

Civic Switchboard Institute: Facilitator's Guide

Prepared April 2025

About this Guide

In 2024, the Civic Switchboard Project team designed and delivered the “Civic Switchboard Institute” in 6 regions and online. This guide supports reuse of the Institute content for professional development workshops for library workers. You will find information about the resources needed to deliver the Institute materials in full or in part, suggested ways to introduce the content and activities, and links to the materials.

Learning Objectives

These materials were developed and delivered in both in-person and online modalities. The following learning objectives are supported by the materials:

The objectives of the Civic Switchboard Institute are:

- Connect with other library workers and expand a community of practice focused on libraries and civic data;
- Discover the connections between librarianship and civic data intermediary work;
- Explore your civic data ecosystem and potential roles for your library;
- Discover critical dimensions of data work, including power, social justice, and responsible data practices to mitigate harms.

Additionally, the Institutes that the Civic Switchboard delivered in 2024 advanced a learning objective that can be supported through additions to this content: Connect with exemplars of local library civic data intermediary work by engaging with the work of host libraries. We did so by including 60-90 minute segments delivered by library workers who served as local hosts. We invite reusers of this content to highlight local examples of library civic data work through the addition of a segment.

Licensing

These Civic Switchboard Institute materials were developed by the Civic Switchboard Project Team (Aaron Brenner, Bob Gradeck, Chelsea Gunn, Liz Monk, Eleanor Mattern, and Marcia Rapchak) in 2024. The Institute design and delivery was supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant Number RE-254899-OLS-23.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC-BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). If you have used these materials, we'd like to learn more about your experience. Please drop us a line at civic-switchboard@pitt.edu to share your story.

Materials Needed and Room Set-Up

We designed these materials to be used in a hands-on, device-free workshop, but also have used them in an online workshop.

If you deliver the content in person: we encourage you to print all handouts and to distribute them when introducing the activity. We experimented with handing out a packet of handouts at the start of the workshop, but found that it was easy for participants to lose their place within the packet and have difficulty locating the necessary handout.

The activities require modest supplies that can be placed on the tables during set-up. Have the following available for participants

- Sticky Notes (about 15 per person)
- Blank Paper - we suggest legal or tabloid size
- Pens
- Markers in assorted colors
- Nametags

Several of the activities are designed to be done in small groups of 3-4 participants. If running the workshop in-person, we suggest a room arrangement that facilitates this small group work. We used a “pod” set-up, as represented in the below illustration. Additionally, having a space that the facilitator can use to organize and store materials is helpful.

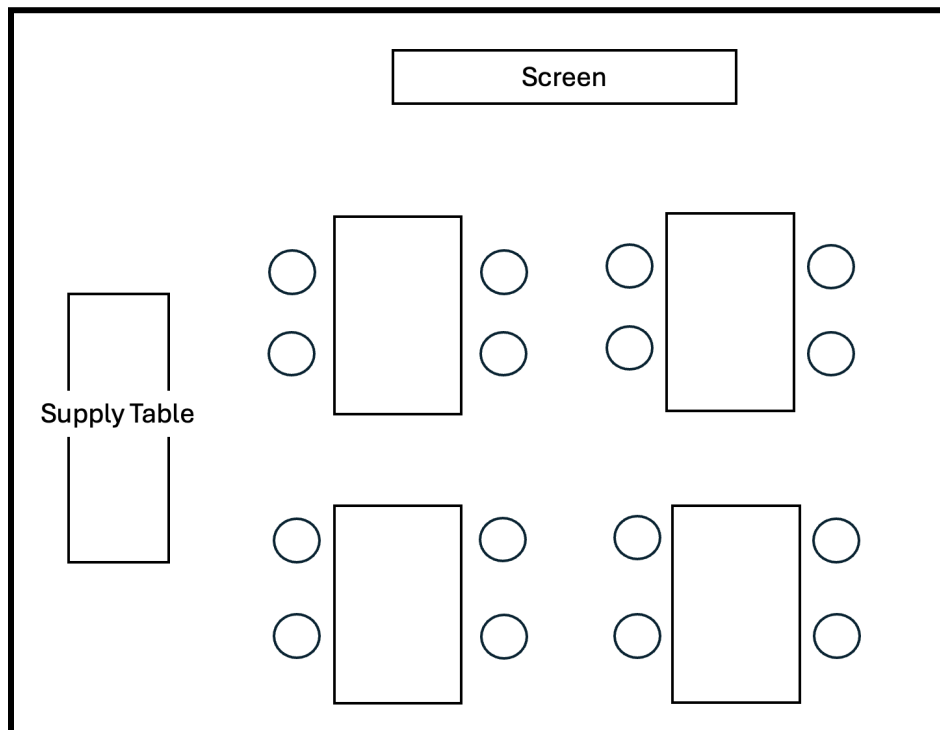


Figure: Image depicts a room set-up that includes a presenter screen, four tables with four chairs and a table for supplies.

