

Civic Engagement Workbook

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Activity 1: Scavenger Hunt

Civic Care Scavenger Hunt

Every community has examples of people working to make a difference. They may be single acts of caring, groups of people performing community service, or possibly more ambitious projects like the above examples.

For this activity,

Collect pictures of people working to make a difference in the community. Collect as many as you can! *The goal is to find examples of people doing things for the community that they care about.* Don't worry about trying to fit the definition perfectly. You'll likely find many simple acts of care that can serve as sources of inspiration.

Arrange the pictures and add brief descriptions if needed [on Miro Board?].

Inspiration -- Here are examples from the libraries that helped build this module [\[link to miro board or?\]](#)

Discuss with your library staff or community members:

- What makes each picture an example of civic care? Which attributes of civic engagement are most present? Which are absent?
- What do these examples say about your community?
- Are there any interesting areas that rise to the top?

Later in the module you'll have an opportunity to take one (or more) of the examples and work through how you would turn it into a civic engagement program at the library.

Activity 2: Roles of the Library

These are some of the roles a library can play in a civic engagement program:

1. Become a Civic Educator: raising awareness of civics, civic engagement, and civic responsibility
2. Become a Conversation Starter: identifying challenging community issues, creating forums for sharing opinions, and developing action strategies
3. Become a Community Bridge: bringing diverse people, including local government officials, and organizations with different perspectives together to build stronger communities
4. Become Visionary: leading efforts to develop a broad and inclusive community vision
5. Become a Center for Democracy in Action: walking, talking, thinking, and acting as the place where democracy, civic engagement, and public discourse happen

Homeless Engagement Initiative - Dallas Public Library

After watching the video, consider what *roles* the Dallas Public Library is playing in the Homeless Engagement Initiative. Refer to the Urban Library Council's list of roles above. What are the primary role/s? Secondary role/s?

Now think about your library. Generally speaking, which roles do you think your library is well positioned to play? What is it about your library or community that makes you highlight these roles?

Activity 3: Library Assets for Civic Engagement

Every library has assets, many of which can be applied to civic engagement services. These assets differ from library to library. In this activity we want you to consider your library's assets as they relate to civic engagement. These assets include:

- Programs and services that could be expanded or tailored to civic engagement
- Knowledge of the community
- Relationships with community organizations (public, private, and nonprofit)
- Staff or volunteers with an interest in civic engagement
- Motivated group of patrons who want to improve the community
- Physical space
- Compassionate and inclusive space
- Digital assets (physical/online presence)

On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least, 5 being the most), rate your library for each of the assets. After rating, discuss:

1. What assets do you believe are particularly strong?
2. What assets would you want to further develop?
3. Are there other assets not listed above that can be leveraged for civic engagement?

The module also describes three ways that libraries are uniquely positioned to make a difference in civic engagement. We call these bridging assets. They are:

- The local and the global
- The physical and the digital
- One shot and sustained activities

4. Which bridging assets can your library bring to civic engagement?

Civic Engagement in Changing Times

As you go through this module, think about:

- How has your community changed in the past few years? Can you point out specific examples?
- Are the changes (if any) opportunities or challenges your community faces?
- Have there been new residents who have moved in? Old-timers who have moved out?
- How have the interests of the community changed, if at all?

What do recent opportunities and challenges mean for civic engagement and the role of your library?

Activity 4: Civic Engagement and Connected Learning

We'll ask you to reflect on three fronts: **Connected Learning, Civic Engagement, and Library Roles and Assets.**

Think about the problem of food insecurity that many communities around the nation face. Insecurity ranges from the houseless population looking for their next meal to families unsure of where that meal will come from, perhaps getting assistance from food banks and organizations that may help lessen the burden.

Now refer back to your own library roles/assets that you listed in the previous pages, plus what you know about connected learning and civic engagement, and build out a service. Situate the problem within your own community. For this exercise, don't consider the constraints of time and budget.

Connected Learning:

How does the program connect to youth's interests?

Are there opportunities for "geeking out" or "going deeper" in the program? How would you make the program inviting for youth?

What values are promoted in the program? Do these align with what youth in your community value? If you don't have a good grasp of their values, how might you find out? Does the program touch on topics of value to both the youth and other ages in your community?

How does the program leverage relationships?

What connections could the youth make between the library program and other spaces in their lives? How might the program support these connections in an authentic and motivating way? Are there partners that would increase the program's impact?

Opportunities:

Does the program connect to larger issues outside your community? Do the youth have access to tangible real-world career and civic opportunities through this initiative? Are there further opportunities the library could provide for youth and the community, using this initiative as a jumping point?

Civic Engagement:

Attributes

Is the program political or non-political? Does it touch a subject many people in the community are supportive of?

Is the program **broader than a one-time community service engagement**? Is the program specific and **deliberate** around a single issue/population/etc.?

