

2022 RHODE ISLAND CIVIC HEALTH INDEX™



RHODE ISLAND
COUNCIL *for the* HUMANITIES



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National Conference on Citizenship
Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

RHODE ISLAND COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

The Rhode Island Council for the Humanities seeds, supports, and strengthens public history, cultural heritage, civic education, and community engagement by and for all Rhode Islanders. As the only dedicated source of funding for public humanities in Rhode Island, we are proud to support museums, libraries, historic sites, schools, preservation and historical societies, community and cultural organizations, individual researchers and documentary filmmakers to bring Rhode Island's stories to life and to amplify the state's many diverse voices. The Humanities Council was established in 1973 as an independent state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The Rhode Island Department of State engages and empowers all Rhode Islanders by making government more accessible and transparent, encouraging civic pride, enhancing commerce, and ensuring that elections are fair, fast, and accurate. As the Department's leader, the Secretary of State has several core responsibilities within state government, including: the maintenance of the state's voter registration database; management of the state's lobbying registration and reporting database; administration of open meetings notice filing for all state and local government entities; the management of rules and regulations database; and the administration of registration and annual filings for both foreign and domestic for and non-profit corporations, limited liability companies, and limited partnerships. The Department of State is also charged with ensuring public access to hundreds of thousands of historic documents and public records through the State Archives and State Library.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

The National Conference on Citizenship is a congressionally chartered organization dedicated to strengthening civic life in America. We pursue our mission through a nationwide network of partners involved in a cutting-edge civic health initiative and innovative projects to advance democracy, and our cross-sector conferences. At the core of our joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their community and country thrive.

ABOUT THE FUNDERS

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES' "A MORE PERFECT UNION" INITIATIVE

The National Endowment for the Humanities's (NEH) special initiative "A More Perfect Union" is designed to demonstrate and enhance the critical role the humanities play in our nation, while also supporting projects that will help Americans commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. The initiative builds on NEH's investment over the past six decades in projects that catalog, preserve, explain, and promote American history. The "A More Perfect Union" initiative supports projects that explore, reflect on, and tell stories about our quest for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society throughout the history of the United States

RHODE ISLAND FOUNDATION

The Rhode Island Foundation is the state's community foundation and largest funder of its nonprofit organizations. Trusted for over a century, the Rhode Island Foundation helps thoughtful individuals, families, organizations, and corporations make smart, effective change.



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Please see all contributors and acknowledgments on page 40.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND DEDICATION

Over millennia, the land now called Rhode Island has been home to many governments, communities, and peoples. Indigenous people from many nations—near and far—live, study and work in Rhode Island today. We recognize Indigenous Rhode Islanders, including the Narragansett, Niantic, Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Pokanoket peoples, as traditional stewards and inhabitants of this territory, and we recognize the histories of colonial violence and dispossession against Indigenous communities in Rhode Island. We gratefully acknowledge the ongoing critical contributions of Indigenous people to the civic life of our state, region, and nation.

We also recognize that the state of Rhode Island exists, in part, due to the forced labor of enslaved and indentured people of African descent and Indigenous descent. We acknowledge and honor the integral contributions of these Rhode Islanders to the state's institutions, infrastructure, culture, and economy, and we value their legacy in their descendants and in Rhode Island's civic life.

This report is dedicated to all Rhode Islanders past, present, and future.

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INTRODUCTION

This 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index*—the first of its kind—allows all Rhode Islanders to understand the status of our state’s civic health. Civic health reflects the strength and resiliency of our communities, and as the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) describes it, “how communities are organized to define and address public problems.”¹ With the Index, Rhode Island can draw upon data-driven indicators and information about diverse connections to civic life to join the 30 other states that have examined their own civic well-being. This report aims to provide a baseline to help us understand what challenges and opportunities Rhode Islanders share—the first step in determining where we want to go, together.

Like all Americans, over the last decade, Rhode Islanders have experienced profound changes in the fabric of civic life—an expansive category encompassing community, societal, and governmental relationships and infrastructures.



NCoC’s 2021 *U.S. Civic Health Index* reports on the underlying trends affecting all states: “Stagnating levels of civic education, dwindling community public membership, and worsening interpersonal and institutional trust.”² Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Rhode Islanders have also navigated fundamental rearrangements of how we interact with our communities, societies, and governments. Longstanding social, racial, and economic inequities have manifested in new and troubling ways, while shifting connections between public health, partisan polarization (a wide and growing gap between the beliefs of political parties), and the information ecosystem (including media outlets and social media) have tested the fabric of democracy.

However, not all changes have been detrimental to civic life. The national *Index* also reports “signs of a vibrant civic nation with increased rates of volunteerism, political knowledge, and casting ballots, and millions of Americans joining together to protest police violence against Black Americans and other communities of color”—phenomena present in Rhode Island.³

This report is an invitation to all Rhode Islanders to reflect on our shared experiences. It is also a call to action. It can be used in many contexts, including public policy, public health, government, education, journalism, community development, and the humanities, arts, and culture sectors. We hope it proves a useful tool for collective growth and engagement in your own life, in your own communities, and in your own state.

Photo Credit: Providence Art Club - courtesy of GoProvidence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index* examines five areas of civic health in Rhode Island in terms of **where we are now** (the current status of that area), **where we can go from here** (steps to strengthen that area), and **how we can move forward, together** (questions for every Rhode Islander to consider). The report draws upon a number of governmental and private data sources for this assessment.

