many of these statistics need more elaboration and follow up in a longer report.
- ▶ **Case studies**—You may want to tell some stories about local civic health, including model programs or lived experiences. A case study can be a great way to take people through a history in the community or a personal story of an individual or group.
- ▶ **Key findings**—There are likely some key takeaways about civic health you want to share that are the “meat” of your project. These might be big picture trends, like seeing that youth don't vote as much as other generations.
- ▶ **Dashboards**—Dashboards can be a helpful way to continue to track data about local civic health over time. Dashboards usually lay out a series of indicators the community feels contribute to civic health, and then within each indicator, there are one or more measures.

Below we provide examples of each of these approaches to help inform your own work.

Community Profiles and Brief Summaries

- ▶ Wolfeboro has designed a *Wolfeboro Community Profile* with key information about local life. You could take this format to design a “civic health profile”, displaying key information about civic life. In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index*, we shared key information about who lives in the community through an [interactive web interface](#). Essentially, when you click on a trend like “We Are Small” a statistic displays at the bottom of the screen with more information.

WHO ARE WE?

Understanding New Hampshire's Demographic Composition

These metrics tell us that New Hampshire is experienced in various ways by its diverse residents. Opportunities to thrive, to be a contributing member of one's community, to feel welcome and included are not the same regardless of where one lives or works or one's social identity. The 2020 Index unpacks some of these differences as they relate to engagement, social capital, and how our residents interact with and trust each other.

CLICK A METRIC BELOW TO LEARN MORE

WE ARE SMALL. **WE ARE OLD.** **WE ARE FROM AWAY.** **WE ARE DIVERSE.**

SOME OF US HAVE HIGH INCOMES, OTHERS DO NOT. **WE ARE WELL EDUCATED.**

CHILDHOOD POVERTY VARIES CONSIDERABLY BY REGION. **RACE MATTERS.**

THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR IS GROWING. **OPPORTUNITY IS CONNECTED TO EDUCATION.**

New Hampshire is one of the smallest states in the country as a function of both geographic size and population. Our population in 2018 was 1.36 million people, making us the ninth smallest state in the United States. This represents a 3% increase since 2000, a modest gain, especially compared to our growth in previous decades.²

- ▶ The State of Maine created a simple report, *Annual Maine Profile: Volunteering and Civic Health*, sharing information about civic health.

Case Studies

The National Civic League has created a number of case studies from communities across the country who are practicing strong civic health. See the sections entitled “Engaged Residents,” “Inclusive Community Leadership,” “Collaborative Institutions,” and “Embracing Diversity, Equity” that start on page 4/8 of the *National Civic League Civic Index*.

Key Findings

In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index*, we pulled out a list of key findings we thought would be most interesting to our readers. Later on in the report, we elaborated on each of these findings. Here is an example of the [key findings](#).

2020 NH Civic Health Index Report

KEY FINDINGS

Successes and Areas of Growth

New Hampshire has some things to celebrate when it comes to the strength of its civic health. The Granite State ranked:

- **Second in the nation in charitable giving of \$25 or more in the past year**
- **Fifth in the nation in voting in the 2016 election**
- **Fifth in the nation in connecting regularly with friends and family**
- **Sixth in attending public meetings**
- **Seventh in talking about important political, societal, or local issues with friends and family**

In addition,

- **Granite Staters volunteered at the highest rates measured since 2002**
- **The majority of New Hampshire residents feel they matter to their community and can make an impact**
- **In midterm elections in 2018, the state achieved the highest voter turnout since 1978**

However, there are aspects of our civic health that need attention, as well as some warning signs that our civic health could be at risk in the future.

Although Granite Staters demonstrated relatively strong civic health in categories such as Volunteering and Giving (p. 37) and Civic Awareness and Engagement (p. 15), residents displayed more of a mixed bag in Connecting in Community (p. 30). Voter turnout has declined in the last two presidential elections, 2012 and 2016. Since 2001, trust in the national government has fallen dramatically, and trust in local government and local news media is also declining. Granite Staters reported that they feel more barriers to engagement than they did in 2001. There was a large disparity between what Granite Staters did civically with friends and family compared with what they did with their neighbors. For example:

- **Granite Staters ranked in the top ten in the nation for connecting with friends and family regularly (5th) and talking about political, societal, or local issues with friends and family (7th)**
- **Granite Staters ranked toward the bottom in the nation when it came to connecting with neighbors regularly (38th), talking with neighbors about political, societal, or local issues (33rd), and doing favors for neighbors (40th).²⁷ Part of this disparity may relate to trust in those outside one's immediate social circle—since 2001, Granite Staters' trust in their neighbors has also declined.**

New Hampshire residents ranked very low compared with national averages in terms of:

- **Posting their views about political, societal, or local issues online (38th).**
- **Helping out friends or extended family with food, housing, or money (45th).**
- **New Hampshire ranked in the bottom five states in the nation in terms of connecting with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds (46th).**

There was a large disparity between what Granite Staters did civically with friends and family compared with what they did with their neighbors.

New Hampshire ranked in the bottom five states in the nation in terms of connecting with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds (46th).

If you examine the [NH Civic Health website](#), you will see many ways of displaying civic health information.

The cities of New Haven, Connecticut, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the state of Alaska also have done a good job of sharing civic information. Here are there reports below if you want to check them out

- ▶ [New Haven, Connecticut](#)
- ▶ [Albuquerque 2012 Progress Report Snapshot](#)

We have also provided a picture from Albuquerque and Alaska's report below:

Albuquerque Report

City of Albuquerque | 2012 Albuquerque Progress Report Snapshot | full report online at www.abqprogress.com
3

GOAL 1

HUMAN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Using Comparisons

Comparisons are used because just looking at the 4-year ABQ trend doesn't tell the entire story. At times, the 4-year Albuquerque (ABQ) trend could be desirable and yet we lag behind our peers and/or the nation at large. This is important to see and yet there are multiple factors and differences from city to city, so please keep this in mind as comparisons can be misleading.

Goal 1:

People of all ages have the opportunity to participate in the community and economy and are well sheltered, safe, healthy and educated.

Why is this goal important?

As an Albuquerque resident, there are probably conditions in your life that you feel are ideal for yourself and your family members, such as a good education, being healthy, having a good living environment, and overall being prepared to be an active member of your community. Each day you make decisions toward achieving these conditions. And yet you're not alone. Your communities, schools, the local city government, as well as state and federal agencies, all support you in your mission to achieve these desired conditions for you and your family.



Goal 1: How is Albuquerque doing?

Desired Condition	Key Indicator	Latest ABQ Data	Peer City Rank	United States	4 Year ABQ Trend	
Responsible youth	Teens (16-19) not working & not in school	10%	4th of 6	9%	Undesirable	● needs focus
Educated youth	High school graduation rate (peer by state)	63%	5th of 6	73%	Stable	● needs focus
Secure/stable families	Families living in poverty	15%	4th of 7	12%	Undesirable	● needs focus
Good public health	STD cases per 100,000 population	740	7th of 7	531	Undesirable	● needs focus
Safe, affordable housing	Percent of Homeowners paying 30%+ for housing costs	35%	5th of 7	37%	Desirable	● improving
Basic needs provided	Individuals below poverty level	19%	2nd of 7	16%	Undesirable	● improving
Educated, literate residents	Residents with high school education or more	89%	2nd of 7	86%	Desirable	● in focus
Active, healthy residents	Percent of residents frequently exercising	58%	1st of 7	52%	Desirable	● in focus
Access to health care	Infant mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 births)	5	2nd of 6	6	Stable	● in focus
Seniors age in place	Seniors (65+) below the poverty level	8%	1st of 7	9%	Desirable	● in focus

What can we tell from the data?

- Albuquerque has a high rate of teens not working and not in school, and a low graduation rate.
- Over the last four years, the percent of individuals (●) and families (●) below the poverty level has increased in a similar way to the majority of peer communities and the nation at large.
- The level at which homeowners are paying 30% or more for their housing costs is improving and better than the U.S. average, and yet we still lag behind peer communities. The number of renters in Albuquerque increased 3% from 2010 to 2011 versus a 1.3% decrease in homeowners in the same period.

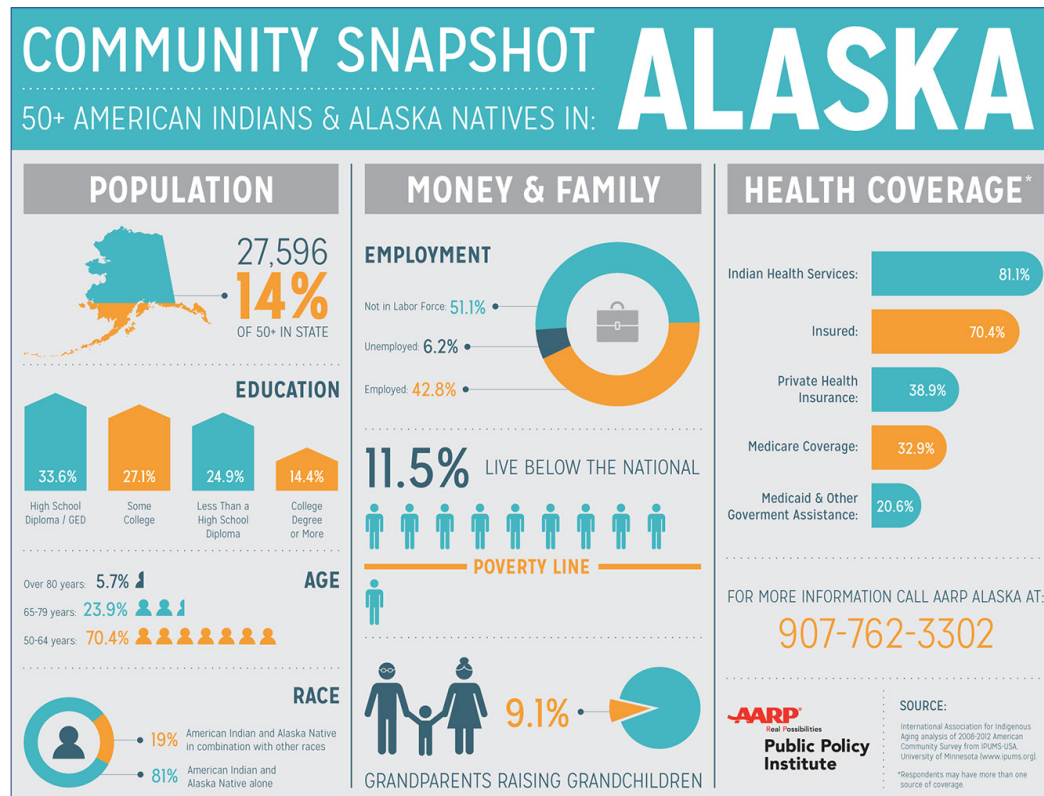
- Compared to peer communities and the nation at large, Albuquerque citizens exercise more frequently.
- Albuquerque has the lowest percentage of seniors below poverty level among peer communities, and less than the U.S. as a whole.





