

Participant Input: 2016 Annual Conference on Citizenship
“Strengthening America: Civic Life. Civic Health. Civic Renewal”

The 2016 Annual Conference on Citizenship brought together 270 people who were concerned with strengthening the civic health of the nation. The meeting focused explicitly on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, because addressing those issues is essential to improving our civic health. It took place on October 13-14, 2016--after most of the 2016 election season had already unfolded, but before the result was known. Participants could reflect on the state of civic health during a contentious national election but did not know what federal leadership to expect in 2017 and beyond.

This paper attempts to capture the essence of the convening with a focus on sharing participant input regarding civic life from their individual and collective perspectives. Participants were challenged to consider civic life, civic health and civic renewal based on their experiences – utilizing the civic life map.

The conference intent was to incorporate a more diverse, community based audience into considerations of civic life and civic health. This analysis of input will influence the work of the conference co-hosts and their partners going forward. It is our hope that those who review this report will value the perspectives voiced by participants and consider how this input might enhance our collective efforts to strengthen the fabric of communities and our country.

We think of “civic life” as the manner in which individuals and communities utilize their individual and collective abilities to help their community and country thrive.

Some key phrases used in the meeting require explanation:

Civic health: The Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted annually by the Census Bureau in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service, measures “civic health” as a list of actions and values that fall into four main clusters: 1) political involvement, 2) community engagement, 3) social cohesion, and 4) confidence in institutions. The NCoC and its partners work closely with these federal agencies. Many people would argue for the importance of other actions and values that are not measured in this survey. All such actions and values may contribute to civic health at the level of communities or the nation.

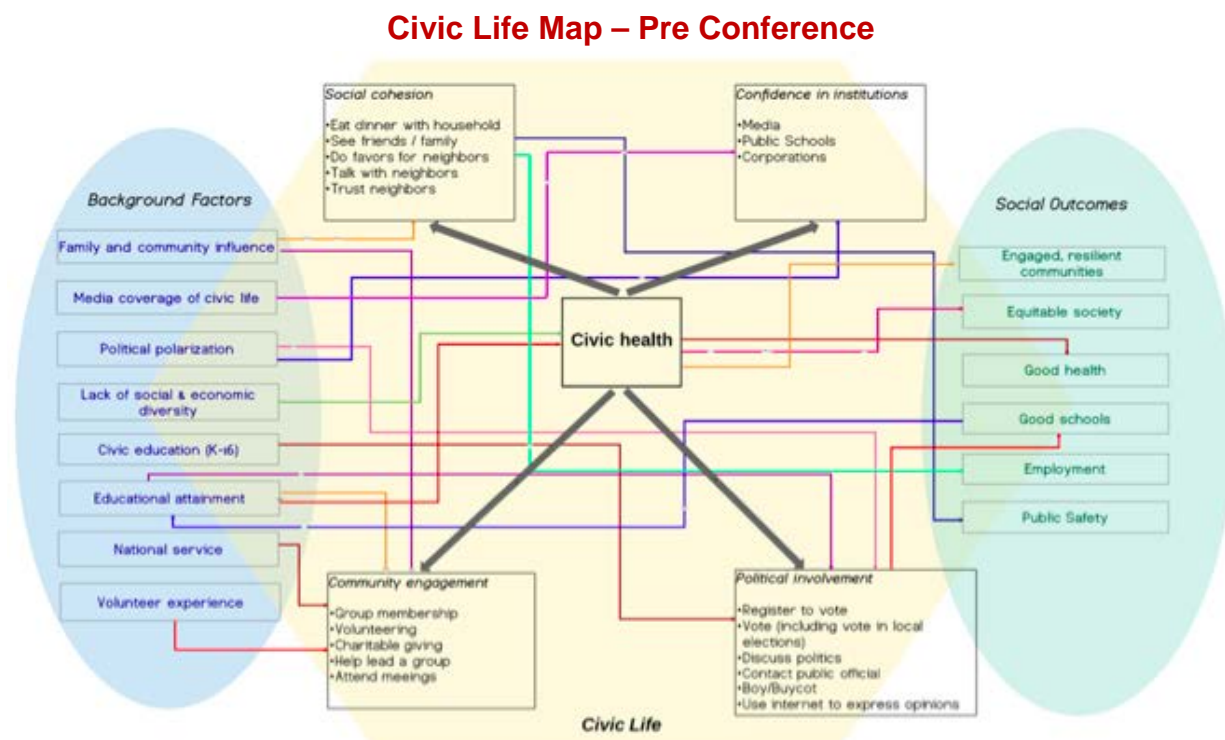
Civic renewal: In turn, “civic renewal” is the ongoing effort to increase the equity, diversity, inclusion, scale, quality, and impact of these civic actions and values. Civic renewal is not about returning to a better time; renewal is every generation’s responsibility. It requires an analysis of the opportunities and barriers to civic health for all communities and sectors of the US population and effective strategies to expand civic opportunities for all.