The *Index* includes an overview of the 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index* project; an introduction to Rhode Island; regional and national context for the state's civic health; and in-depth discussions of the five areas of civic health in Rhode Island, summarized below.

Community Well-Being

- » **Where are we now?** Geographic and racial disparities in community well-being pose barriers to civic health across the state.
- » **Where can we go from here?** Strengthening community well-being calls for greater investment in rectifying racial inequities across Rhode Island.
- » **How can we move forward, together?** How would Rhode Island, your city, or neighborhood look, feel, and operate if addressing racial inequities were a priority? What investments would be required to do this in meaningful ways?

Community Participation: Social Connection

- » **Where are we now?** Rhode Islanders stand out nationally for the strength of their connections to family and friends. Race and age can impact those connections across different groups, limiting thoughtful dialogue about politics and local issues, and leading to concerns about social insularity and partisan polarization.
- » **Where can we go from here?** Strengthening social connection calls for tools and venues for civic dialogue.
- » **How can we move forward, together?** What tools or spaces have proven useful or accessible for starting dialogues with Rhode Islanders unlike yourself? If you have not found these tools or spaces yet, what do you feel would be most helpful?

Community Participation: Public Participation

- » **Where are we now?** Rhode Islanders' public participation lags compared to other states, according to US Census indicators. But, expanding how we measure participation reveals strength in community groups and non-governmental civic institutions. Rhode Islanders maintained public participation even during the pandemic, but many factors act as barriers, including social insularity.
- » **Where can we go from here?** Strengthening public participation calls for greater acknowledgement of Rhode Island's non-governmental civic institutions.
- » **How can we move forward, together?** Think about the non-governmental civic institutions that have been most impactful in your life—for example, local heritage societies, parks, and independent corner stores. What resources would allow those institutions to impact even more Rhode Islanders? What would it require to provide those resources?



Community Participation: Collective Understanding

- » **Where are we now?** Rhode Islanders' collective understanding of civics, history, and media all have significant room for improvement. Race and age may also affect Rhode Islanders' perceptions of the state's public history, including monuments in city squares and neighborhoods. Many Rhode Islanders feel frustrated by the lack of relevant information and local coverage from the state's media outlets.
- » **Where can we go from here?** Strengthening collective understanding calls for greater attention to civics, history, and media literacy education; inclusive public history; and local independent media.
- » **How can we move forward, together?** What ripple effects can you envision in your community from improvements in civics, history, and media literacy education? What impact would more inclusive monuments and historic sites have in your neighborhood? And, what will it take to achieve greater investment in local independent media? How could this transform the state's civic landscape?

Community Participation: Engagement with Government

- » **Where are we now?** Rhode Islanders engage with government at high rates compared to the rest of the nation, but many are concerned about nepotism and corruption in government.
- » **Where can we go from here?** Strengthening engagement with government calls for continued emphasis on government transparency.
- » **How can we move forward, together?** What do you see working well in Rhode Island when it comes to government transparency on the state, city, or neighborhood levels? What needs improvement, and how could that improvement be made?


Photo Credit: 231st Bristol, RI 4th of July Parade, 2016 - Wikimedia Commons - courtesy of Kenneth C. Zirkel

ABOUT THE 2022 RHODE ISLAND CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

What is a Civic Health Index?

A Civic Health Index is a data-driven report analyzing the state of a particular community's civic health. Civic health reflects the strength and resiliency of our communities, and as the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) describes it, "how communities are organized to define and address public problems."⁴ It includes the many ways that individuals—the "me"—connect with community, society, and government—the "we."

Civic health relates to how people participate in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends, family, and neighbors. It is also influenced by the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation. As stated by the NCoC, "communities with strong indicators of civic health experience corresponding outcomes of higher employment rates, stronger schools, better physical health, and more responsive governments."⁵



While people often assume that civic health refers only to voting and other forms of government participation, this report takes a much broader and more robust view of civic life that occurs across a spectrum. Civic life includes a wide range of activities and contributions that all Rhode Islanders can and do share, regardless of citizenship status. In this broader view, attending a cultural festival, coaching softball at a local park, or engaging in conversations with neighbors about local happenings all contribute to Rhode Island's civic health.

Who wrote this Civic Health Index?

The 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index* (or the *Index*) is a project of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities with funding support from the "A More Perfect Union" initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Rhode Island Foundation. The *Index* has been produced in partnership with National Conference on Citizenship and the Rhode Island Department of State, as well as advisors and Community Partners.

This *Index* is an expression of the Humanities Council's vision and values. The Humanities Council embraced the opportunity to develop the state's first *Civic Health Index* because we believe that democracy depends not just on restoring civic infrastructure but reinventing it, and that the humanities are essential for this process. The Humanities Council envisions a Rhode Island that nurtures a culture of belonging for all people while actively engaging with the complexity of the state's challenges, history, and future possibilities.

As the nation moves towards the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, the *Index* is an invitation to continue the work of building "a more perfect union" in Rhode Island now and for the next 250 years.⁶ Knowing and engaging with the state of our civic health will allow us to take steps to strengthen it. With this understanding, Rhode Islanders can work to achieve a vision of civic life that inspires participation in community, promotes conversations that bridge differences, and ultimately helps us address some of our most difficult challenges.