To support captioning and accessibility, we created a Zoom meeting and logged in using the presenter's computer with captions enabled. We invited participants to log in to the Zoom room to access captioning. The Zoom room was not displayed on the presenting screen but ran passively throughout the workshop.

If you deliver the content online: We suggest making a local copy of all handouts to a Google Drive or OneDrive account and sharing a link to the relevant handout during each activity. Some activities are also designed to be done on paper. Ask your participants to have on hand a couple pieces of blank paper, a pen or pencil, and (ideally!) a pack of sticky notes.

Use an online meeting platform that allows for small group work. We used Zoom and activated breakout rooms for small group activities and discussion.

Agenda

Your agenda and approach to the workshop may differ from ours depending on the goals of the professional development session. Like us, you can run activities over two days or you can use them more modularly.

Example agendas for Institutes that we gave [in-person](#) and [online](#) can be adapted for your purposes.

Workshop Content

This section walks through sections of the content, articulating the goals of the section and the materials used.

Because we delivered the Institute over two days, we have organized the slides across two decks labeled [Day 1 Slides](#) and [Day 2 Slides](#). Section headers in the slides correspond with the sections outlined in this facilitator guide.

Day 1 Content

Introduction [[Day 1 Slides](#); slides 2-12]

This section begins on slide 2. This section includes a Day 1 agenda, a code of conduct, Day 1 learning objectives, an ice breaker, and an introduction to the Civic Switchboard project. All content is adaptable or removable. You can base the learning objectives on the activities that you choose to reuse.

This segment will take about 20-30 minutes, based on whether you ask all participants to introduce themselves.

Materials needed:

- [Code of conduct handout](#) (1/person)

The Civic Switchboard Project context (slides 9-12) orients participants to the rationale for the workshop materials. If you would like to share this context, you can read more about the Civic Switchboard project in our [Civic Switchboard Guide](#).

It's also a good idea to give participants time to individually review a code of conduct, if you are using one. We suggest printing out

An Introduction to Civic Data [[Day 1 Slides](#); slides 13-28]

This section provides a definition of civic data and open data, examples of open civic data, an explanation of the value and uses of civic data, and an articulation of the connections between library work and civic data.

This segment will take about 30 minutes.

Materials needed:

- ["Talking Points"](#) handout (1/person)

You can find slide notes to guide your facilitation. You can also find a useful primer on civic data in the Civic Switchboard Guide (["An incredibly condensed look"](#) and ["Ways of thinking about"](#)).

For slides 18-22, look for local examples of open civic data that will resonate with your participants and replace the examples in our slides. If you're not sure where to locate local open datasets, see if your city or region has a local open data portal by searching [DataPortals.org](#).

There is an **activity** and **handout** for this section that supports the learning objective *Discover the connections between librarianship and civic data intermediary work*. Print 1 ["Talking Points"](#) handout for each participant. Here's a script you can use to set up this **15-20 minute exercise**:

We just looked at some reasons that libraries, with their mission, community trust, and core functions, are well-positioned to do civic data work in their communities. Let's reflect on reasons for library work that can help (or have helped!) us make a case for our involvement with civic data work.

We're going to do a Think-Pair-Share activity. For 5 minutes, reflect on the "Talking Points" handout. Think about whether any of the "Why Libraries" talking points resonate with you or with your organization? Are any of these compelling talking points for you and people you work with? What makes them so?

After you review these, pair up with a colleague. Spend 5 minutes sharing your thoughts with one another. We'll then come together for some group discussion.

Then come back together and spend 5-10 minutes inviting discussion.

Library Civic Data Roles [[Day 1 Slides](#); slides 30-43]

This segment is a facilitated activity that supports the learning objective: *Explore your civic data ecosystem and potential roles for your library.* As an outcome of this activity, participants will identify high-priority and realistic civic data roles for their libraries

This activity will take about 45 minutes.