Does the program support youth's **agency** to drive its mission and the values they care about?

How does the program meet **equity** principles? How does the program enhance the **quality of life** for the community?

Library Roles and Assets

Roles

Does the library play any (or several) of the roles below in engaging with the program:

- ☐ The library is a **Civic Educator**: raising awareness of civics, civic engagement, and civic responsibility
- ☐ The library is a **Conversation Starter**: identifying challenging community issues, creating forums for sharing opinions, and developing action strategies
- ☐ The library is a **Community Bridge**: bringing diverse people, including local government officials, and organizations with different perspectives together to build stronger communities
- ☐ The library is a **Visionary**: leading efforts to develop a broad and inclusive community vision
- ☐ The library is a **Center for Democracy in Action**: walking, talking, thinking, and acting as the place where democracy, civic engagement, and public discourse happen

Assets

What assets does the library bring to the program? Are there any unique assets that make the library ideally positioned to offer the program?

Activity 5: Civic Engagement in Action

Refer back to section 4 in the Civic Engagement module and browse through the tools, tips and techniques some libraries around the country used to enable civic engagement in their communities. Then, choose one activity (from the examples in the toolkit) and try to imagine how it works in the capacity of your library (feel free to get inspired!)

What in the programing could you keep as is? What would you have to change to better fit your community's needs and characteristics?

Bonus Activity:

Civic Imagination: a Tool for Finding and Solving Community Issues

(The following section was adapted and inspired from a book called *Practicing Futures: A Civic Imagination Action Handbook*, written by Gabriel Peters-Lazaro and Sangita Shresthova, published in 2021.)

Whether you have a community service program underway that you'd like to take to the next level and transform into a program with emphasis on civic engagement, or whether you're starting from scratch, we'd like to introduce you to the concept of **Civic Imagination**.

Civic Imagination is the process of imagining, together as a community, the best that our community can be in different aspects, and then taking each of those dreams and seeing how we can translate them into tangible, prolonged, action. In the words of Henry Jenkins:

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"[civic imagination is] a practice of envisioning social change that supports a movement towards a better world. Civic imagination supports the creation and strengthening of imagined/imagining communities, one's own civic agency, respect and understanding for the perspectives of others, and opportunities for freedom and equality that have not yet been experienced."

Civic Centered Imagination Can Help Us To:

1. **Imagine Ourselves as Civic Agents.** If we as individuals within our communities can imagine themselves making a difference - they may begin to think differently about their capacities to create actual change in their communities. The exercise of thinking the impossible may bring it closer to a realistic option.
2. **Imagine A Better World.** If we can imagine a better world, starting with our own communities - it may help us better define what we are fighting for, and where we should begin.
3. **Imagine Our Social Connections with a Larger Community.** Imagination can be central to the formation of collective identities, imagined/imagining communities, and shared histories.
4. **Bring an Imaginative Dimension to Our Real World Spaces and Places.** Encourage an interplay between cultural geography, urban space, and the civic imagination.
5. **Forge Solidarity with Others with Experiences Different from Our Own.**

6. **Imagine the Process of Change.** Understand that civic action tactics and strategies emerge from activists' ability to imagine a process transformation.

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"When combined, the functions of the civic imagination allow us to activate the imagination as a crucial step that helps us mobilize, organize and act." In short, " 'civic imagination' invites us to think beyond those status quos".

4.1 What Does Civic Imagination Look Like?

Imagining a better future for your community may look differently to everyone: some may express their dreams in a story, others may want to act it out, and yet a third may want to write a song expressing a future that looks different from the current present.

In their case studies, the authors of the Civic Imaginations Handbook noted that: "the communities included in our case study research were effective in harnessing inspiring stories to build and support communities that could then be mobilized to take action. As we explored the narratives that resonated and how they operated within these participatory communities, we noted that they provided a sense of future, a forward momentum, that also recognized the value of the past".

Civic Imagination workshops, then, aim to: "create a temporary space... that invite participants to gather and collectively take a break from their everyday lives to remember what is important, share with each other, and imagine aspirational future worlds".

A video explaining civic imagination (Jenkins): [▶ The Civic Imagination](#)

Here is an example of an **imagination workshop**, geared to have participants imagine meaningful, civic change by using their favorite media interest. [Here](#) you can find other imagination workshops, all geared slightly differently but with the same vision and goal in mind: if the youth in our community can imagine a better future, they can start and build the skills needed to achieve it.

Imagination Workshop Example

Brief Description: Fictional characters come together to tackle real world problems in this activity.

Recommended Age Range: 5+

Participants: 2-6 participants (or groups of 2-6 participants)

Duration: 45 minutes (in addition to time spent watching media content together)

Materials Needed and Space Requirements:

- In Person: A pen and colored pencils can be enough.
- Internet-Friendly Option: Synchronous video conferencing platform (Facetime, Zoom, Skype, etc).