Social outcomes: Analysis of the CPS data and other data shows that civic health is valuable because it produces positive social outcomes, such as better schools and more social equity. Research demonstrates the links between civic health and economic resilience, civic health and personal health and wellness, access to opportunity, functional democracy, and community vitality.

Background factors: Civic health is influenced by a range of background factors, from the existence of national and community service programs (which boost volunteering, an element of civic health) to the political polarization of the American people, which can undermine confidence and cohesion.

Research has identified connections among specific background factors, specific aspects of civic health, and/or specific social outcomes. For instance, there is evidence that k-12 civic education increases students' political involvement. There is also evidence that more politically engaged communities have better schools. In turn, better schools may generally offer better civic education. That is an example of a positive feedback loop that is important for civic renewal. There may also be negative cycles or gaps that we should identify and address in order to make progress.

Before and during the conference, the organizers shared the preliminary model below that emphasized research findings by NCoC and its partners. The model was organized so that background factors that might influence civic health were listed at the left, aspects of civic health were shown in the middle, and social outcomes were presented at the right. The arrows reflected specific research findings by NCoC and its partners, often based on CPS data.

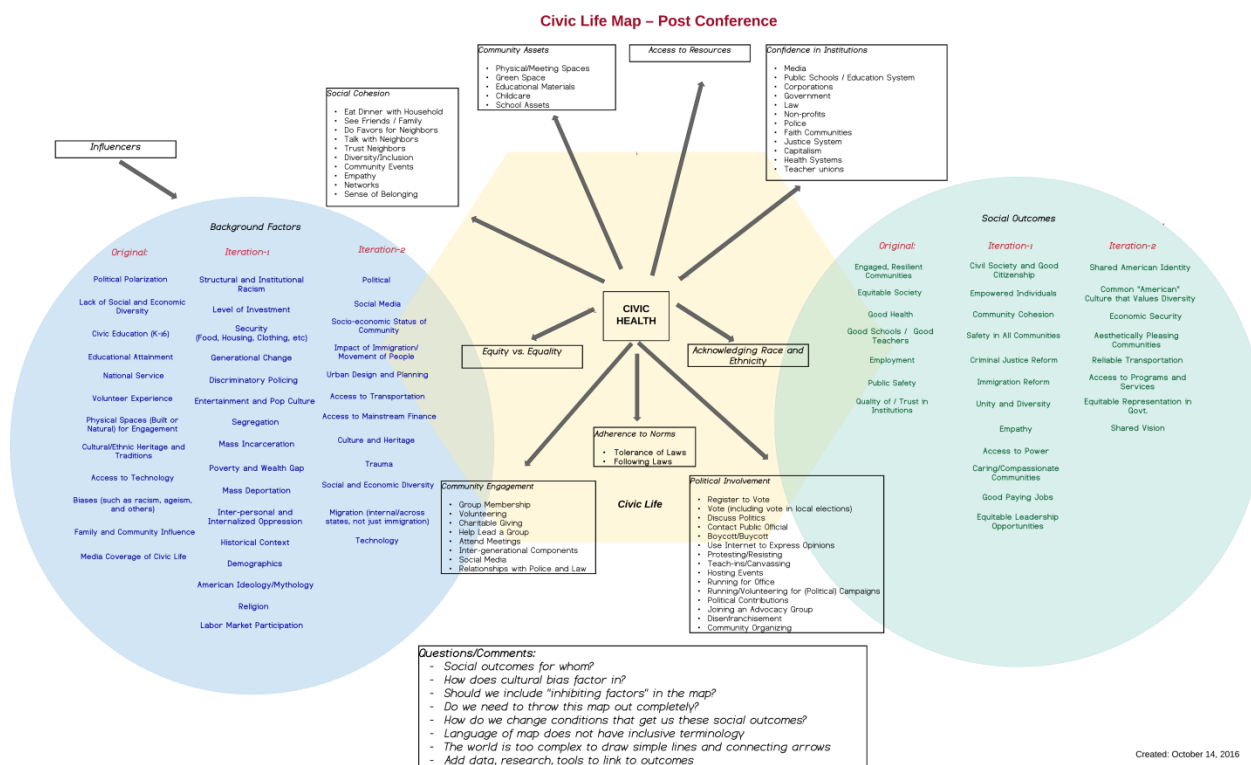


Pre-Conference Map

Participants critically engaged the model: This model was meant to be a stimulus for discussion. The organizers were eager to prompt ideas, insights, alternative perspectives, and value-based criticisms from the diverse people who assembled at the Conference. Participants' experiences and knowledge of all kinds were at least as valuable as the evidence presented in our initial draft.

Individuals could mark up their own printed copies of the diagram in a morning (Iteration 1) and an afternoon (Iteration 2) session. It should be understood that there are unknown or unspecified factors that are “influencers” to these background factors. In all, we collected 103 edited or annotated civic life diagrams. This document does not do full justice to the detailed and diverse ideas contained on those maps.