The full report is online at:
www.abqprogress.com

Alaska Report



Dashboards

Below are some examples of dashboards in case you want to consider continually tracking civic data over time. If you decided to pursue a dashboard, you would want people in your community to continually update the dashboard measures so that you have the most up-to-date information on the indicators you are tracking. For instance, if voting is one of your dashboard measures, you might be measuring voting through voter records and would want to update the measure after each election.

Examples:

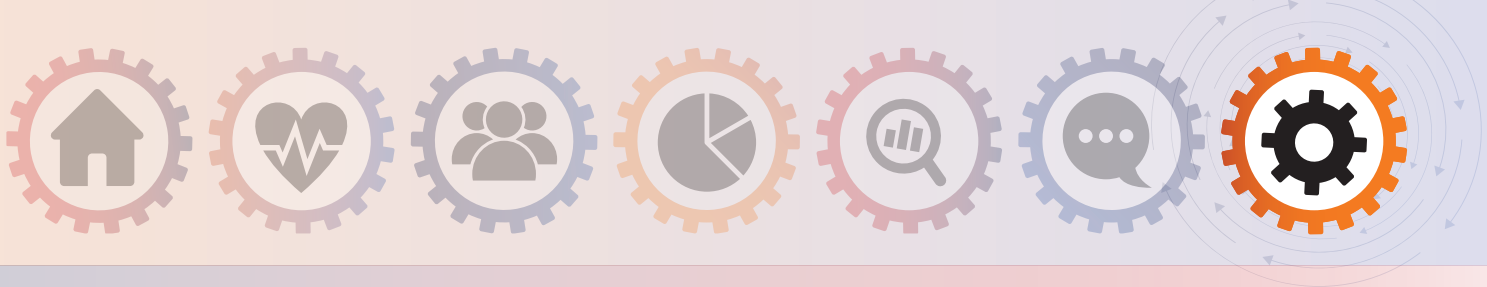
- ▶ <http://www.tib.wa.gov/Dashboard/>
- ▶ <https://www.arizonafuture.org/progress-meters/>
- ▶ <https://performance.sandiego.gov/>

Taking Action

As you share your results about local civic health, who could you invite who you think would help you to publicize and take action with your results? Is it the local media? School leaders? The local police? Community activists? Faith communities? You may want to think through a guest list of people who you know will want to learn about local civic health.

Conclusion

There are lots of ways to communicate with the public about civic health information. You will want to consider where the most accessible and trusted spaces are to display civic health data, and who will maintain and update this information over time. Clearly communicating information is critical to success, and you may even want to consult with a data analyst and communications specialist about the best ways to do this!



7 Sustaining Your Work and Making Change

Overview

The importance of being aware of our local civic issues is critical. Still, it can be easy for good projects like a local civic health analysis to sit on a shelf, given all the priorities we juggle professionally and in life. We know if you are doing all this work you don't want that to happen. Here are some suggestions we have for how to sustain civic health work over time and keep the momentum going by implementing substantive changes that improve your community's resilience and connectedness. After all, that is the heart of this work.

Tips for Sustaining Civic Health Work Over Time

- ▶ Create a tiered or phased approach to your work. Starting small and building your outreach and strategy over time can help lessen burdens on people who may already have lots of work to do.
- ▶ Elevate what is already happening in the community. Show the vibrancy that already exists and lead with what is already working.
- ▶ Establish a local civic health committee in your town or city that meets periodically throughout the year to have conversations focused on local civic issues and trends.
- ▶ After conducting a civic health project, hold a community forum to assign out action steps to different groups or individuals in the community, and then reconvene periodically to see how progress toward those actions is going.
- ▶ Create solutions that will have longevity, such as developing a new tradition that can be repeated. For example, Keene High School invites students to the office on their 18th birthday to register to vote.
- ▶ Create celebratory events to acknowledge progress in civic health, like annual awards for civic leaders.

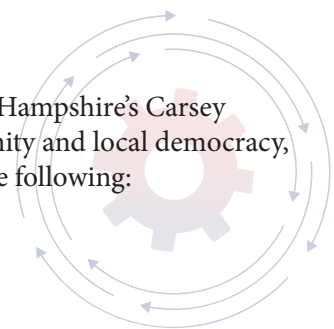
Other Models and Resources

Connecticut created a statewide civic health advisory committee which includes the Secretary of State. Leaders from different sectors take action on different civic priorities that the civic health advisory committee has identified. Connecticut also has civic ambassadors from different communities and NGOs who work to publicize and take action specifically around civic health. You could take similar actions at the local level, or try to see if you can activate statewide action in New Hampshire related to civic health. Click [here](#) to learn more about Connecticut's work.

The National Conference on Citizenship and the YMCA have worked together to create a "civic health champions" program for youth. To learn more, visit <https://www.ymcayag.org/civic-health/>.

How New Hampshire Listens Can Help

New Hampshire Listens is a civic engagement program at the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy. NH Listens helps local cities and towns to build community and local democracy, all in the name of strong civic health. NH Listens can assist communities with the following:



- ▶ Designing and implementing community conversations
 - » [Hosting a local community conversation](#)
 - » Identifying strategies for recruiting local community members to conversations
 - » Analyzing and reporting on findings from conversations
 - » Planning steps to move from talk to action
- ▶ [Hosting facilitator training for community members](#). NH Listens offers in-person and online facilitating for public engagement training throughout the year. The staff can also tailor training for specific groups.
- ▶ Facilitating equity learning exchanges, where participants learn tools and undergo reflection exercises to explore diversity, equity, and inclusion
- ▶ Building and sustaining coalition groups
- ▶ NH Listens also published a previous guide on local civic health that is a summary of this guide called [Designing and Conducting a Community-Based Civic Health Index: A Primer for Local Leaders](#)

Additional Statewide Resources

There are a range of different organizations and projects in the state that are interested in civic health, including:

- ▶ [New Hampshire Center for Justice and Equity](#)
- ▶ [University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension](#)
- ▶ [New Hampshire Citizen's Count](#)
- ▶ [Community Engagement Resources, Campus Compact for New Hampshire](#)
- ▶ [New Futures](#)
- ▶ [New Hampshire Humanities](#)
- ▶ [New Hampshire Institute for Civics Education](#)
- ▶ [Welcoming New Hampshire](#)

Stay Connected

Podcasts, newsletters, and other media resources that platform and amplify events & opportunities around civic health and education throughout the state:

- ▶ [The Granite State News Collaborative](#)
- ▶ [New Hampshire Humanities Digital Resources](#)
- ▶ [NHPR, Ask Civics 101](#)

Keep in Touch

As you learn about your community's local civic health and take action to strengthen it, feel free to reach out to us at [New Hampshire Listens](#), Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire, nh.listens@unh.edu, 603-862-0692. We would love to hear about your journey!

A Applying State Findings at the Local Level

Overview

This section pulls out interesting trends about civic health in the state of New Hampshire, taken from the *2020 Civic Health Index*. We encourage you to use this information to explore if these trends hold true for you at the local level, or if you are experiencing trends that differ from the overall state. We hope exploring these trends will help you to think about root causes behind issues as well as assets that you have at the local level.

You can use the information below to have conversations with your working group, to frame conversations at a community dialogue, or to share in a variety of other venues.



HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY COMPARE TO STATE CIVIC HEALTH TRENDS?

Introduction

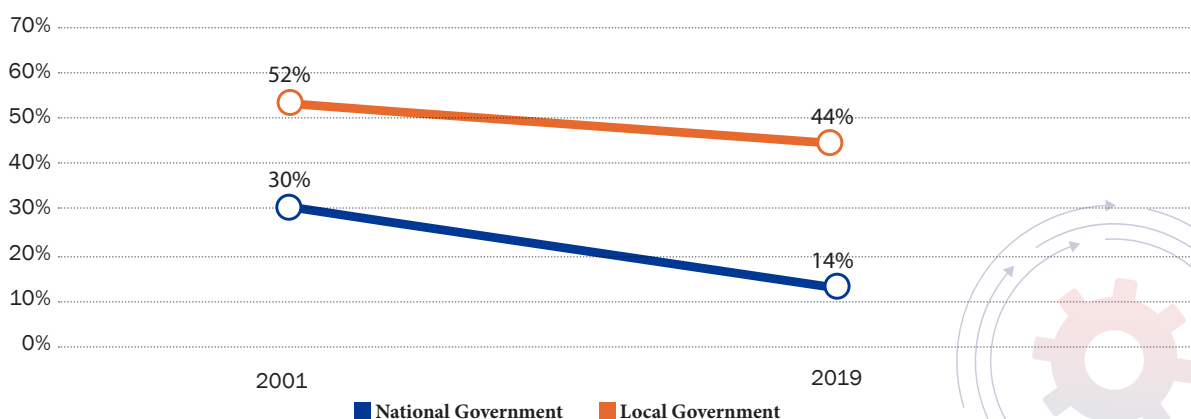
In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index* that we did at the state level, we identified some interesting trends. Do these statewide trends hold up at the local level? We expect for some communities they will, and for others, they won't. Below are some of the statewide trends with some talking points and questions for you to consider. You could use this information in a working group meeting, at a community presentation, or in a dialogue (see Section 5 in the above guide for more information about how to host a civic health dialogue).