Materials needed for this segment include:

- Sticky notes (at least 8/person)
- Blank Paper (1 piece/person; We suggest legal or tabloid size paper)
- Pens (1/person)
- [Roles Handout](#) (1/person)

Begin the activity by sharing the following instructions:

To get started, draw a horizontal line on your blank paper. This is your x axis for this activity. On the left side of the line, write "low priority for my library." On the right side, write "high priority for my library." And, if you would like, you can create a box titled "not sure."

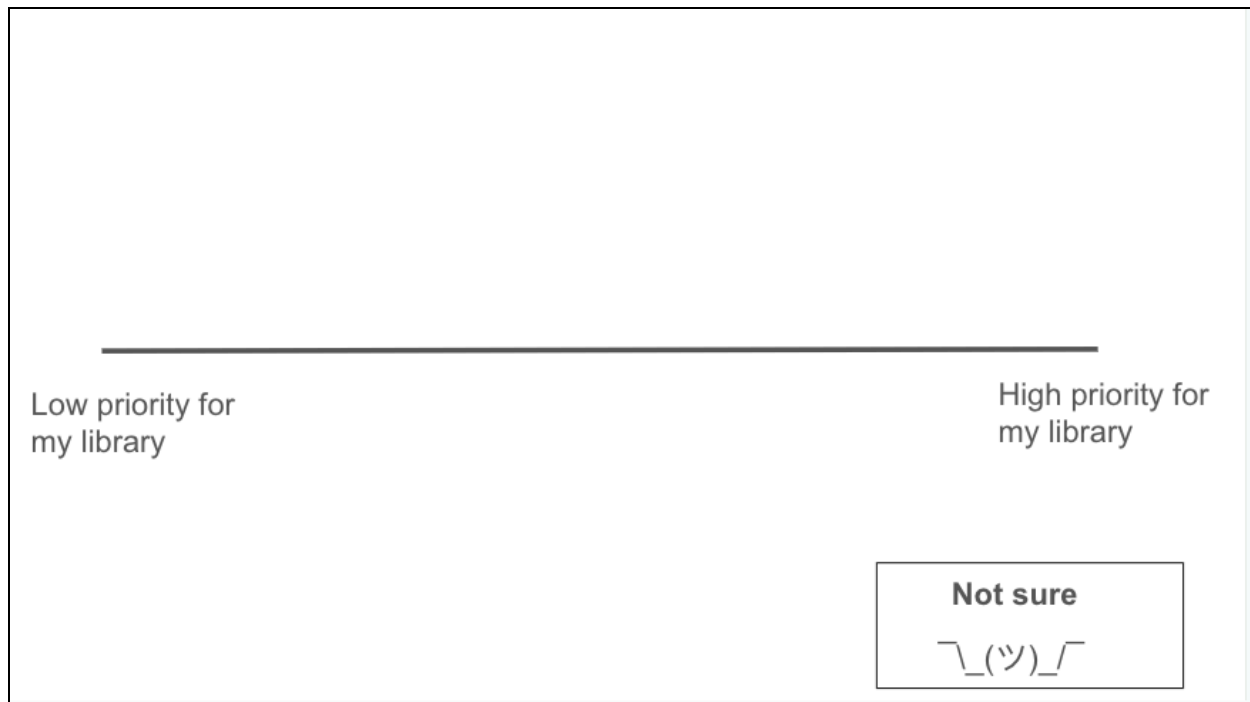


Figure: Participants should draw a horizontal axis that represents priority for your library.

After participants set up the paper, share the following instructions (also on slide 32):

In this activity, we are going to review different civic data library roles and reflect on our own libraries and communities. These aren't an exclusive list, but can get us thinking!

1. *After each role is introduced, write the role on a Post-It. Place the Post-It on the x-axis, indicating **priority** for your library (based on what you know about your community)*

Reflect on whether there may be another community partner who does this work already. How does this shape the priority level for your library?