Our collaborative approach affirmed how productive the articulation of shared goals can be. The Humanities Council's network of community, organizational, government and academic partners helped to generate an *Index* that has a broad, deep, and inclusive reach. We would not have been able to achieve this on our own, and, perhaps more importantly, this network of partners is, itself, an expression of civic health.

How can we assess Rhode Island's civic health?

This report focuses on two areas to assess Rhode Island's civic health: community well-being and community participation. To do so, the Index analyzes a number of government and private-sector data sets, including a survey conducted for this project. Together, this information examines assets and challenges for civic health, and highlights key areas that will strengthen civic health in Rhode Island. The Index examines the data sets through five major themes:

The **Community Well-Being** section (p. 15) examines the material and social conditions (cost of living, job opportunities, housing and food security, public health, racial equity, and so on) that different groups of Rhode Islanders experience. These material and social conditions affect if, and how effectively, Rhode Islanders are able to participate in civic life.

Community Participation is assessed in four areas:

- » **Social connection** (p. 17): examines how Rhode Islanders perceive, trust and engage with family, friends, neighbors, and other Rhode Islanders on an interpersonal level.
- » **Public participation** (p. 21): explores how individual Rhode Islanders participate in their communities as part of a greater public.
- » **Collective understanding** (p. 27): encompasses how Rhode Islanders understand local issues and factual information about their communities and state, including history and current events.
- » **Engagement with government** (p. 32): analyzes how Rhode Islanders engage with and perceive their governments.

Which data sources does the 2022 Rhode Island Civic Health Index use?

The data used in this *Index* comes from a number of different government and private-sector sources, and were collected between 2019 and 2022. As such, some data sets used in the Index provide insights from before the COVID-19 pandemic, while others provide insights from civic life during the pandemic. Please refer to the "Technical Notes" section (p. 39) to learn more about specific data sets.

The primary data sets for this *Index*, as with all Civic Health Indexes, are the *U.S. Census's Current Population Survey (CPS) 2019 September Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement* and the *Current Population Survey (CPS) 2020 Voting and Registration Supplement* provided by the NCoC, a project partner. The Rhode Island Department of State, also a project partner, provided integral data on state voter registration and voter turnout, as well as other metrics of government engagement such as tours of the Rhode Island State House and usage of the State Archives and State Library.

The *2021 Rhode Island Life Index*, produced by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island and the Brown University School of Public Health, proved invaluable for the assessment of community well-being, as did the *2020 RI Healthy Aging Data Report* by the University of Massachusetts Boston John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies.

The *2021 Media Literacy in Rhode Island: A Statewide Survey* report by the University of Rhode Island's Media Education Lab guided our analysis of the state of media literacy in Rhode Island, and project partner Generation Citizen kindly provided data on civics education from their forthcoming report: the *2022 Rhode Island Survey on Civic Learning*. The Humanities Council's previous 2021 report *Culture Is Key: Strengthening Rhode Island's Civic Health Through Cultural Participation* shaped the discussion on the role of cultural organizations in strengthening civic health.

To complement, deepen, and expand existing data sets, the Humanities Council also developed and administered a survey in Spring 2022. Community Partners—a group of 10 individuals selected for their collective demographic diversity as well as their leadership within their communities—worked with Council staff to create and interpret the survey, as well as to shape the overall direction of the Index. The resulting *2022 Rhode Island Civic Health Index Survey (CHI Survey)* primarily focuses on Rhode Islanders' relationships with their neighbors, communities, and state history.

As a result of outreach by the Community Partners and the Council's networks, 751 Rhode Islanders took the *CHI Survey* between April 21 and May 4, 2022, and their participation is deeply appreciated.



A Note on the 2022 Rhode Island Civic Health Index Survey

The respondents to the Humanities Council's *CHI Survey* do not constitute a statistically representative sample of Rhode Islanders. While the sample was inclusive of all of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, the residences of respondents do not statistically align with the population distribution of the state. Compared with the demographics of Rhode Island, respondents disproportionately identified as white, female, older, and/or highly educated.

As such, findings and significant information from the survey are characterized as valid for survey respondents, but the results are not representative of Rhode Islanders at large. The survey's findings may be used as suggestions for further study of Rhode Islanders.

To learn more about the survey, you can find a complete data summary at rihumanities.org.

Top Left Photo Credit Eastern Medicine Singers - courtesy of TedxPVD

Top Right Photo Credit: Traditional Chinese Lion Dance performance - courtesy of RI Kung Fu and Lion Dance Club

Bottom Photo Credit: Young Voter, open source

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The work of the Community Partners is critical to the philosophy and design of this project, and, to our knowledge, is unique among Civic Health Indexes. For the *Index* to truly reflect perspectives in the state, it was imperative to have different community voices informing the report from the beginning. Selected from over 50 applicants, the group ultimately included 10 individuals deeply involved in their communities from across Rhode Island, ranging from high school seniors to senior citizens, and had six members who identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). All Community Partners received compensation for the time and energy spent on the *Index*.

The Community Partners worked together via Zoom during three, two-hour sessions from March to May 2022, engaging in deep, probing, and wide-ranging conversations about their experiences with civic health in Rhode Island, and how civic life takes place in their communities. These conversations shaped the questions and framing of the *CHI Survey* as well as informed the interpretation of the survey's findings. Community Partners also shared their invaluable feedback on a draft of this *Index*, and will serve a major role in community-centered engagement following the report's publication.