Trust

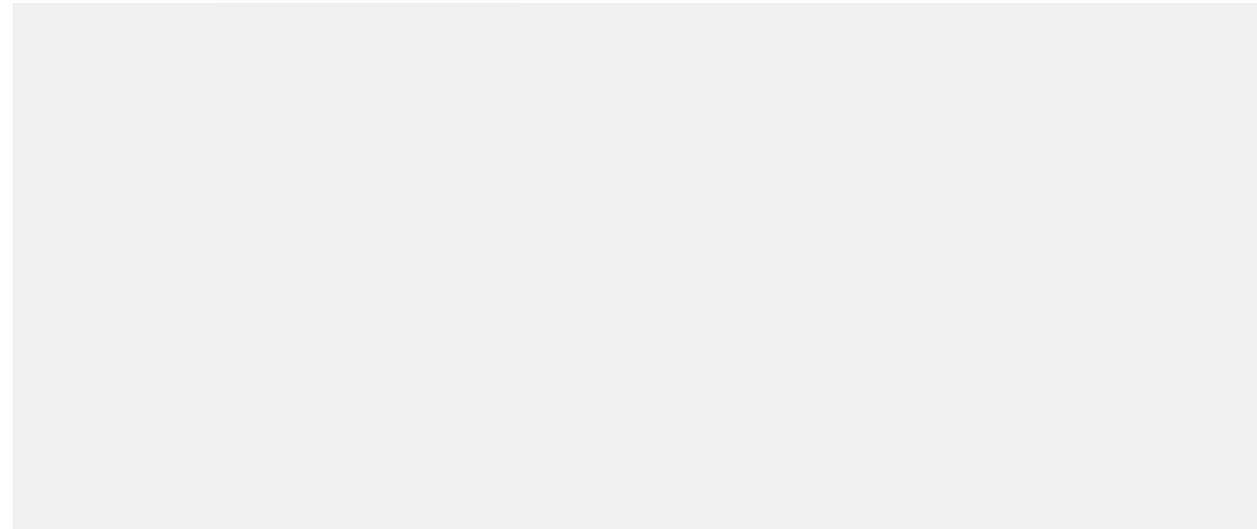
In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index*, one red flag we saw is that trust is declining all around in the state. This included trust in neighbors, trust in government, and trust in media.

The largest drop in trust was in both local and national government. As you can see in Figure 1, NH residents' trust in national government has fallen by over half in the past 19 years, and trust in local government has also fallen. How do you think you are doing at the local level in terms of trust in local government? What information could you draw on or collect to learn more about local trust? Do you think trust in local government has gotten better or worse since the pandemic?

Figure 1. New Hampshire Residents' Trust in Government All or Most of the Time, 2001–2019

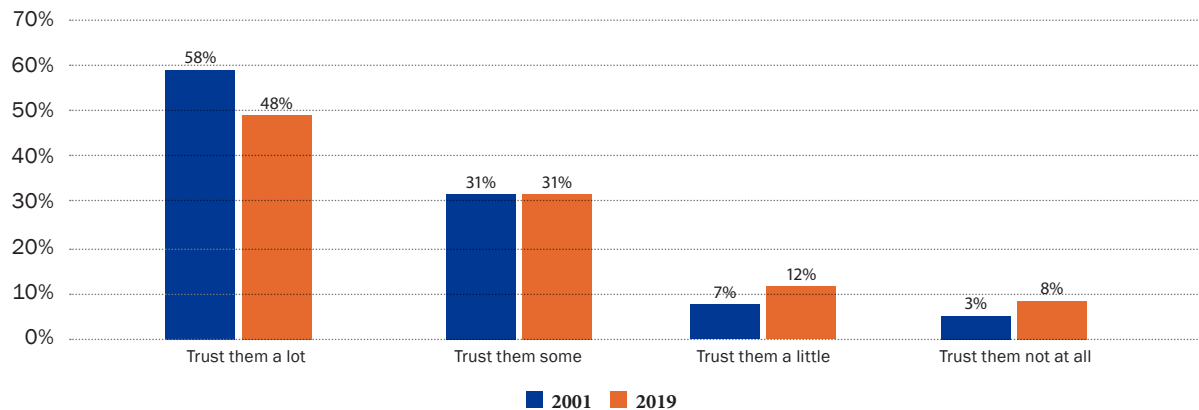


Source: October 2019 Granite State Poll

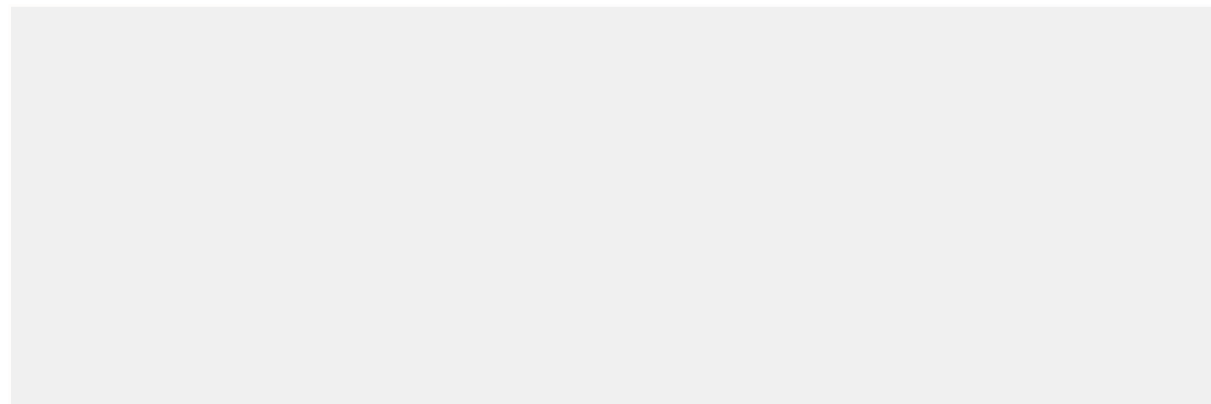


Trust in neighbors has also declined in New Hampshire over the past 19 years (Figure 2). Certain regions of the state are demonstrating more trust than others. How strong is trust among neighbors and others who live in your local community? Has it gotten better or worse in recent years? What are signs of trust or distrust that you are seeing?

Figure 2. Trust in Neighbors 2001–2019 in New Hampshire

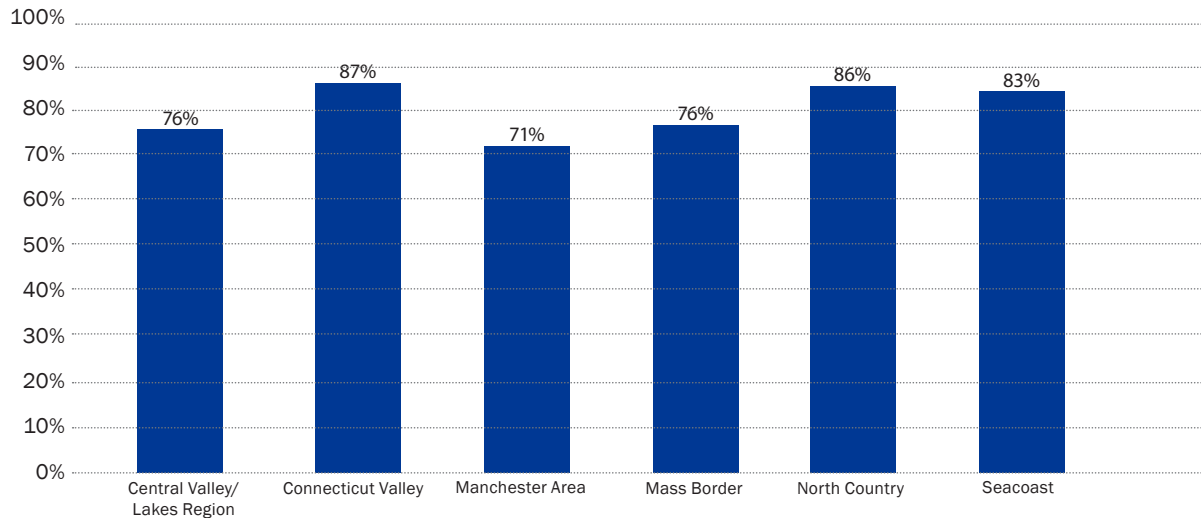


Source: October 2019 Granite State Poll



We also found that trust varied in the state by region. Connecticut Valley and North Country residents trust their neighbors most. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Trust Neighbors by Region in New Hampshire



Source: October 2019 Granite State Poll

Voting

In the *NH Civic Health Index*, we looked at voter data from the late 1970s and early 1980s through to 2016–2018 and found that voter turnout has been strong in the state over the past few elections (Figures 4 and 5). The 2018 midterm election in particular was strong. At the time we wrote the index, there was not yet information on the 2020 election, but we now know that there was record voter turnout in that election as well. How do you think voter turnout in your local community has compared with the state trends? Do you see the same turnout for local elections that you do for national ones? What are your concerns and priorities for future elections? Do you have ideas of how to encourage more people in your community to vote?