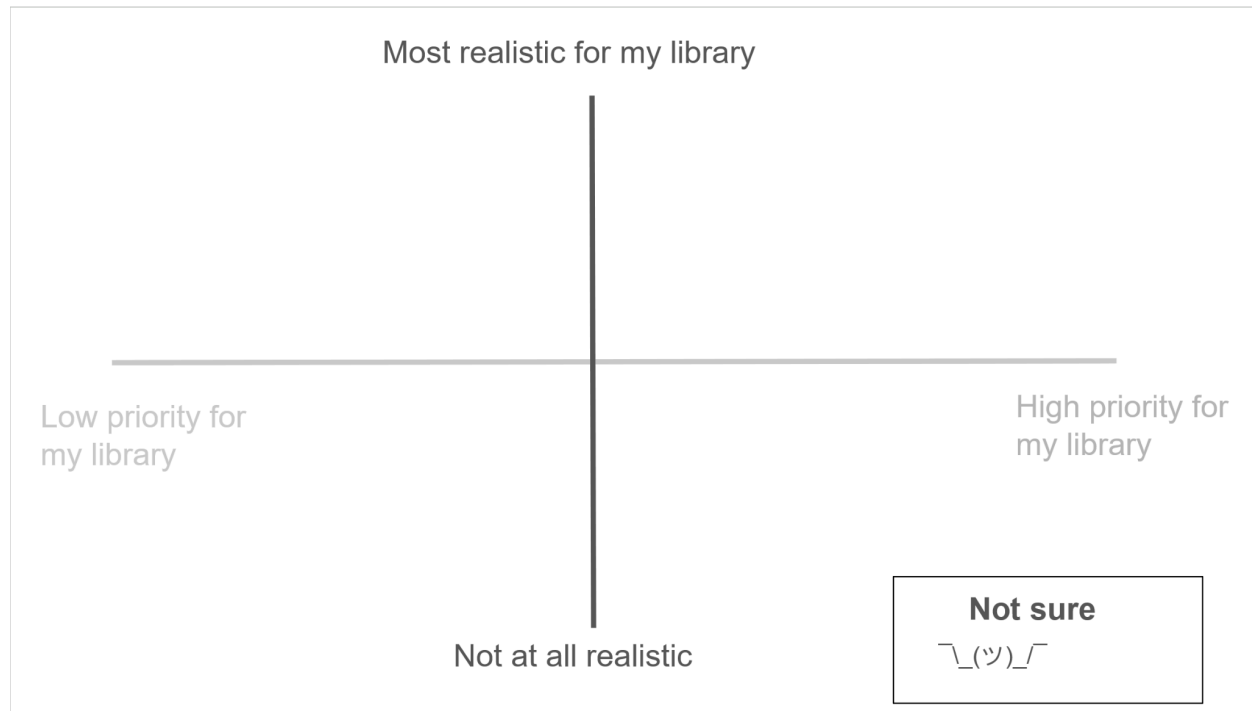
If you can, record an idea of what this role would look like/involve in your library.

2. *Once you have all your roles prioritized, there will be time to review and move the roles around!*

Walk through the roles using the slides and [Roles Handout](#). Give participants about one minute after introducing each role to place a Post-it note on the x axis. After that, introduce the Y axis. Tell participants (slide 41)

Think about how hard it would be to implement in your library context. Move the Post-It along the y-axis.

Instruct participants to draw a Y axis. Their paper should look like the image below (also on slide 42):



Give participants about five minutes to rearrange their Post-it notes.

If time, allow participants to share out by answering these questions (slide 43)

Choose a high priority role that is realistic for your library.

Share why the role is a high priority for your library.

Ecosystem Mapping [[Day 1 Slides](#): slides 46-63]

This section is a facilitated activity that supports the learning objective: *Explore your civic data ecosystem and potential roles for your library*. After completing this activity, participants will be able to identify potential partners in their civic data ecosystem who are doing civic data work or who might be interested in civic data work.

Materials needed for this segment include:

- [Ecosystem mapping](#) handout (1/ person)
- Pens (1/person)
- Blank Paper (1 piece/person)

This activity will take about 45 minutes.

Case Study Activity [[Day 1 Slides](#); slide 64]

This segment is a reading and discussion activity that supports the learning objective: *Discover the connections between librarianship and civic data intermediary work and Explore your civic data ecosystem and potential roles for your library*. After completing this activity, participants will reflect on an approach to open civic data work from a library and consider potential connections between their work and the roles presented in the case.

Materials needed for this segment include:

- [Case studies](#) (1 unique case for every 3-4 participants, 1/ person)

This activity will take about 30 minutes.

Provide the following instructions for participants:

These are examples from work that various libraries engaged in as part of Civic Switchboard. Given what you now know about roles and that you have explored potential partners, examine this case study and consider these questions. First reflect on your own, then discuss in groups

You will share what you discuss, so make sure to choose a presenter.

The questions presented on Slide 64 are:

*What was successful? What wasn't successful? Why?
Are there strategic goals or existing services in your libraries that align with this case study?
Does this library role(s) seem relevant to your library? Of interest to your ecosystem?*

Give participants 20 minutes to reflect on their own and in groups, and then have each group present out for the last 10 minutes of the session.