Our Community Partners were incredibly generous in sharing their own insights on the status of civic life in Rhode Island, and their contributions are integral to this *Index*.

We offer our tremendous gratitude to the following Partners for their many contributions to this project, and to the civic health of Rhode Island:

- » **Cathleen Carr, South Kingstown**
- » **Christine Costa, Tiverton**
- » **Diana Figueroa, Pawtucket**
- » **Wanda Hopkins, Hopkinton**
- » **Mariam Kaba, Woonsocket**
- » **Alex Kithes, Woonsocket**
- » **Mr. Joel Rosario Tapia, MSc / Chief Tureygua Taino Cay, Providence**
- » **Doug Victor, Providence**
- » **Kilah Walters-Clinton, Providence**
- » **Jannessa Ya, Cranston**

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Meet Rhode Island



The **smallest state**, by land area, in the Union: 48 miles from North to South and 37 miles from East to West for 1,045 square miles.⁷

One of the **six states of New England**, sharing land borders with Connecticut and Massachusetts and a water border with New York.

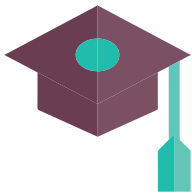
The Ocean State: **Over 400 miles of coastline.**⁸



The first American colony to codify the **ideals of religious freedom** and the **separation of church and state.**

An **18th-century center of American slavery** and the origin of 50% of American voyages in the Transatlantic Slave Trade (which were outlawed in 1807).⁹ Also a **birthplace of the Industrial Revolution** in the U.S., and a nineteenth- and twentieth-century textile, jewelry, and industrial manufacturing power.¹⁰

The first of the original 13 colonies to **renounce allegiance to the King of Great Britain and of Ireland**, and the last to ratify the U.S. Constitution.



Home to **12 world-class institutions of higher education**, including Brown University, Bryant University, Community College of Rhode Island, Johnson & Wales University, the US Naval War College, New England Institute of Technology, Providence College, Rhode Island College, Rhode Island School of Design, Roger Williams University, Salve Regina University, and the University of Rhode Island.



Economically impacted by the **decline of American manufacturing in the twentieth century**,¹¹ and harder-hit by the Great Recession of 2008 than all other states in New England.¹²

Currently **led by the industries**¹³ of life sciences; health care; education; IT software, cyber-physical systems, and data analytics; maritime industries; advanced business services; design; food; custom manufacturing; and travel and hospitality.

As of August 2022, home to **9,128 non-profits**¹⁴, including at least 1,000 non-profits in the cultural, arts, and humanities sector.¹⁵ Of counties with over 500,000 residents, Providence County has the third-highest number of nonprofits per capita in the nation.¹⁶

Meet Rhode Islanders



The Indigenous people of Rhode Island include the **Narragansett, Niantic, Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Pokanoket** peoples.¹⁷

A **population of 1,097,329**, as of the 2020 US Census.¹⁸ The state is the second-most densely populated in the nation.¹⁹

Living in **39 towns and cities across five counties**: Four urban centers (Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Woonsocket), six smaller cities, 14 suburban areas, and 15 rural towns.²⁰



On the whole, **older and whiter than the general American population**.²¹ 9.4% are under 18 years; 36.1% are 18 to 44 years; 27.3% are 45 to 64 years; 17.3% are 65 years & older.

Statewide, 79.0% white (including 71.4% white alone, non-Hispanic or Latino); 6.5% Black or African American; 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native; 3.5% Asian; 0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; 5.6% some other race; and 4.9% two or more races. 15.9% of Rhode Islanders are Hispanic or Latino, who may be of any race.

According to the US Census, **51.4% female and 48.6% male**.²²

In urban centers, populations are significantly more Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American than in statewide populations.²³

According to the U.S. Census, **in the state capital of Providence**, 53.2% are white (including 33.8% white alone, non-Hispanic or Latino); 16.1% Black or African American; 0.7% American Indian and Alaska Native; 5.6% Asian; 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; 16.4% some other race; and 7.8% two or more races. 43.5% of Providence residents are Hispanic or Latino, who may be of any race.



4.5% are veterans.²⁶

23% of adults have a disability.²⁷

At least **4.5% of adults are LGBTQIA+**.²⁸

11.6% of Rhode Islanders live in poverty, with 15.6% of people under 18, 10.9% of people 18-64, and 9.3% of people over 65 below the poverty level (roughly the same as national percentages).²⁴

The **median household income in the state is \$70,305**, compared to the national median average of \$67,521.²⁵

Significantly **more likely to be union members** compared to national and regional numbers: 17.8% of Rhode Island workers are union members, the third highest rate in the nation.²⁹



The most Catholic state in the country: 75% Christian, with 42% identifying as Catholic; 5% identifying as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or other faiths, and 20% identifying as unaffiliated.³⁰

41% registered Democrats; 14% registered Republicans; 45% unaffiliated registered voters.³¹ 64% of Rhode Island's registered voters participated in the 2020 general election.³²

Of people over 25, **89.2% have at least graduated from high school** (compared to 65.8% nationally), and 35% have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 37.9% nationally).³³

56.4% of Rhode Island residents were born in Rhode Island; 86% were born in the U.S.³⁴ One in eight Rhode Island residents is an immigrant, while about one in five residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent. Rhode Island has significant immigrant communities from Ireland, French Canada, Italy, Portugal, Cape Verde and the Azores, Armenia, the Caribbean, Central America, China, Southeast Asia, and other parts of the world.^{35,36}

22.4% of Rhode Islanders over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home (on par with 21.5% of people nationwide).^{37,38}



As of July 2022, **85.1% of Rhode Island residents, including 95.5% of Rhode Island adults, completed the primary vaccination series against the coronavirus**, and 99.0% of Rhode Island residents were at least partially vaccinated.³⁹ As of July 2022, Rhode Island counted a total of **409,731 COVID-19 cases**, and **3,630 COVID-19 fatalities**.⁴⁰

How do areas of Rhode Island's civic health compare regionally and nationally?