During and after the conference, organizers reviewed the 103 edited maps and many written notes. Although by no means every idea was included in the edited map, it was revised and the post conference version is available below.



Post-Conference Map

The background factors that influence civic health expanded to include the following, shown here. Each background factor may be positive, negative, or both.

<i>Original</i>	<i>Iteration 1</i>	<i>Iteration 2</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Polarization • Lack of Social and Economic Diversity • Civic education (K-16) • Education Attainment • National Service • Volunteer Experience • Physical Spaces (Built or Natural) for Engagement • Cultural/Ethnic Heritage and Traditions • Access to Technology • Family and Community Influence • Media Coverage of Civic Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural and Institutional Racism • Level of Investment • Security (Food, Housing, Clothing, etc.) • Generational Change • Discriminatory Policing • Entertainment and Pop Culture • Segregation • Mass Incarceration • Poverty and Wealth Gap • Mass Deportation • Inter-personal and Internalized Oppression • Historical Context • Demographics • American Ideology/Mythology • Religion • Labor Market Participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Social Media • Socio-economic Status of Community • Impact of Immigration / Movement of People • Urban Design and Planning • Access to Transportation • Access to Mainstream Finance • Culture and Heritage • Trauma • Social and Economic Diversity • Migration (Internal / across states, not just immigration) • Technology

The aspects of civic health have expanded to include the following, again shown in loose clusters:

<p><i>Social cohesion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat Dinner with Household • See Friends/Family • Do Favors for Neighbors • Talk with Neighbors • Trust Neighbors • Diversity/Inclusion • Community Events • Empathy • Networks • Sense of Belonging 	<p><i>Community Assets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical/Meeting spaces • Green Space • Educational Materials • Childcare • School Assets <p><i>Access to Resources</i></p>	<p><i>Confidence in Institutions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media • Public Schools / Education System • Corporations • Government • Law • Non-profits • Police • Faith Communities • Justice System • Capitalism • Health Systems • Teacher Unions
<p><i>Equity vs Equality</i></p>		<p><i>Acknowledging Race and Ethnicity</i></p>
<p><i>Community Engagement</i></p>		<p><i>Political Involvement</i></p>

