If civic tech is not an app, a website, data portals, a map, data journalism, online procurement, or online voting - what is it?

Civic tech = people + tech + impact

Civic tech is the intersection of these three things that brings together positive social change. Civic tech isn't an object or genre of objects, but **a process or way of working**.

If we were to try and map out what those things were, how we might talk about them consistently, or how they might be measured across organisations and projects, here's a rough start.

People

	Baseline	Progressive	Ideal State
Inclusion + Diversity How are we creating opportunities for diverse communities to participate in the entire process (from design and recruitment, to feedback and analysis)	Opportunities are made open for underestimated people to join.	Outreach is made to intentionally reach underestimated people.	Safe spaces create the right environment for active participation from underestimated people.
Collaboration How are we creating opportunities for different groups of people to come together, how are we sharing this back	Between teams (within one organisation)	Between organisations (within the same sector)	Between ecosystems (across sectors)
Empathy + Trust How are we working to build these in new places	Creating connections between communities of practice	Between public institutions and private / NGO sector	Between public institutions and individuals
	Reaching out to usual alliances	Reaching out to new or unlikely alliances	Building bridges with 'opponents'
Transfer of Skills How are we creating lasting change through skill development	Using new tools (Slack, Trello etc.)	Using new processes (double diamond, roadmapping, user journeys, prototypes etc)	Using new ways of thinking / getting things done (brokering, relationship building, collaboration) Knowledge about how to collaborate.

Tech

	Baseline	Progressive	Ideal State
Human-Centered To what extent does the project address the needs and wants of the end users and beneficiaries, as opposed to only those of whoever commissioned the project	Needs and wants are addressed based on data *about* end users/beneficiaries. Focus is on functions, tasks, and usability.	Needs and wants are addressed based on data *from* end users/beneficiaries (primary design research). Focus is exploratory; on understanding and empathy.	Needs and wants are addressed based on data synthesised *with* end users/beneficiaries (participatory design). Focus is generative and long-term; on facilitation and empowerment.
Demand-Driven How do we decide where to work and what to focus on	Direction set by those who pay for work (specific grant proposal, fee-for-service)	Direction set by other dominant players (thematic proposals, replicating projects, incubators)	Direction set from the ground-up (human-centred design ➜ approaching funders, crowdfunding or open grants)
Validation To what extent are we ensuring what we're making is needed, & hasn't been done before	Validated the need (with end-users)	Validated the approach (leverage existing research in the space)	Validated the thing being made (made sure it hasn't been built before)
Agility How much do we elicit feedback and to what extent are we able to react and pivot work to changing data and circumstances	Feedback is gathered but not acted upon. Feedback is gathered after the process.	Continuous feedback and flexibility on **what** is made, throughout the project.	Continuous feedback and flexibility on **how** it's made, throughout the project.
Openness How much are we making open, and making work easy to	Data // Code // Legal Frameworks (ie. static materials)	Analysis // Research // Findings (ie. analysed or dynamic materials)	Ways of working, documentation Training others.

replicate			Facilitating co-creation of knowledge.
Sustainability How is the technology being sustained and how is the value being communicated?	Sustained by philanthropy

Not sustained // temporary project. No outreach and communication of value | Value is recognised / held by organisation who sustain the project, temporarily.

Work on storytelling and communicating value has been done. | Value is recognised / held by organisation who sustain the project, permanently.

Or so cheap it doesn't need funding.

Strong focus on storytelling and communicating value. |
| **Enriches Society** Is the thing being made something that will enrich society or worsen it | Does not progress: war, mining, tobacco, corruption, surveillance etc. | Does progress: justice, health, environmental protection, community / social fabric, sustainable development goals, accountability, etc. | Empowering communities // progressing democracy |
| | | | |

Impact

	Baseline	Progressive	Ideal State
Self-Aware To what extent do we understand the context of this project, the impact of the work and the potential negative outcomes	Understanding and awareness of why the project exists and how it came to be	Understanding and awareness of how it fits into a bigger picture of impact	Understanding and awareness of the ecosystem(s) it might affect, including negative implications,