The following chart represents Rhode Island's national rankings in the 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement for civic health-related indicators where the state is notably strong and notably weak. A ranking of "1" signifies that a state ranks first in the nation for this indicator; a ranking of "50" signifies that a state ranks last in the nation for this indicator.

Please note that this chart is limited to civic health-related indicators from this data set in which Rhode Island is particularly strong or particularly weak. It does not include all civic health-related indicators.

The rankings for the nearby New England states of Connecticut (population ~3.5 million) and New Hampshire (population ~1.35 million) are provided for regional context.

CIVIC HEALTH-RELATED INDICATOR IN 2019 CPS VOLUNTEERING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SUPPLEMENT	National Ranking – Rhode Island	National Ranking – Connecticut	National Ranking – New Hampshire
Frequently hear from or spend time with family/friends	1	8	27
Donate to political organization (\$25 or more)	6	15	26
Donate to religious or charitable organization (\$25 or more)	6	19	9
Attending a public meeting	8	13	2
Vote in the last election	11	31	28
Talk or spend time with neighbors	12	3	38
Frequently discuss political/societal/local issues with family/friends	35	11	9
Participate in a group	40	18	15
Frequently discuss political/societal/local issues with neighbors	41	5	40
Frequently do favors for neighbors	44	45	18
Volunteer	47	28	27

1st - 14th National Rank

15th - 34th National Rank

35th - 50th National Rank

Areas of Civic Health

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Geographic and racial disparities in community well-being pose barriers to civic health across the state.

The material and social conditions that individuals face daily can help us understand if and how they can actually participate in civic life. These material and social conditions include cost of living, job opportunities, affordable housing, programs for youth and older people, access to food, access to health care, racial equity, and physical and digital accessibility. If individuals are constantly struggling to meet these basic needs, they will have less time, motivation, and resources to participate civically. If basic needs are fully supported, individuals face fewer barriers to community participation.

ECONOMIC STRUGGLES

According to the *2021 Rhode Island Life Index*, of all quality-of-life issues, Rhode Islanders have the most concerns and difficulties with cost of living, job opportunities, affordable housing, and their economic situation. The scores from this study “represent how close respondents believe their community is to an ideal or healthy community in these areas”; each of the areas noted above received less than 60 points out of a 100-point scale.⁴¹ Notably, these concerns and difficulties are all related to economic security, and were measured before 2022’s record-breaking inflation, which has since increased the cost of housing, gas, and goods. Rhode Island residents also struggle with affordable housing, as this area received only 40 on a scale of 100 statewide.

However, Rhode Islanders do not experience these stressors equally. The *2021 Rhode Island Life Index* identifies the urban core cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket as communities where 25% or more of children are living below the federal poverty line. These core cities also have a much higher concentration of Black/African/African-American and Latinx/e residents than non-core areas. Disparities in community well-being are most apparent within these core cities. According to the *2021 Rhode Island Life Index*, “From 2019 to 2021...BIPOC Rhode Islanders living in core cities perceived social factors such as access to affordable housing and cost of living as much greater obstacles to health and well-being than white Rhode Islanders living in non-core areas.”⁴² Core city residents rate cost of living at 27 points out of 100, compared to non-core areas, where residents rated cost of living at 33. More substantially, while core city residents rate their financial situation at 57 out of 100, non-core residents rate theirs to be significantly higher at 67.



Photo Credit: (Press)ed Panel audience 2018 - Cat Laine - RI Council for the Humanities

ACCESSIBILITY: HEALTH CARE, PHYSICAL, AND DIGITAL RESOURCES

Racial disparities also exist in Rhode Islanders' access to health care and in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. To focus on these issues, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDoH) has directed over \$30 million in public health funding towards 15 Health Equity Zones in the state, which "leverage place-based, community-led solutions to address the social determinants of health."⁴³ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, RIDoH worked closely with the Health Equity Zones and the state's COVID-19 Equity Council to devise and implement a data-driven plan informed by health inequities and the corresponding disproportionate impacts of the pandemic.⁴⁴

According to RIDoH's Health Equity Zone Initiative, white, non-Hispanic adults have an easier time accessing healthcare than all other racial/ethnic groups in the state.^{44a} Furthermore, Hispanic adults experience the following barriers to healthcare access more than any other racial/ethnic group: "being uninsured, having no doctor, and experiencing cost barriers to seeing a doctor."⁴⁵ During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hispanic/Latino Rhode Islanders have had a significantly higher rate of death than all other racial groups, and Black/African/African-American and Asian Rhode Islanders have also had higher rates of death than white Rhode Islanders.⁴⁶

Nearly 25% of Rhode Islanders have a disability.

