What is civic engagement?

Civic engagement means actively participating with others to improve life in your community. This can be at all levels, from local to national and beyond.

Why it's important to be engaged

Our system of government is intended to be "By the People." It's a right, and a responsibility. Everyone can make a difference in some way.

How to get involved

STEP 1:

PREPARE YOURSELF TO BE ENGAGED AND EFFECTIVE: KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO DO, DEVELOP THE KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED, AND DECIDE HOW TO ENGAGE.

Think about what issues or problems interest you most and what skills, experience, or resources you bring. Research issues and decide what is important to you. Find reliable sources of information, and understand the differences among different sources of information, and know how to read or view those sources critically.

Sources of news and information include:

- Quality journalism from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and blogs.
- Newsletters of public officials, government offices, public interest sites, nonprofit organizations.

There's nothing wrong with following more partisan and "political" sources but understand how to follow them critically – both the ones you agree with and the ones you don't.

TEST YOUR NEWS LITERACY AT THE NEWS LITERACY PROJECT

CHECK THE AD FONTES MEDIA CHART FOR A GUIDE TO THE RELIABILITY, BIAS, OR PARTISANSHIP OF MANY NEWS SOURCES

CONSULT USA FACTS FOR A RELIABLE & BALANCED SOURCE OF GOVERNMENT DATA

STEP 2:

FIND YOUR PATH

Examples of ways to get involved

Make Your Voice Heard

- Attend public hearings or meetings and speak during public comment time.
- Write letters to editors.
- Comment on laws and regulations during comment periods for local, state, and federal government decision-making. You can do that online at Regulations.gov.
- Call or write your legislators to register your views. One easy platform to use is 5calls.org.
- Participate in demonstrations.

Support free and fair elections

- Help register voters. Join an organization that does this, such as the League of Women Voters.
- Volunteer as a poll worker. Some cities and towns struggle to fill positions. lwvma.org/volunteer-as-a-poll-worker
- Get involved with a local organization campaigning for a referendum of interest to you.
- Get involved with a local political party. Also there are organizations that facilitate phone banks so you can influence elections beyond your local area.

Join local civic organizations or local chapters of state and national organizations. There are many different types, such as:

- Neighborhood groups and local government committees;
- School-oriented organizations such as the PTA;
- Community organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce;
- Religious congregations and organizations;
- Organizations aimed at particular issues or interests such as racism, homelessness, women's rights, or the environment;
- Professional and business associations.

Braver Angels, an organization that seeks to bridge the partisan divide through dialogue, has many opportunities to get involved https://braverangels.org/

Become a public official

Run for election or seek appointment to local or state-level government boards and commissions. These positions are critical to the efficient functioning of towns and cities, which are often seeking qualified candidates. Look at your town website and state government website for specific opportunities. Some examples of local opportunities that are appointed or elected are:

- Town Meeting
- Board of Library Trustees
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Conservation Commission
- School Committee
- Select Board or City Council

This resource was researched and written by Susan McMurry and Erin McNeill, members of the Civic Engagement Initiative within The Boston Club, with additional input by political scientist Virginia Sapiro.