Being close to people impacted. |
| **Outcomes Based** To what extent do we understand the | Understand the outputs of our work, with a theory on | Loose theory of change, some anecdotal evidence, | Clear theory of change, demonstrated |

relationship between outputs and outcomes	outcomes	or correlated numbers on outcomes	outcomes from work
Longevity To what extent is the project, or outcomes sustainable, or creating space for a ripple effect	Project or work has no visible effects *past* its duration	Outcomes live in the people involved, culture change	Change to institution, system or process mean a new way of doing something
Distribution of Benefits How much are we working to ensure the thing made is in the hands of those who need it most?	Benefits of tool / product is distributed to community centred around those making it.	Benefits of tool / product is distributed through some outreach outside of the existing community.	Benefits of tool / product is distributed through partnerships, training and outreach to ensure it's in the hands of those who need it most.
~~Empowerment~~ **Distribution of Power** To what extent are we creating shifts in power for those the thing is made for.	Functional (people as users) - technical fixes of service delivery problems	Instrumental (people as choosers) - aims to address systemic governance challenges	Transformational (people as makers and shapers) - build foundations of democratic and accountable government systems

[ADD YOUR NAME // ORG BELOW]

Credit and Input:

Alvaro Maz - Code for Australia

Lina Patel - Code for Australia

Lia Milito - Code for Canada

Christopher Whitaker - Code for America

Khairil Yusof - Sinar Project

Nick Kaufmann - Open Maine

Sheba Najmi - Code for Pakistan

Micah Sifry - Civic Hall

Krzysztof Madejski - ePaństwo Foundation

Kelly Halseth - Code for Canada

Milo van der Linden - Code for NL

Nadiia Babynska Virna

Kersti Wissenbach - DATACTIVE

James McKinney

Denique Ferguson - SlashRoots Foundation

Scratchpad follows:

If we consider civic tech, or the value of working with Code for Australia, as a process - what are the things that set us apart?

- **Inclusion** - How are we creating opportunities for diverse communities to participate (recruitment, feedback, deliberation)
    - Opportunity (making it open to others)
    - Outreach (making effort to reach different groups of people)
    - Safe spaces (making the right environment for active participation)
- **Collaboration** - How are we creating opportunities for different skills to come together / to what extent are we contributing back to a wider civic tech movement
    - Within team
    - Within organisations
    - Within communities of practices
    - Within ecosystems
- **Shifting Power** - To what extent are we creating shifts in power for those involved
    - Functional (people as users) - technical fixes of service delivery problems

- - Instrumental (people as choosers) - aims to address systemic governance challenges
  - Transformational (people as makers and shapers) - build foundations of democratic and accountable government systems
- **Agility** - How much do we elicit feedback, and to what extent are we able to react and pivot work to changing circumstances and data
  - Feedback and flexibility on what is made
  - Feedback and flexibility on how it's made
- **Demand Driven** - how do we decide where to work and what to focus on?
  - Direction set by those who pay for work (specific grant proposal, fee-for-service)
  - Direction set by other dominant players (thematic proposals, replicating projects, incubators)
  - Direction set from the ground-up (human-centred design ➜ approaching funders, crowdfunding or open grants)
- ~~**Reflection** - To what extent are we taking on feedback and reflecting on how we're working~~
- **Validation** - To what extent are we ensuring what we're making is needed, & hasn't been done before
  - Validated the need (with end-users)
  - Validated the approach (leverage existing research in the space)
  - Validated the thing being made (made sure it hasn't been built before)
- **Openness** - How much are we making open
  - Data
  - Analysis (Research / Findings)
  - Code
  - Ways of working (documentation)
- ~~**Documentation** - How much have we put into the documentation of our work (blended above?)~~
  - ~~Tool / model / code (or demo) is accessible by public~~
  - ~~Supporting documentation is accessible by public~~
  - ~~Promotion of tool - storytelling for purpose, documented in civic tech catalogs etc.~~
- ~~**Replication** - How easy are we making it to replicate for others (Same as above)~~
- **Empathy ➜ Trust** - How are we working to build these in new places