Nearly 25% of Rhode Islanders have a disability. Within this population, people qualify their experience further as functional disabilities, where due to one or more reasons they find daily personal and social tasks difficult and challenging to address without help. For example, 11% have a functional disability related to cognition and memory, 10% have a functional disability related to mobility, 10% have hearing or vision difficulties and 6% have serious difficulty with independent living. While 38% of the state's health spending is concentrated in disability healthcare costs, adults with disabilities are more likely to have other health conditions, such as depression, obesity, diabetes and heart disease, that impact their ability to be well and active in their communities.⁴⁷

Only 75% of households report a broadband connection.

In a 2019 assessment of quality of life metrics for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Rhode Island averaged 70%.⁴⁸ While this measure indicates that adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are somewhat able to live independently and participate within their communities in the state, it also indicates room for improvement for accessibility and support. In keeping with this finding, respondents to the *CHI Survey* who reported a disability and/or chronic illness were more likely than non-disabled and/or chronically ill respondents to report the following as barriers to community participation: lack of financial resources; lack of accessibility accommodations; and lack of access to transportation.

Disparities in internet access also play a role in community participation. With only 75% of households reporting a broadband connection in the state, the digital divide remains a challenge.⁴⁹ The University of Rhode Island's *2021 Media Literacy in Rhode Island* report cited lack of technology as a barrier to media literacy education in schools, with 67% of educators citing wireless connectivity and 55% citing access to digital devices as issues.⁵⁰

The decrease in availability of programs and services for youth and older adults is also an area of concern for Rhode Islanders. From 2019 to 2021, the *2021 Rhode Island Life Index* noted a decrease in the scores for how residents rate the availability of programs and services for children. While there are no trends for programs and services for older adults, those Rhode Islanders who are over 60 years old represent 23% of the total population. The state also has the highest percentage of people ages 85+ in New England, and the third highest in the nation, indicating the importance of senior services and support in the state.⁵¹

Numerous comments submitted to the Humanities Council's *CHI Survey* underlined the findings of the *2021 Rhode Island Life Index*, and pointed to the economic challenges of limited income, affordable housing and cost of living. They also noted challenges for aging adults, and issues with infrastructure and accessibility, including public transportation and communal spaces.

Voices of Rhode Islanders

Rhode Island is a tapestry of wonderful diverse communities contributing to an exciting civil culture. But a problem with being age 65+, most often events, music, gatherings are very young adult oriented. They rarely include what I'd prefer to hear/experience, another reason I rarely go.

Everything is very expensive and this will require us to work more to pay our bills. Therefore we will have less time and less money to participate in community events.

As I get older, I become much more concerned about access for older people in various settings. I have a long track record personally [of] participating in many community and cultural organizations over the past 40 years. Now I have to cut back on some of that, I worry a little bit about staying in my home in the very long term, and I'm trying to plan adequately for that.

The city [Woonsocket] is very disjointed by cultural publics and socioeconomic status...I think more people would be involved in the community if doing so were more accessible (language barriers, unnecessary requirements that make potentially qualified people ineligible, time constraints, etc.)



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: SOCIAL CONNECTION

Rhode Islanders stand out nationally for the strength of their connections to family and friends. Race and age can impact those connections across different groups, limiting thoughtful dialogue about politics and local issues, and leading to concerns about social insularity and partisan polarization.

When people are strongly connected to each other in the place they live, there are better health outcomes, improvements in public safety, increased civic involvement, and enhanced resilience in the face of disaster. Locally connected people are more likely to invest the resources they have in keeping their communities safe, vibrant, and healthy.



Photo Credit: Fotohistoria Bus Shelter - Fefa and family - courtesy of RI Latino Arts

65% of CHI Survey respondents feel connected to their neighborhood and/or communities.

STRENGTH OF CONNECTION

According to the 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement, Rhode Islanders show an exceptional degree of connection within their communities: the state ranked 1st nationally for frequently hearing from or spending time with family/friends, and 12th for frequently talking with or spending time with neighbors. This supports what many Rhode Islanders experience—that the culture of the state is very family-oriented. The fact that 56% of Rhode Islanders were born in the state (on par with neighbor Connecticut at 54%, but higher than neighbor New Hampshire at 40.9%), likely contributes to this closeness, as they likely still live near family members.⁵²

Remarkably, nearly 65% of respondents in the CHI Survey agreed that they feel connected to their neighborhood and/or communities in Rhode Island, with respondents ages 55-84 most likely to feel connected in their communities. Many also indicated how the pandemic altered these feelings, if at all. While 35.5% of survey respondents noted the pandemic weakened their connection to community, nearly 40.5% noted no effect and 24% reported their feelings of connection were actually strengthened during the pandemic. This surprising result—that only about a third of respondents felt their community connections were weakened during multiple years of social distancing and isolation—could be attributed in part to strong connections built prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Voices of Rhode Islanders



I'm glad to live on a street / in a neighborhood with people who are different from me, but friendly and people who care about each other.

I love my city (Providence) and want every neighborhood to be healthy, beautiful and affordable.

One of the things I'm proudest of on my street is the diversity. There's no single race dominating the street, everyone is wonderful too. A true community.