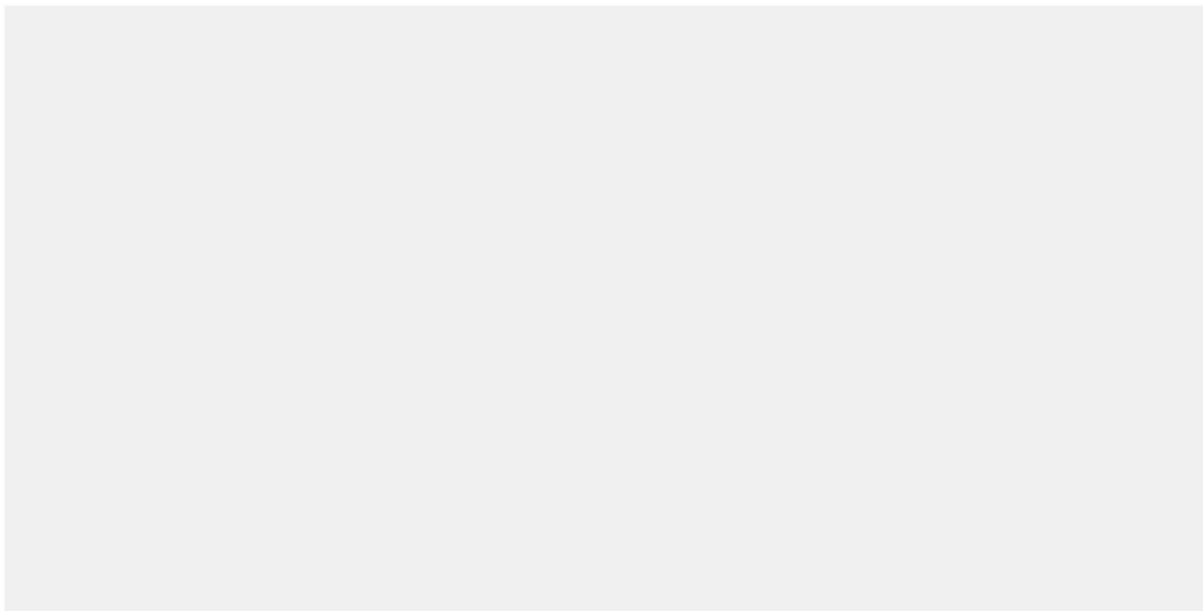
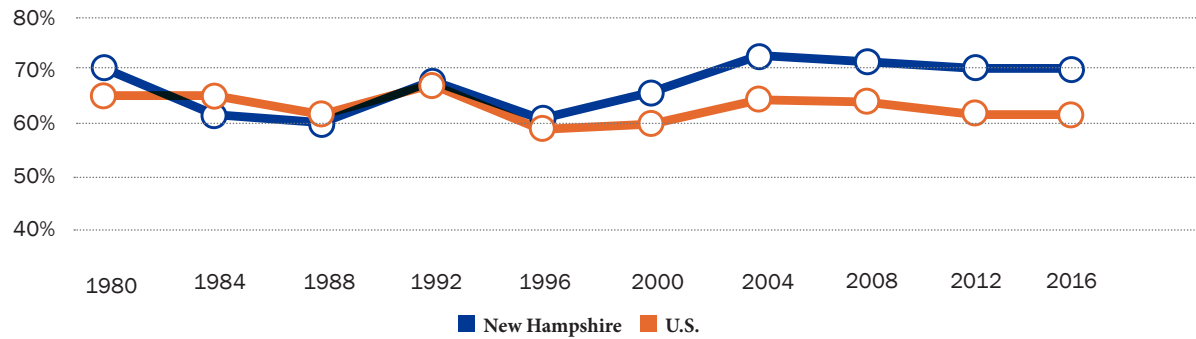
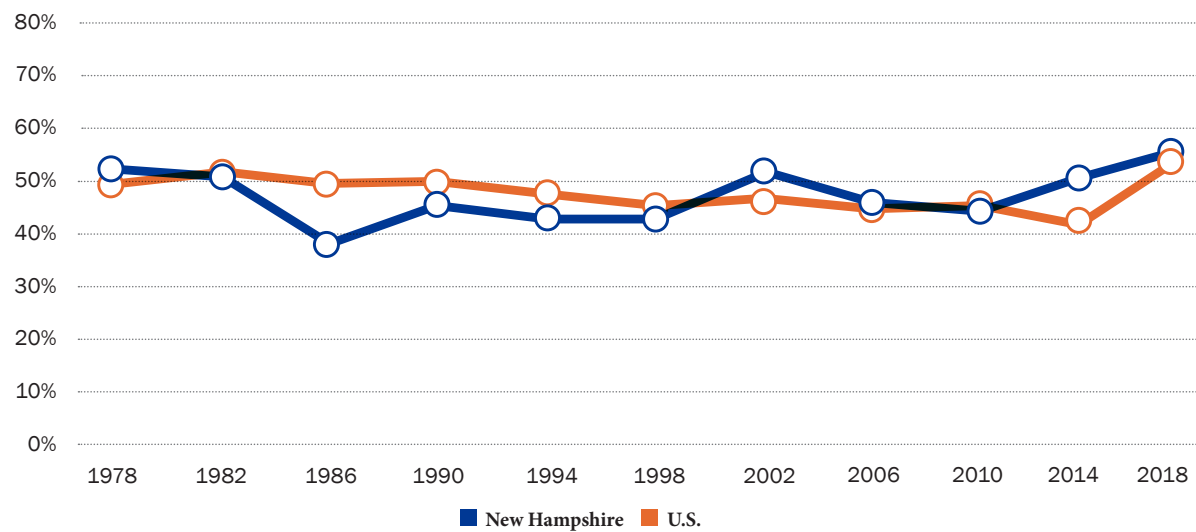


Figure 4. Presidential Election Voter Turnout in New Hampshire, 1980–2016



Source: *Voting and Registration in New Hampshire*, U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey

Figure 5. Midterm Voter Turnout in New Hampshire, 1978–2018



Source: *Voting and Registration in New Hampshire*, U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey

Barriers and Obstacles to Community Involvement

In the 2020 *NH Civic Health Index*, we asked people to identify any barriers they experienced to getting involved in local civic life (Figure 6). When you look at these trends, how do you think your community compares? How might you address barriers that people are experiencing to encourage more community involvement?

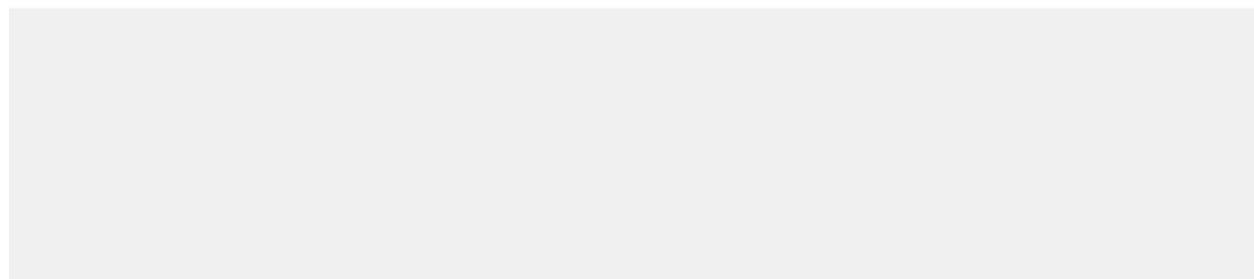
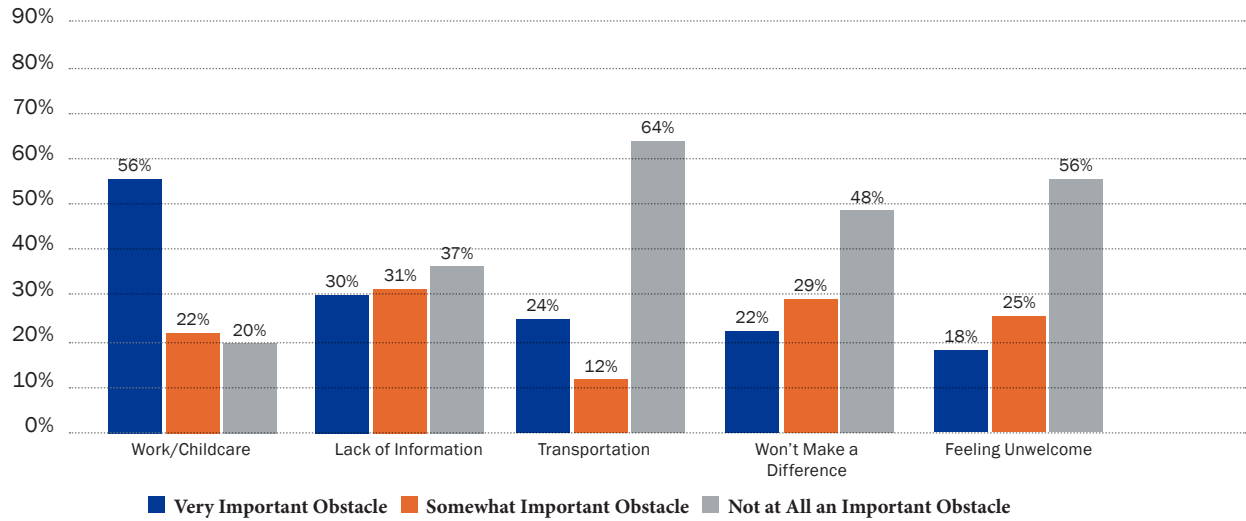


Figure 6. Obstacles and Barriers to Community Involvement in New Hampshire



Source: October 2019 Granite State Poll

Millennials and Youth

Millennials (people born between 1982 and 1996) in New Hampshire are struggling to achieve strong civic health. The Millennial generation are now mostly in their 30s and 40s. Small sample sizes prevented us from collecting as much information about Gen Z (people born 1997–2012) as we would like, but in the information we had, it looks like Gen Z is also not demonstrating strong civic health in New Hampshire. As you can see in the figures below, though Millennials exhibit some civic strengths, overall they lag behind other generations in their civic health. Gen Z and Millennials tend to trust their neighbors less than other generations. Do the youth and Millennials in your community engage at high or low levels? In what ways have you found success in engaging younger people? If younger people are not engaging as much as others, do you know the reasons why? If not, how could you find out? What could you do differently at the community level to engage younger people?