- ○ Creating connections between communities of practice (e.g. across departments)
- ○ Creating connections between government and private / non-profit sector
- ○ Creating connections between government and civic-minded groups/individuals
- ○ Creating connections between government and marginalised groups/individuals
- **Transfer of Skills** - How are we empowering others in the process
    - ○ Using new tools (Slack, Trello etc.)
    - ○ Using new processes (double diamond, roadmapping, user journeys, prototypes etc)
    - ○ Using new ways of thinking / getting things done (brokering, relationship building, collaboration)
- ~~**Support** - To what extent are we supporting people to try new things~~
- **Self-Awareness** - to what extent do we understand the context of this project, the impact of the work and the potential negative outcomes?
    - ○ Understanding why the project exists and how it came to be
    - ○ Understanding how it fits into a bigger picture of impact
    - ○ Understanding the ecosystem(s) it might affect (negative implications)
- **Outcomes Based** - to what extent do we understand the relationship between outputs and outcomes?
    - ○ Understand the outputs of our work, with a theory on outcomes
    - ○ Loose theory of change, some anecdotal evidence, or correlated numbers on outcomes
    - ○ Clear theory of change, demonstrated outcomes from work
- **~~Sustainability~~ Longevity** - to what extent is the project, or outcomes sustainable, or creating space for a ripple effect?
    - ○ Outcomes live in the people involved, culture change
    - ○ Change to institution or process mean a new way of doing something
    - ~~○ Project became self-sustaining, continuing to contribute to outcomes~~
- ~~**Evaluation (blended into Outcomes Based)**~~
    - ~~○ Being clear on the actual goals and outcomes~~
- ~~**Effect on Policy (maybe blend into Longevity)**~~
- **Things made enrich society**
    - ○ Don't make things that progress war, mining, tobacco, corruption, surveillance etc.

○ Make things that progress justice, health, environmental protection, community / social fabric, accountability, democracy etc.

Readings:

https://civichall.org/civicist/why-even-bother-with-a-user-centered-digital-govt/

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six_ways_to_repair_declining_social_trust

Chat with Lia (Code for Canada) - 28th November 2018

Practices vs. Values of Code for All

Theory of Change

Lia's take on hard values:

- Working in the open (open code, open process - "not a hill we need to die on")
- Improving government not politics.
- Not agreed upon but heading towards - statement of ethics. Significant impact on specific communities, but no ethical practices around dealing with that. Not codified.
- Agile in the sense of responsive and learning, building reflection into processes.
- Fighting bureaucracy - anti-waterfall - simplicity, using the lightest solution.
- Rallying around challenges and not solutions
- Having a wide net, in terms of who is engaged (silo-busting) - let's just talk together, we're all going to work together
- Equity and justice sessions - aware of the power and politics of technology - result of many different biased forces
- Not the usual suspects (including different people, recruitment). Testing with not the usual suspects too.
- Learning - not just about a product, but about capacity building, and inward learning as an organisation
- Government and communities relations are great - but how about other community groups, CSOs contribute to the same problems

The way we talk about these things is different to how we do things (dependent on who we're talking to) - mindful of the language we use. The audience would change.

Christopher Whitaker (Code for America) - 11 December 2018

Several teams working in different areas - biggest levers are government and technology (you need both). Teaching others what we know, showcasing what we do (what's possible), and building the network / movement.

Some confusion around the brigade and what its overall goal is? Some is great, some is not so great ➡ main goal is to produce civic technologists, really attractive to government. One of the main things we look at. 18F and USDS are full of CfAmerica Brigade members.

Training new people to be future leaders and to be cross-skilled (community building alongside, development and design).

Building product happens entirely at the local level.

[Values were co-designed with the brigade.](#) Non partisan but not neutral part of it.

Not solutions for solutions sake. Don't buy into the shiny things, trends (blockchain etc) - care much more about the mundane, accessibility, usability etc. Being grounded in reality.

Hard rules are the Code of Conduct - https://github.com/codeforamerica/codeofconduct

They're autonomous - pick their own governance structure, own projects. Unless it's a CfAmerica thing.