WEAKNESS OF CIVIC DISCOURSE

Rhode Islanders' strong connections to families and friends do not necessarily translate into political and civic conversations. According to the 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement, Rhode Islanders rank 35th nationally for discussing political, social or local issues with family and friends, and rank even lower (in 41st place nationally) when in discussion with neighbors. To probe Rhode Islanders' political and social alignment with their neighbors, the CHI Survey asked respondents if they held similar values and beliefs as their neighbors. Only 35% of respondents agreed with this statement; 53% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12% disagreed. The fact that over half of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed suggests that respondents simply might not know their neighbors well enough to comment, or perhaps that they feel aligned with some, but not others.

Despite these perceived differences, 54% of respondents reported that they also felt they knew and trusted their neighbors. This suggests that, in Rhode Island, feeling aligned with the values and beliefs of your neighbors is not a requirement to know and trust them, a premise that should be further tested in future studies. In a time of partisan polarization, this suggestion is an encouraging sign for social fabric in a democracy.

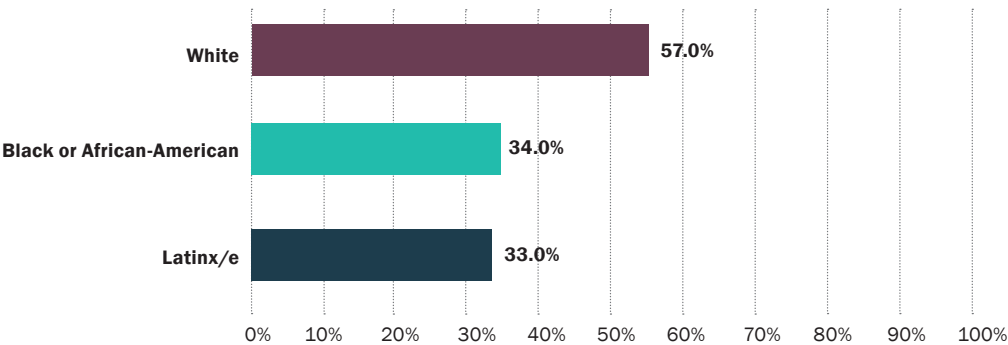
GENERATIONAL AND RACIAL DISPARITIES

In addition to reinforcing strong ties, social connections also promote interaction between different groups of people and can bridge perspectives and experiences. While Rhode Islanders certainly interact frequently with their families, friends, and neighbors, the findings of the *CHI Survey* indicate that connections among members of different communities and overall social trust are limited.

A breakdown of responses based on generational lines showed that respondents over the age of 35 were more likely to agree that they knew and trusted their neighbors than those between the ages of 16-34. One possible explanation, among many, for this generation gap is duration: older Rhode Islanders may have lived among their neighbors for longer, and therefore may know them better.

White respondents to the *CHI Survey* were also more likely to report that they knew and trusted their neighbors than Latinx/e and Black/African/African-American respondents: 57% of White respondents agreed with the statement, whereas 34% of Latinx/e and 33% of Black/African/African-American respondents agreed. Unfortunately, the sample sizes for Asian, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, multiracial, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander respondents were not large enough to draw statistically significant conclusions for this question. Yet overall, the majority-white racial composition and structural racial inequities in the state could be contributing factors to this comparative lack of trust from Black/African/African-American and Latinx/e respondents.

Chart 1. CHI Survey Results: Trust in Neighbors by Race/Ethnicity



In terms of relationships beyond the neighborhood, approximately 71% of respondents to the survey indicated that they did spend time and interact with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds from their own, a strong indication of interaction among different groups in the state. To better understand the nature and quality of these interactions, further study is necessary.

Different racial groups also responded differently to this question, suggesting that Rhode Islanders of color almost uniformly interact with people different than themselves. Black/African/African-American respondents and Latinx/e respondents were more likely than white respondents to agree that they spent time and interacted with people of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds from their own. In fact, these responses were overwhelmingly affirmative: 97% of Black/African/African-American respondents and 93% Latinx/e respondents agreed. Again, while sample sizes for other groups of color were not large enough to draw statistically significant findings, the vast majority of respondents of color agreed with the statement: 85% of Asian respondents, 100% of Indigenous respondents, 90% of Middle Eastern respondents, 88% of multiracial respondents, and 100% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander respondents.

However, only 67% of white respondents agreed that they spent time and interacted with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds from their own. This suggests that, given the demographics of Rhode Island, it is much easier for white Rhode Islanders to stay within their own racial, ethnic, and cultural communities than for Rhode Islanders of color to do so.


71% of *CHI Survey* respondents indicated that they did spend time and interact with people of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds.

CONCERNS ABOUT SOCIAL INSULARITY AND PARTISAN POLARIZATION

While the *CHI Survey* did not directly ask respondents about either social insularity (an interest in your own group to the exclusion of perceived outsiders) or partisan polarization in the state, these topics surfaced throughout the survey responses. Together, they signal respondents' collective anxiety about how, and to what extent, Rhode Islanders are able to connect and converse across differences.

Rhode Island's local focus can surface in daily life as a playful and self-aware facet of the state's identity. One respondent mentioned a popular bumper sticker that reads, "I never leave Rhode Island." However, some respondents to the *CHI Survey* described this inward focus as contributing to a culture of social insularity that can negatively affect social connections in the state. Respondents who moved to Rhode Island from other places reported difficulty in connecting socially, and attributed this, in part, to what one respondent called "in-group/out-group thinking."