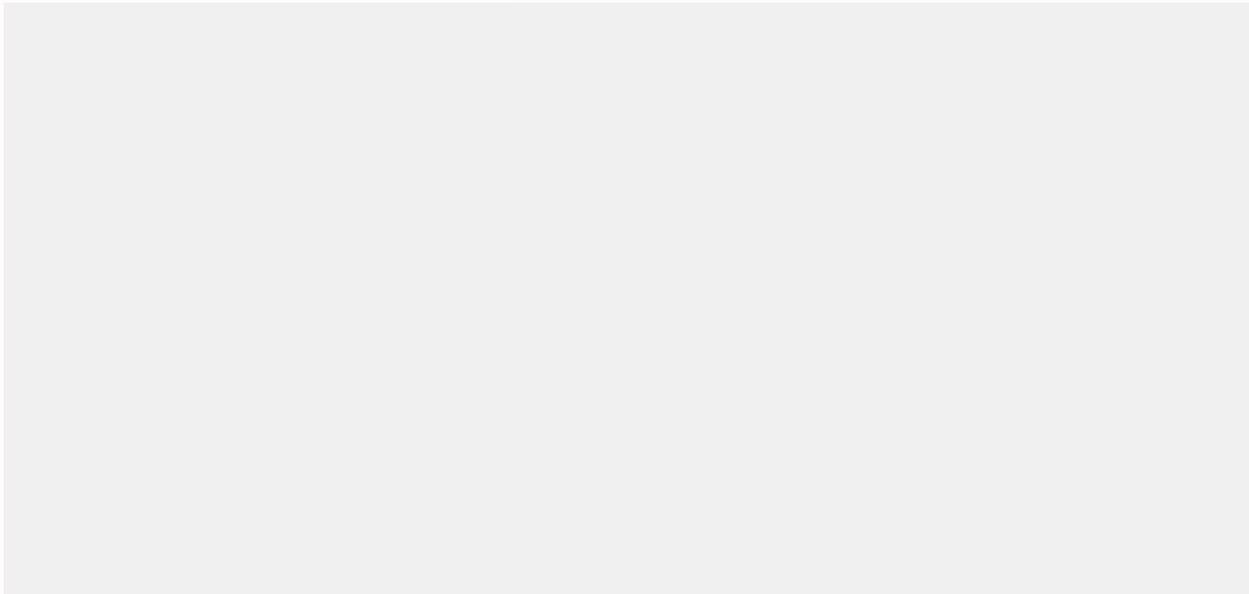
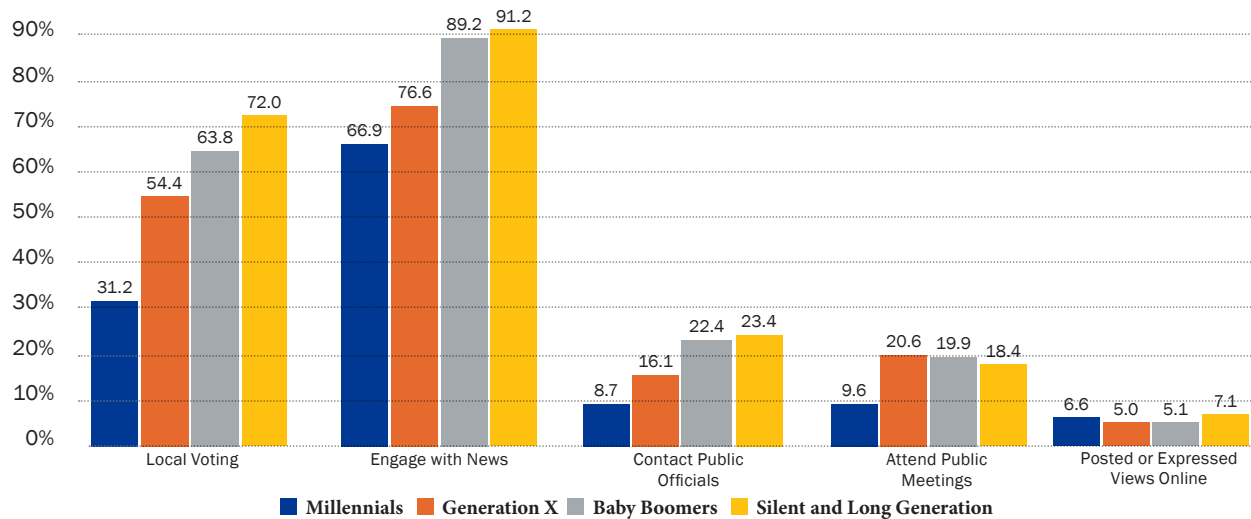
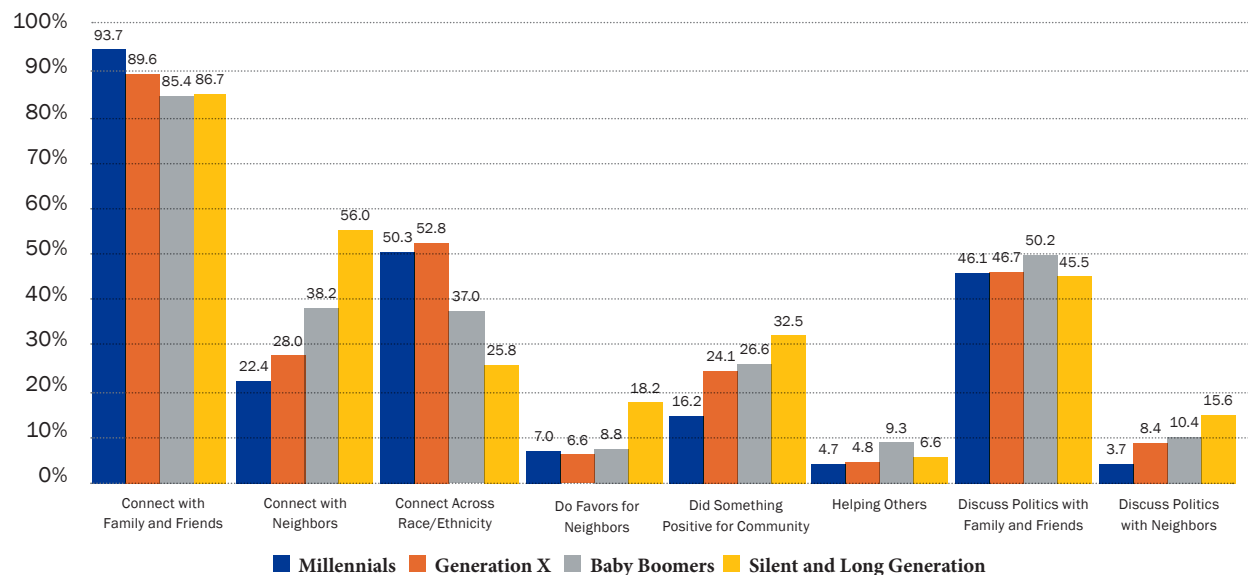


Figure 7. Civic Awareness and Engagement by Age in New Hampshire



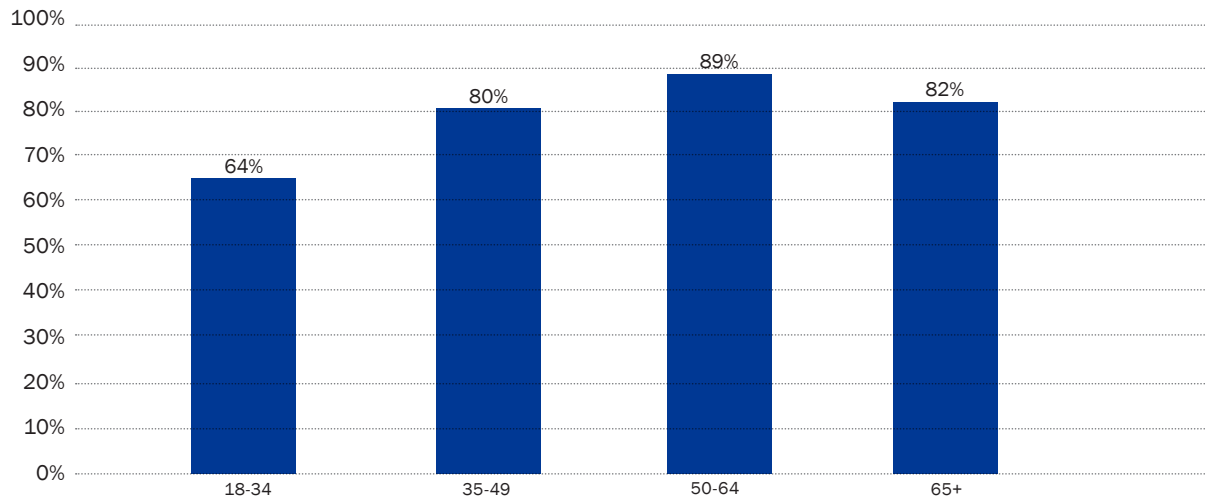
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)* and *Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016)*