Infiltration of government, through brigade members. Stronger sense of values that have more resilience / staying power than others?

Measurable impact is super important.

Enriches society is great - codifying the ways we operate from our gut feel on things. Immigration is an iffy one (things that progress mobility are great, working for Trump's version of immigration policy… not so much).

Scaling up (has massive implications in USA). Measurable impact beats scale everytime. SNAP - can we close gaps? When we talk about scale, we're thinking about the impact.

Pushing back on number of brigades as a metric. Number of people hired by government is something we're more interested in.

Khairil Yusof (Sinar Project) - 18 December 2018

Different terms for similar things

Work that is in the public good - something that can't easily be monetised. Things that don't make sense in other business models. Where one person works on it and it benefits a lot of people, it also has to be inclusive (available to all).

Open source, or open content model.

All partners are part of that community. Everything in sharable (processes, source code, data, meetings - more meetups and conferences). Nothing should be closed off.

Work emerges by a need - things like neighbourhood watch where there's no police.

We're driven by a goal of parliament openness (so open parliament goals). Usually it's an itch to scratch - there's obvious needs and what's missing. To some extent funding by grants (thematic).

Goals are mainly around accessibility (physical and knowledge - do you understand the way that government works).

Collaboration happens by nature of society - there's not much civil society in Malaysia. Looking at NGOs that work on human rights is less than 50 people. All other NGOs have 1-5 people teams. We share spaces, we share everything. It puts away ego.

We work well with others if there's shared objectives - usually human rights related and then build on top of that. Openness and inclusion is huge.

Feedback is limited in Malaysia - generally only when there's surveys or workshops. Constrained environment, people aren't aware of role of civil society. People are sometimes scared to have their name associated with feedback.

We've been trying to teach other NGOs not to replicate work when it comes to tech. Depends on what CSO, some compete for funding. For us, it's less competitive and when collaboration doesn't happen it's because of tech literacy. Deplication at the local level happens because of the lack of literacy. Sinar is able to work internationally. We look to what's out there in the open source world - we don't want to make the same mistakes, or increase costs (maintenance is very costly).

Political systems - it's hard to adapt anything from USA or Canada, because of the context. Copying from Australia or Kenya is generally pretty easy.

Teaching is super hard - digital gap is quite a challenge. Digital component is what users demand, people are expecting it. Without the literacy it's difficult for CSOs to give that. The gap has been increasing. If they don't have capacity they outsource it. We did try to have a series of workshops, how to collaborate, what is the IP, lots of basic concepts. Still when it was constrained, there were few numbers, but donors are increasingly asking for it (under open content licenses).

In Malaysia - we have a really good CIO. We have an open source unit. They have more resources.

Legal is a huge one - having a straightforward outline of what the rights and boundaries are. Why are you allowed to use it, why you are not allowed to use it (open data). For example, having a Creative Commons (CC) license allows people to translate it. You still own the copyright, people just have clear permission.

Even the simple act of getting people onto new tools is really hard. At Sinar we have almost zero collaboration online / tools - most is through traditional meetings and meetings notes. If we're lucky they might have an intern who's an intermediary.

Open Contracting Partnership inclusivity is a really great resource. IDRC have a guide on how people do measurement / outcomes / proposals. On a more basic level, even getting people to think about outputs and outcomes is a huge achievement (or working with people from other CSOs we had to teach them about outcomes etc). Teaching them about frameworks and language. Need gov for non-gov as much as tech for non-tech. All of it is inclusive. Some of it is really hard. How do you converge a tech development program with outcomes and milestone reports. When beta is delivered for example, what's the outcome. Matching development with government outcomes.

Sheba Najmi (Code for Pakistan) - 11 January 2019

The line between civic project and social services is very blurred - government isn't great at providing services (e.g. largest ambulance org run by philanthropy).

What we are approached for - somethings we have to stop and say where is the line with government services - many projects work with other CSOs (e.g. keeping journalists safe).