Learning Opportunity: This activity recognizes diversity as crucial to effective decision making.

INSTRUCTIONS

Identify

Each participant identifies a familiar character from a popular culture story (content world) that they like.

Each participant should identify a different character!

Spend a few minutes jotting down what you know about the character - who are they, what is important to them, how do they behave?

Then draw them on the included print out cards. The drawing could be a sketch of the character. It could also be a drawing of something that evokes them (a symbol, color, shape etc.).

Share

Once each sketch is complete, everyone should introduce their character. Describe them, their skills, and personality. Then share why you chose them.

Set the characters aside for a minute.

Identify

Now have each participant identify a problem or issue that they currently see in their family, neighborhood, school or community. This could be a local concern or a large-scale global one, but it should be something they care about deeply.

Each participant introduces their issue. Once everyone shares, identify one that you want to continue to work with in this activity. You can either make this decision randomly (by rolling a dice) or by voting.

Imagine

Now imagine that all of your characters are called upon to respond to the issue or problem that you identified.

How would the characters work together to solve this problem?
What would they do?
What could they accomplish?

Share

Work together to create a drawing that represents their adventure!

Another exercise groups often use to enhance civic imagination is called the “What If” Exercise, inspired by the thought experiments done by the poet Gloria Steinham. In this exercise, we ask ourselves (and our community, youth and so on) “what if” questions that can lead to deeper conversations that may shine a light on what we would like to change within our communities. These questions can span a variety of community topics, but may include, for example:

- What if I was mayor for a day? What would be the first thing I would change?
- What if we had an unlimited amount of funds?
- What if we could hear what every member of our community would like to see?
- What if our community was featured in some publication as the “perfect town”? What would that look like?

These questions, as a starting point and examples only, can help spark the imagination of your community and drive them to create meaningful, prolonged action that can become civic engagement.

4.2 Last Tips on Civic Imagination

Before we move on (to the more practical side of things!) Here are some last tips to creating imagination workshops, whether they be for existing issues or for brand new ones, in your own community to enhance civic engagement, taken from the book “Practicing Future: a Civic Imagination Handbook”:

It really is about the journey: the importance of the process, of going through the imagination exercises and doing it together, is crucial in opening our communities’ minds to new possibilities.

Be sure to listen. Really Listen: When entering a workshop, notice how participants relate to each other, do they know each other, and make it a point to approach at least some of the participants before the workshop starts to introduce ourselves briefly and to get an initial sense of the participants’ background and motivations. As we go through the ice-breaker, we also focus on what the participants are saying and how they are saying it. We notice how other participants respond.

Commit to diversity and include a broad range of issues: Encouraging diverse perspectives

to surface is incredibly enriching for the participants. With that in mind, we often go out of our way to extend friendly invitations to participants that initially seem more reserved. Though we generally rely on our workshop participants to generate the content that drives the workshop, we do make selective suggestions if we feel the conversation is becoming too polarized, focused or one sided early into the workshop.

Allow civics and politics to surface in unexpected ways: The workshops bring the imagination to participants' civic lives and communities. In that spirit, we intentionally do not enter through politics. Rather, we enter through an exploration of stories and narratives that the participants find meaningful and inspiring. We believe these stories provide a starting place that invites us to see the human (rather than politically tinted) versions of ourselves, which can then help us see our civic and political lives in new ways, outside of the divisions that define our current formal political debates.

Make participation less daunting: Finding and telling compelling stories that convince people to take action can be elusive. Producing a polished media product can be intimidating. Getting stories to spread is challenging. Valuing all levels of participation and allowing people to value their imagination is crucial. The workshops are structured to help participants feel that they can participate and take action around issues that they care about. Civic engagement is a process and people can participate in ways that make sense to them. In that context, reflecting on the process is just as, if not more important than, achieving the goals young people set for themselves.

Note popular culture: Popular culture informs our imaginations in many ways. For some participants, narratives rooted in popular culture provide sources of inspiration. For other participants, they are sources of cultural critique. Either way, we always notice how popular culture shows up in our participants' brainstorm ideas and in the stories they generate. If we feel that the popular culture example that is being mentioned may not be familiar to other participants, we make sure that we create a moment to introduce the general contours of that particular content world to everyone so it can be part of the conversation.

Stories Matter. The characters, conflicts and plot twists that the participants come up with during the course of the workshop are significant. Often a natural or human-made crisis becomes a mobilizing event for change to take place.

Watch for models of change. Imaginations of how change could and should happen are implicit to the stories participants tell. Sometimes, an invention shared with the general public starts a process of change. Other times, the dedication of a few individuals who are able to tap their networks saves the day. In every instance, how participants see change happening point to the limitations and possibilities they perceive in their own communities. In some instances, participants even turn to magical processes to make change happen.