Figure 8. Connecting in Community by Age in New Hampshire



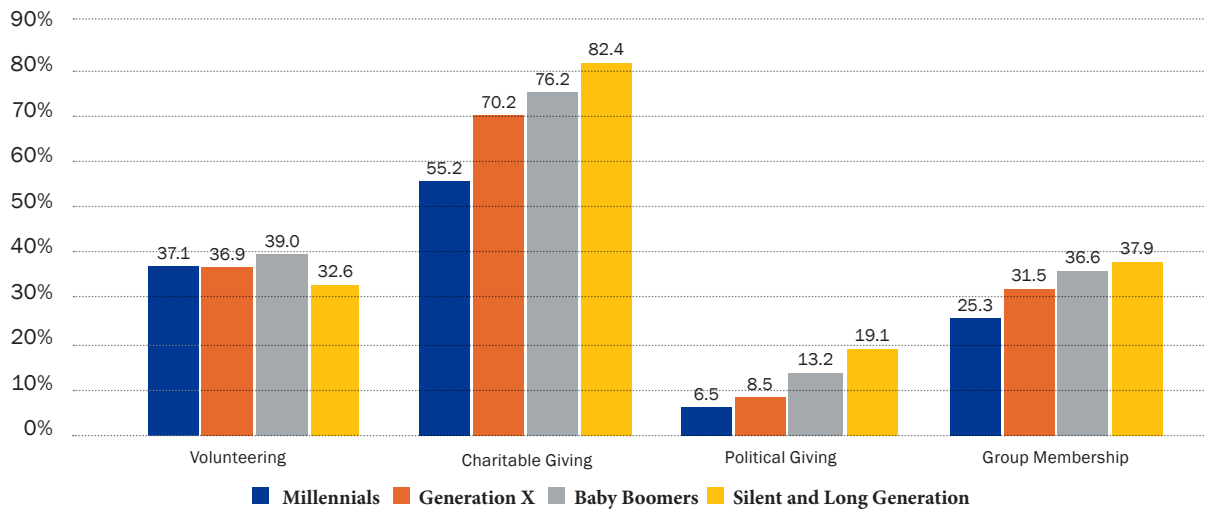
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*

Figure 9. Trust Neighbors by Age in New Hampshire



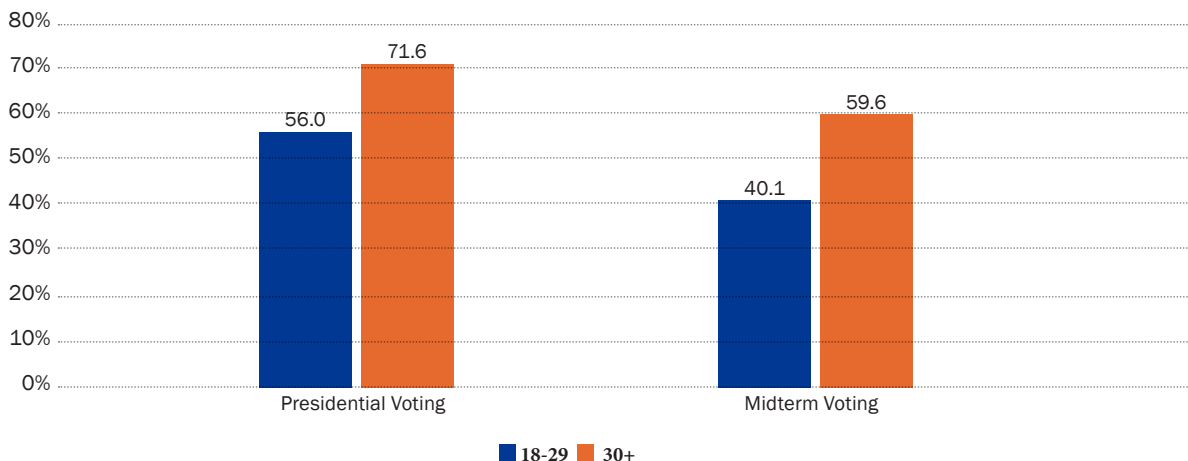
Source: October 2019 Granite State Poll

Figure 10. Volunteering and Giving by Age in New Hampshire



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)

Figure 11. Voting by Age in New Hampshire



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)* and *Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016)*

Engaging Across Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

New Hampshire exhibited some strengths in civic health, like being in the top 5 states in the nation when it comes to voting, connecting with friends and family, and charitable giving. However, we ranked in the bottom 5 in the country—46th—in connecting with people of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Table 1). This question was asked not only of in-person connection but also how often people interact with others online or on the phone, and we still scored quite low. The state is also rapidly diversifying, especially in the southern part of the state, and in particular communities like Manchester and Nashua. This trend raises important questions about how much people are engaging—or not—with people different than themselves. In your own community, do you see people engaging with others across race, ethnicity, and culture? If you do not have much racial and ethnic diversity, do you see people engaging across other differences like disability, age, income, and politics? If new residents are moving into your community, what ways do you think you could welcome them? How do you balance honoring people who have lived in communities for a long time and people who are new? Are you seeing incidents of racism and discrimination? What could your community do to encourage more interactions across differences?

Table 1. Connecting in Community: New Hampshire Versus U.S.

Census Indicators of Civic Health	National rank, out of 51 (including DC)	Percent who engage in activity in NH	Percent who engage in activity in U.S.
Connecting with a person of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background	46th	44.2%	56.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*



Education and Income

In the *NH 2020* and *2012 Civic Health Indexes*, we found that education, not income, was the bigger influence on if people are civically engaged (Figure 12–18). Do you think this is true for your local community? What intersections are there between education and civic health at the local level? Are there ways that your schools or other educational institutions like universities or colleges encourage local civic health? What is civic education like in your community, and are there ways it could be improved?