Become known for running civic hackathons. Started as means to an end (to launch Fellowship and innovation labs). What happens when Telcos approach for hackathons - line is blurred.

Tech community is so small - everybody knows everybody - same community.

Are there criteria you run through with partnerships? It would be nice, but in reality I feel like it's a nation of last minute people. People do things sometimes 1-2 weeks in advance. Informally we'll talk about things, often from a resource point of view. Gut feel.

Values - if it's something of a religious nature we'll steer clear of it.

Try to be a pretty progressive organisation. Very aware of minority rights. Things most people avoid, we take on (etc. LGBTQ community projects).

There was a particular project, not because of the values, but because of the safety risk involved. For example, working with India when tensions were running high. There's also law from the 80s that is used against minority groups for blaspheming the Prophet. That's a contentious and widely cared about issue, but it's important to think about preservation. Bold one was around transparency, TrackReps, could track promises made through elections, if they were just showing up. Politicians have essentially mafia groups, so calling out somebody can be dangerous.

What are the things you think about for sustainability: in terms of fellowship, serious screening process for government who ask for fellows. Outside of the fellowship we need to choose who we work with, one is how engaged is the government partner, do they have resources, do they have buy-in, how devoted is the focal person, will they adopt this thing after it's done. We try to do a lot in the selection upfront.

Government are invited to training sessions. Focal person meets weekly with the team, co-located with IT Board, rather than the partnering government departments are (came from a space requirement).

Micah Sifry (Civic Hall) - 16 January 2019

Practice leads to theory, so it makes sense that this framework has emerged from you in this moment.

Labels - early, mature etc. are confusing. It sounds like it relates to the development of the project - implies progression. Ideal State. Is and ought to be might be another way of clarifying.

Validation - could be more clear on reinventing the wheel, reusing code, etc.

Openness

Enriches society - highest level is empowerment, not just enriching bad actors.

Difference between improves community health and community itself. If a community has more power, it can improve itself.

Empathy + Trust - is this in the scope of what civic tech can do? Even collaboration, it's hugely aspirational - might be careful not to depress people.

Underestimated - feels like there's underestimated value yet to unlock, rather than considering intrinsic human value. Active participation rather than just being open.

Impact / Longevity - change becomes institutionalised, it becomes normalised. Eg. congress voted for government data to become open. Policy being open by default.

Distribution of benefits - is it really different from other things? Like X people served, vs eliminating the need for the service.

Two effects of impact of civic tech - functional (tangible service, have we streamlined that process etc.) and empowerment (power changes, shifts from few to the many). Shift to Impact section add distribution of benefits / distribution of power. Impact = outcomes.

What's missing?

Sustainability (under tech / product) - a lot of civic tech is like demonstration projects, wouldn't it be cool if we could do X. Is the project being sustained by philanthropic people, through government, through people (users), or, wild card it's so cheap it doesn't cost anything (unconferences, hashtags, etc ways of doing things). Some civic tech processes don't need a

business model. Responding to user questions, bug fixes, etc. How are we going to launch this if we have no idea? Is it ethical to do so? Funders will tear me a new one for leaving it out.

Marketing (under tech / product) **-** Knight Foundation study came out last year, on the issue of sustainability. Very few invest in marketing. Assume if we build it they will come, no investment in storytelling and user stories - making sure people know about it. Planning for storytelling, conveying value.

Matthew McNaughton (Slashroots)

Kelly Halseth (Code for Canada) - 12th February 2019

Building a version of something similar with civic tech community - out of request from the community. What is the Canadian civic tech community about? Hoping to get to shared principles, a shared story of civic tech to date. As more governments & smart cities initiatives get involved / interested, civic tech wants to be able to say this is what it's about.

Some civic tech apps aren't working towards something bigger than political will. Micro level problems vs macro level systemic issues. E.g. Vision Zero (traffic deaths), changing street lights, the way they build streets, etc. Holistic approach. Civic Tech Toronto working together to visualise data around road related deaths / injuries to build political will and awareness. Responding to a real need.

Code for Canada doesn't necessarily consider Fellowships civic tech projects - more digital government.