- Group membership
- Volunteering
- Charitable Giving
- Help Lead a Group
- Attend Meetings
- Inter-generational Components
- Social Media
- Relationships with Police and Law

Adherence to Norms

- Tolerance of Laws
- Following laws

- Register to Vote
- Vote (including vote in local elections)
- Discuss Politics
- Contact Public Official
- Boycott/Buycott
- Use Internet to Express Opinions
- Protesting/Resisting
- Teach-Ins/ Canvassing
- Hosting Events
- Running for Office
- Running/Volunteering for (Political) Campaigns
- Political Contributions
- Joining an Advocacy Group
- Disenfranchisement
- Community Organizing

Finally, these were the outcomes of civic health that had emerged by the end of the conference that also were built through an iterative process:

<i>Original</i>	<i>Iteration 1</i>	<i>Iteration 2</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged Resilient Communities • Equitable Society • Good Health • Good Schools / Good Teachers • Employment • Public Safety • Quality of / Trust in Institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Society and Good Citizenship • Empowered Individuals • Community Cohesion • Safety in All communities • Criminal Justice Reform • Immigration Reform • Unity and Diversity • Empathy • Access to Power • Equitable Leadership • Caring/Compassionate Communities • Good Paying Jobs • Equitable Leadership Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared American Identity • Common “American” Culture that Values Diversity • Economic Security • Aesthetically Pleasing Communities • Reliable Transportation • Access to Programs and Services • Equitable Representation in Govt. • Shared Vision

Participants also posed these questions through the process:

- Social outcomes for whom?
- How does cultural bias factor in?
- Should we include “inhibiting factors” in the map?
- Do we need to throw this map out completely?
- How do we change conditions that get us these social outcomes?

They also provided these additional comments:

- The language of the map does not have inclusive terminology
- The world is too complex to draw simple lines and connecting arrows
- Add data, research, and tools that link to the outcomes.

Participants' surveys showed that they thought

- *This was my first NCoC conference -- and it was a great experience! I hope to come back every year*
- *It was an amazing opportunity that I will not forget!*
- *As a new student majoring in Public Health, I found the conference interesting and well informative. I'm grateful I was able to attend. Thank you*
- *I thought the speakers in plenary were very, very good - thought provoking and informative.*
- *I was drawn to the conversation on Equity -- and I think the mainstage speakers did an excellent job! It was thought provoking (which many conferences are not), timely, and important.*
- *The sessions and people were great.*
- *I left feeling inspired and more optimistic about the future after attending the conference.*
- *I wanted to share with you the gratitude that I have for those two days!*
- *I met so many incredible people serving the High Calling of restoring the foundations of our society that my experience was almost breathless.*
- *The 2016 Conference can be summed up in two words, Brilliantly Timely!*
- *Brilliant in its design and execution and near prescient in the message and substance of the Conference.*
- *I thought the plenary panels really opened up the thinking (at least mine) to new possibilities and also gave me some inspiration about the substantive*
- *differences people are making in their communities*
- *Have attended all but one since 2002, this was the best substance wise of the bunch...much needed, honest conversation about very difficult issues.*

The 2016 Annual Conference on Citizenship created opportunities for people to exchange ideas about civic health and civic renewal with a strong focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. People discussed and introduced a broad range of concepts. All Americans concerned with important social outcomes must consider civic health as a means to those ends, and all Americans concerned with civic health must consider the factors that encourage or block it. Civic renewal will occur when we work together to improve those factors. To learn more about NCoC's [Civic Health Index](#).

About the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC)

NCoC is a congressionally chartered organization dedicated to strengthening civic life in America. At the core of our efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their community and country thrive.

About the Tisch College of Civic Life

The Tisch College of Civic Life is a national leader in civic education. Tisch College prepares young people to be lifelong active citizens and creates an enduring culture of active citizenship.

For additional information see www.ncoc.org or <http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>