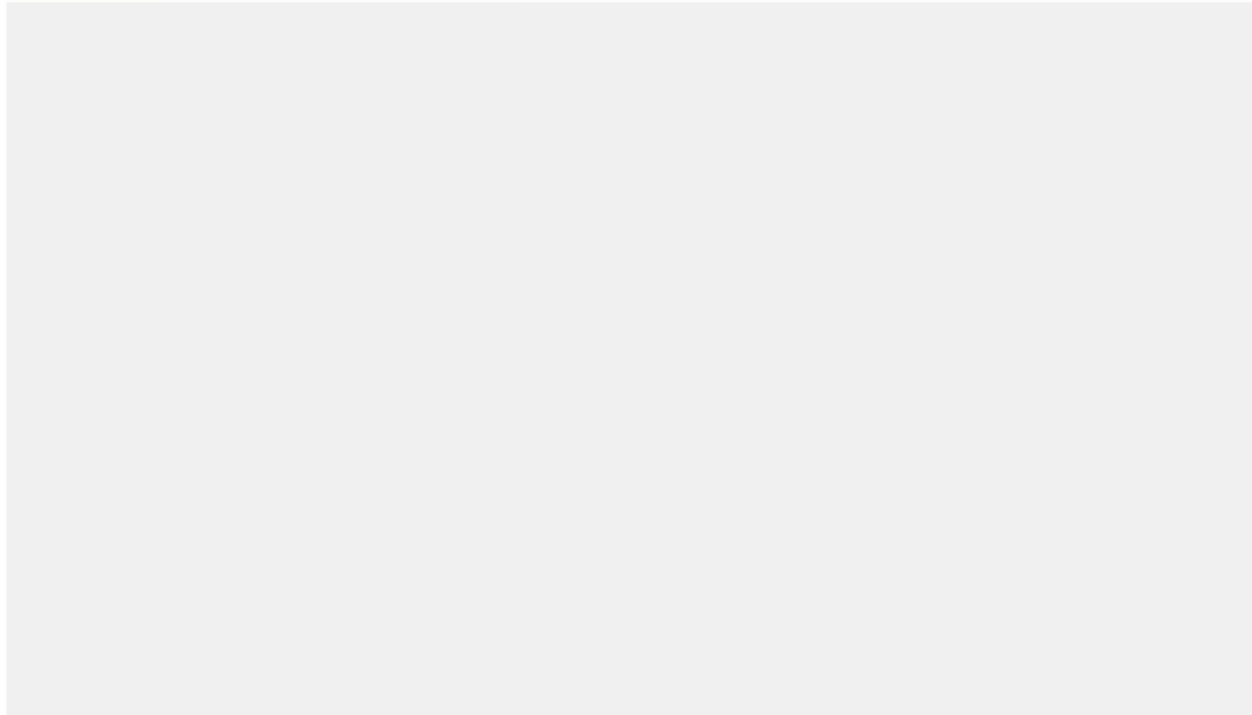
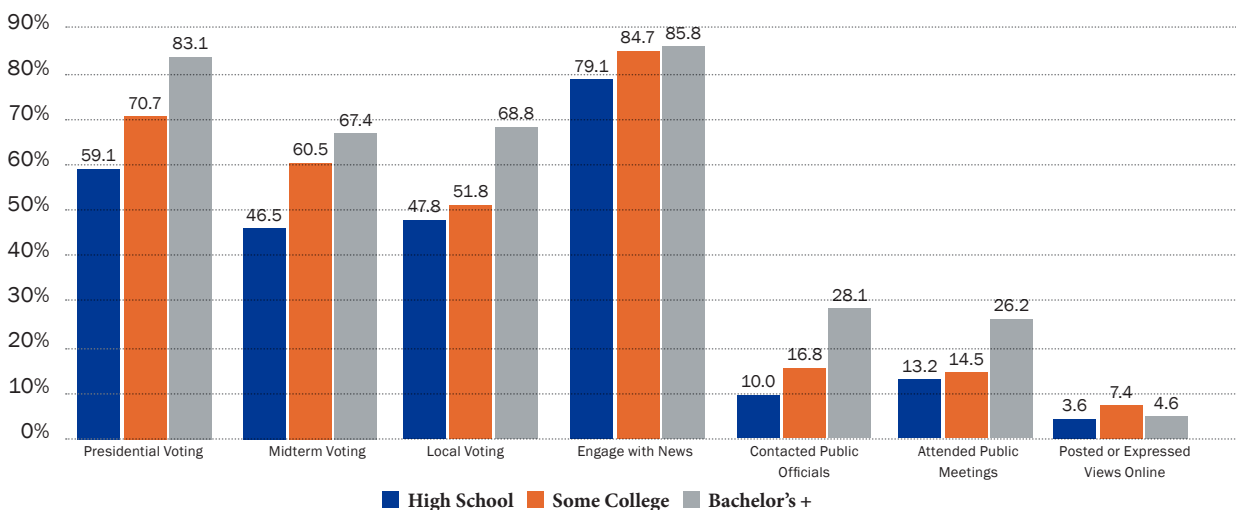
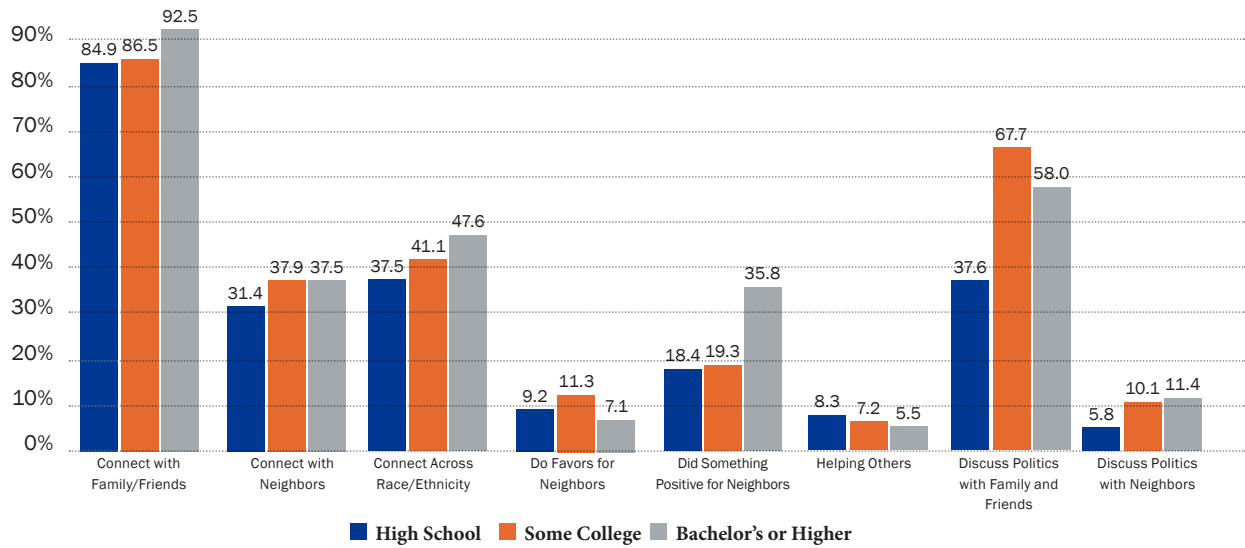


Figure 12. Civic Awareness and Engagement by Education in New Hampshire



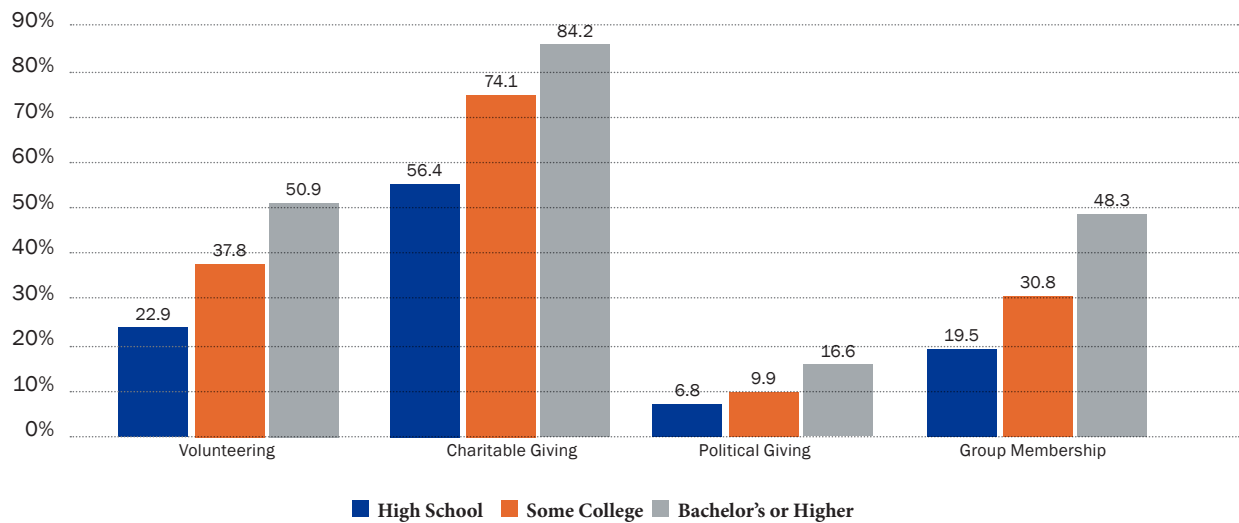
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017) and Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016)*

Figure 13. Connecting in Community by Education in New Hampshire



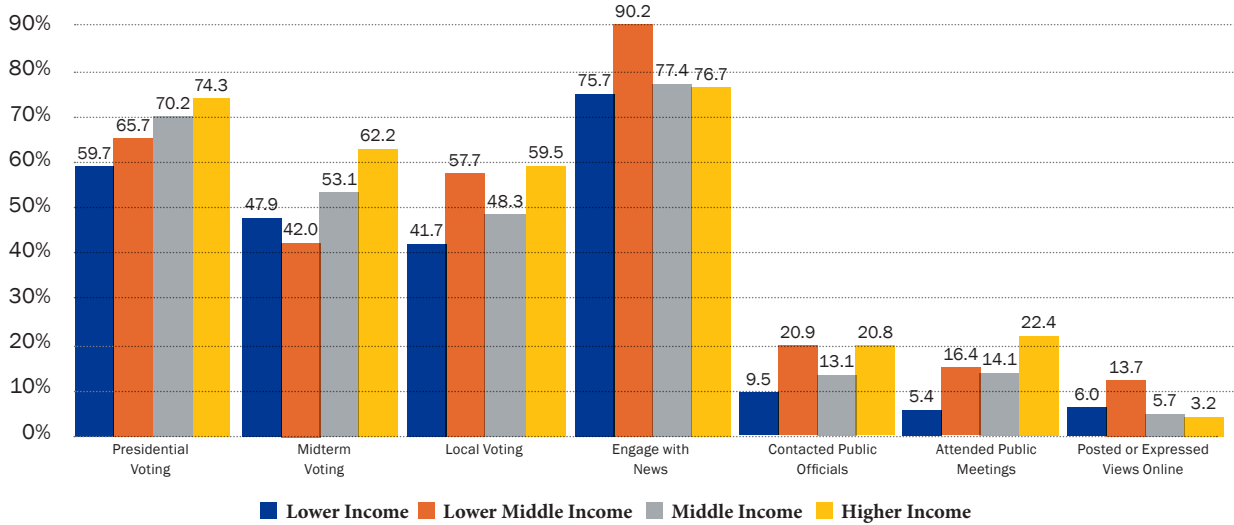
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*

Figure 14. Volunteering and Giving by Education in New Hampshire



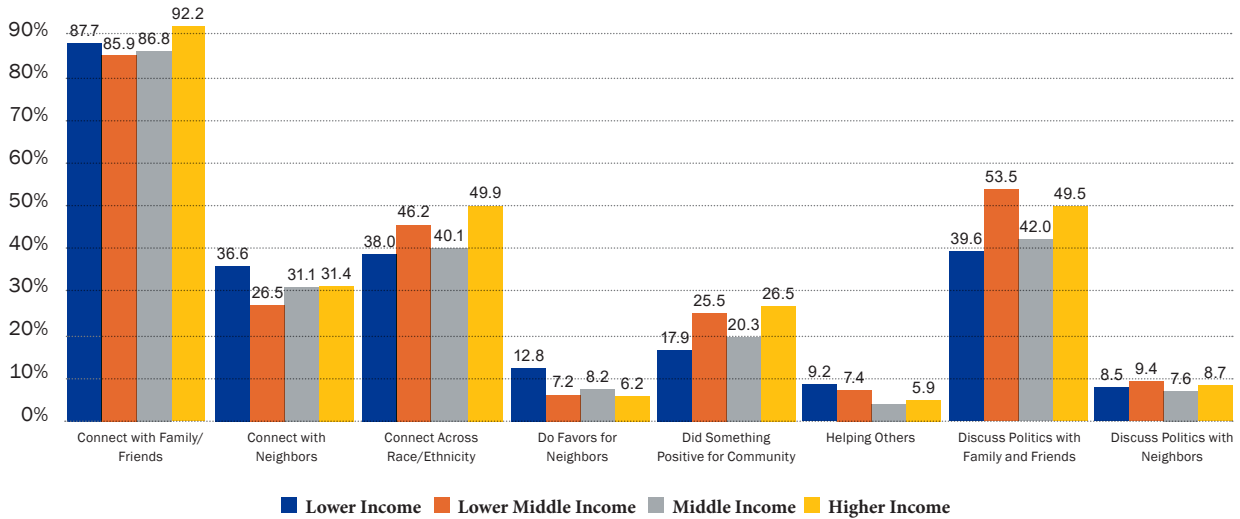
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*