Canvas Planning [[Day 1 Slides](#); slides 65-67]

This segment is an activity that supports the learning objective *Explore your civic data ecosystem and potential roles for your library*.

This activity will take about 1 hour to complete. Allow 40 minutes for individual work and 20 minutes for group discussion.

Materials needed for this segment include:

- Canvas worksheets - 2 pages/person; we recommend printing slide 2 (blank canvas) on large, tabloid size paper

Provide the following instructions for participants:

This canvas walks you through planning for a library civic data role. You can use this canvas to plan an event, an activity, a service, or a tool. As you work through each section of the canvas, keep your ecosystem in mind. Consider whether you should partner with others for this project or if another member of your ecosystem is already doing this work.

After 40 minutes of planning time, bring the group back together. Use the questions on slide 67 to guide group discussion. Invite individuals to share out on:

- What's your idea?
- What are your next steps?
- What are you most excited about?
- Are there opportunities to work together? Are there ways that connections or collaboration with other library workers would support your work?

Wrap-Up [[Day 1 Slides](#); Slides 68-70]

Spend about 20 minutes inviting reflections on the activities. Use the questions on slide 68 to guide discussion:

- What opportunities or challenges for civic data work in libraries do you feel motivated to explore further?
- Are there any other comments or questions you'd like to share as you reflect on our work today?

If you are planning on a second day of activities, review the agenda with participants.

Day 2 Content

Example of Library Civic Data Work

One of the main learning objectives of Day 2 of the Civic Switchboard Institute was: *Connect with exemplars of local library civic data intermediary work by engaging with the work of host libraries.* The Civic Switchboard Institute was hosted at 6 libraries throughout the country, each of which are engaged in civic data work. At each of the Institutes, we asked library hosts to provide a 60-90 minute segment on their work. Engaging with regional examples allowed library workers to reflect on the possibilities for their own organization.

We encourage you to identify an example of library work involving civic data and develop a segment that connects participants to this example. If you are interested in locating examples, check out the [Civic Switchboard case studies](#) or email us at civic-switchboard@pitt.edu.

Embedding Data Justice in Library Roles [[Day 2 Slides](#); Slides 5-17]

The goal of this segment is to *Discover critical dimensions of data work, including power, social justice, and responsible data practices to mitigate harms.*

This segment will take 45-60 minutes.

As pre-reading before delivering this section, review the definition that we use for data justice. This definition comes from the Coalition of Communities of Color: “Data justice is an approach that redresses ways of collecting and disseminating data that have invisibilized and harmed historically marginalized communities.” They explain, “The fundamental premises of data justice are that data should: (1) make visible community-driven needs, challenges, and strengths, (2) be representative of community; and (3) treat data in ways that promote community self-determination.”

This segment is just that – a segment. Indeed, data justice work is community-partnered, intentional, and involves relationship building and time. The goal of these materials is to encourage reflection on the library role envisioned in the canvas planning activity through the lens of data justice.

Begin this segment by providing an open discussion :

Data justice, in short, focuses on redressing harm and reflecting community interests and perspectives in data work (slide 6). What does data justice mean to you? What does a justice-oriented approach to data work look like? Can you think of ways that data has been used to harm marginalized communities? (slide 7)

In this segment, we highlight examples of data work that has caused harm as an illustration for why taking a critical, data justice approach is important in data work broadly and library civic data work specifically. We encourage you to bring local examples that will resonate with your participants. If you would like additional examples, *Data Feminism* by Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein spotlight several cautionary data case studies.

Invite participants to return to their canvases, prepared through the Canvas Planning activity. You can use the following script (that accompanies slides 15-17).

Let’s spend some time returning to our canvas with a data justice orientation. Our goal will be to locate ways that we can embed justice into our civic data work. As we do so, let’s consider Data Feminism authors Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein’s discussion of power in mind. We want to afford data work that places blame or

responsibility on individuals who are marginalized and harmed by social systems. Instead, we can challenge power by recognizing systemic issues and how to engage our communities collectively to dismantle power

Here are questions to guide your work on the canvas:

- 1. Who is involved in the design of this project? Who is not represented but could (or should) be? How will we regularly evaluate to ensure alignment with community interests?*
- 2. Who benefits from this project?*
- 3. How does this project take into account historical or contemporary context in your community?*
- 4. Could this project inadvertently stigmatize communities or reinforce systems of harm? How can we mitigate this?*
- 5. Reflect on your understanding of social justice. Does this project/role move toward your vision?*

After 30 minutes of independent work, come back together to discuss your canvas through the lens of data justice.