Figure 15. Civic Awareness and Engagement by Income in New Hampshire



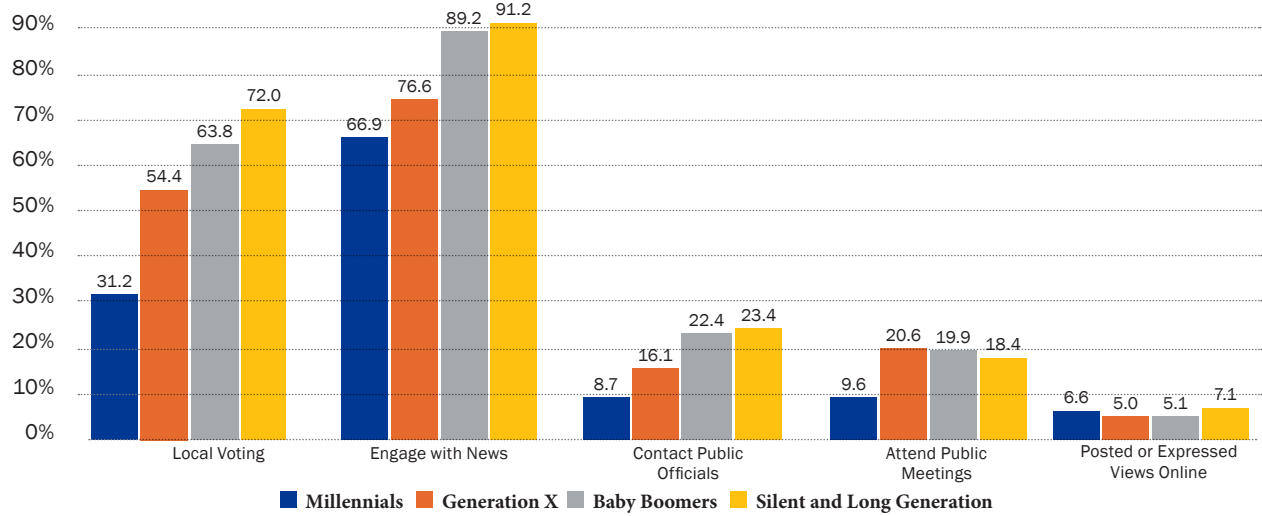
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)* and *Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016)*

Figure 16. Connecting in Community by Income in New Hampshire



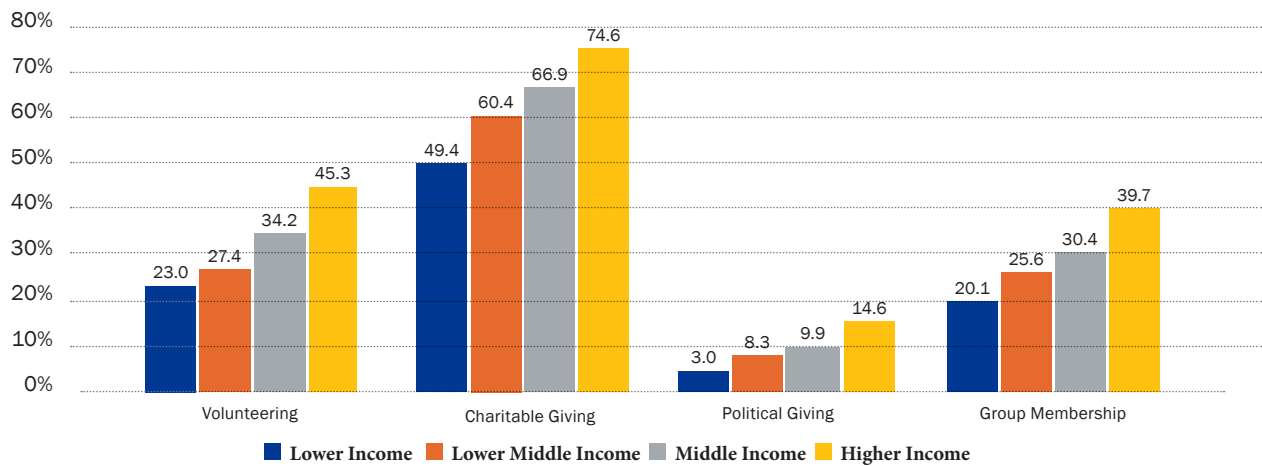
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*

Figure 17. Civic Awareness and Engagement by Age in New Hampshire



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)* and *Voting in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2018 and 2016)*

Figure 18. Volunteering and Giving by Income in New Hampshire



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volunteering and Civic Life in New Hampshire, Current Population Survey (2017)*



Taking Action

The information in this section is intended to support you in conversations at the local level.

- ▶ If you are finding that trends in your local community differ from the state trends, what do you think these differences mean for your local community? Does it make you feel good about the directions you have been going or motivate you to make changes?
- ▶ If you are seeing similar trends to the state, do you feel like you want to approach people at the state level to take action? Do you want to talk with other communities about this issue and create partnerships to address civic health?

Conclusion

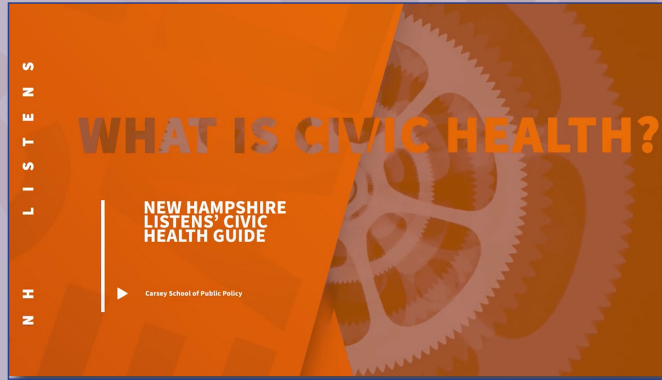
There is a lot of information in the statewide civic health index from 2020 that may be interesting for you to explore at the local level. How does your local community differ from the state, and where do you see similar trends? What have you learned about civic health at the local level?



Resources

Click on the images below to access the videos that accompany this guide and for the *2020 New Hampshire Civic Health Index* report (PDF and online versions).

▶ Video About Civic Health

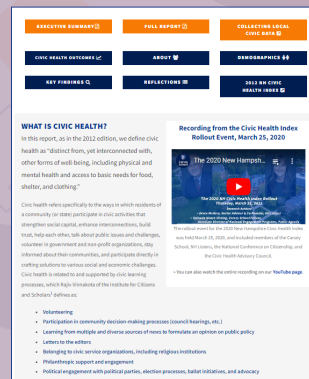
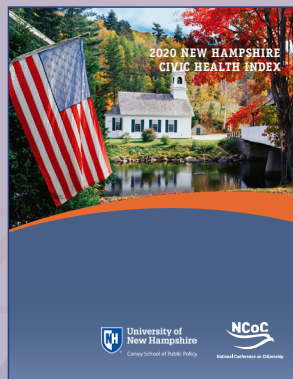


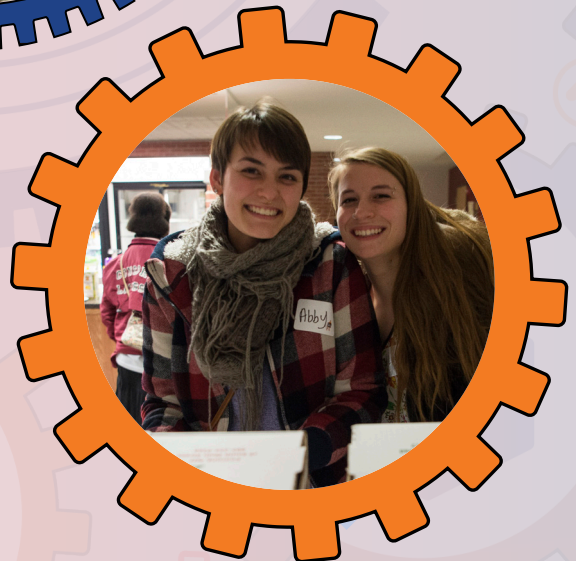
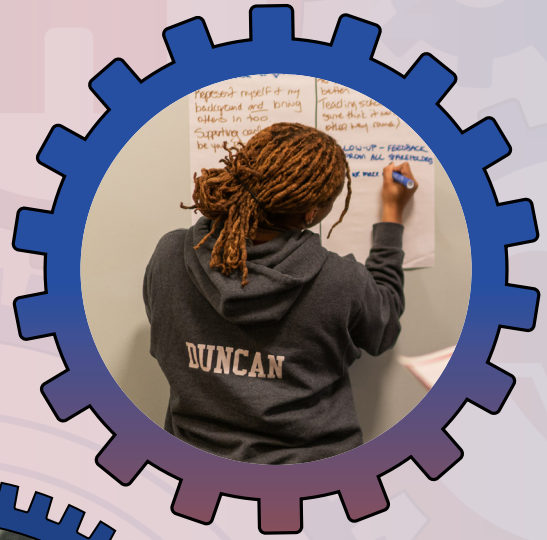
▶ Video About Local Civic Health Guide



📁 2020 New Hampshire Civic Health Index

PDF **Online**







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