Voices of Rhode Islanders



I moved to RI 25 years ago from Massachusetts and encountered many who grew up here who conveyed attitudes of dislike towards "outsiders" who were coming in and "changing" things. I think an attitude of openness and a more cosmopolitan approach needs to be encouraged and taught, to counteract the "us v. them" feelings of some lifelong Rhode Islanders. I also heard, many times, "I'll never leave Rhode Island." That's also terribly provincial, in my humble opinion.

A more welcoming approach—Rhode Islanders have a tendency to favor in-group/out-group thinking. Where I live, it can be difficult to integrate into the long-term community.

I just moved to my current community and it's definitely true that some places are more welcoming/easier to participate in than others.

Hard to say that I know the values of or trust all my neighbors. I know & trust some, however even in a fairly tight neighborhood it still feels hard to reach out & get to know people.

Some respondents also noted the phenomenon of homeowners owning multiple homes and/or purchasing in-state from outside Rhode Island. Famed for their beaches and waterfronts, many Rhode Island coastal communities indeed include seasonal residents, including out-of-state homeowners. In 2021, 26% of all Rhode Island residential real estate transactions included an out-of-state buyer. For luxury homes over \$1 million, nearly 50% of transactions included an out-of-state buyer, including from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and even California and Florida.⁵³ The presence of both full-time and part-time residents can serve to reinforce the insularity of full-time resident communities, and to reduce opportunities for newcomers to connect with their neighbors, who may only be in residence during summers. Out-of-state, part-time homeowners may also have different civic concerns and needs than in-state, full-time homeowners, creating potential tensions and divides.

A number of respondents also shared their anxiety about political divides in their communities, and being ostracized by those with different political views. Respondents who self-identified as both “liberal” and “conservative” reported this experience, suggesting that Rhode Islanders across the political spectrum have experienced partisan dialogue as a social stressor. In some cases, respondents discussed concern for those in civic roles, or stepping back from civic roles themselves, due to this polarization.

Voices of Rhode Islanders

Not being able to dialogue with those who think differently from me. No opportunities to come together and talk civilly.

Politics has made interacting with people I don't know uncomfortable.

[I feel] alienated from my community because of how conservative it is.

As a conservative, I am not welcome by my liberal neighbors when I try to participate.

Last spring I resigned from our local board of canvassers because of the political climate, and I dread continuing as a poll worker. The divisiveness has permeated down to the roots.



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Rhode Islanders' public participation lags compared to other states, according to US Census indicators. But, expanding how we measure participation reveals strength in community groups and non-governmental civic institutions. Rhode Islanders maintained public participation even during the pandemic, but many factors act as barriers, including social insularity.



Public participation indicates the social and civic contributions individuals make when they actively participate in public life. While social connections provide us with information on interpersonal relationships within communities, this section sheds light on how Rhode Islanders choose to participate in public life. This participation takes many forms, including contributions of time and resources (both financial and non-financial), as well as participation in community groups and non-governmental civic institutions.



Photo Credit: (Press)ed Panel audience 2018 - Cat Laine - RI Council for the Humanities

44% of CHI Survey respondents felt empowered to make a change within their community.

EMPOWERMENT TO AFFECT LOCAL CHANGE

The 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement shows that Rhode Islanders rank 32nd in the country at working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community. One has to believe that change is possible in order to seek it, so the CHI Survey investigated this further by looking at individuals' perceptions of their own agency within communities. Of respondents, 44% agreed that they felt empowered to make a change within their community, a percentage that shifted depending on how long the respondent had lived in Rhode Island.

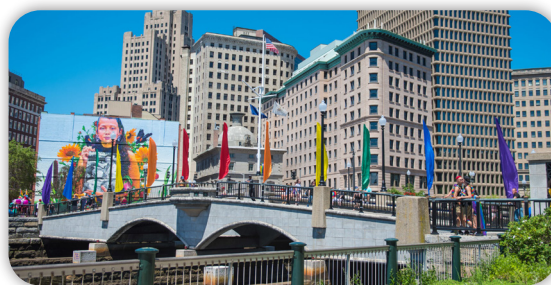
Individuals who had lived in Rhode Island for 10-19 years were most likely to feel empowered to make change as opposed to those who were newer to the state. More surprisingly, people who had lived in Rhode Island all their lives were most likely to disagree with this perception, perhaps pointing to perceptions of nepotism and corruption among lifelong Rhode Islanders.

Voices of Rhode Islanders



Also have found it disheartening when I have been involved to then feel like change isn't supported at the city level especially with respect to infrastructure, affordable housing, schools, etc. Feels like there's a lot of talk about these things but not much progress (or if progress is happening slowly—I wish there were ways residents could be updated so they feel more connected to what is happening & where the challenges are when they arise.)

There is such potential here and somehow so little collective energy to make positive change. (Though again, on the smaller scale, the energy and commitment and thoughtfulness burns so bright.) What keeps RI/Rhode Islanders from making these positive changes?



Top Left Photo Credit: Blackstone River Valley - courtesy of David Lawlor @RunoftheMillShop

Top Right Photo Credit: Festival Bridge - courtesy of PrideRI

Bottom Photo Credit: Pell Bridge with lighthouse - courtesy of Rand McNally

FORMS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

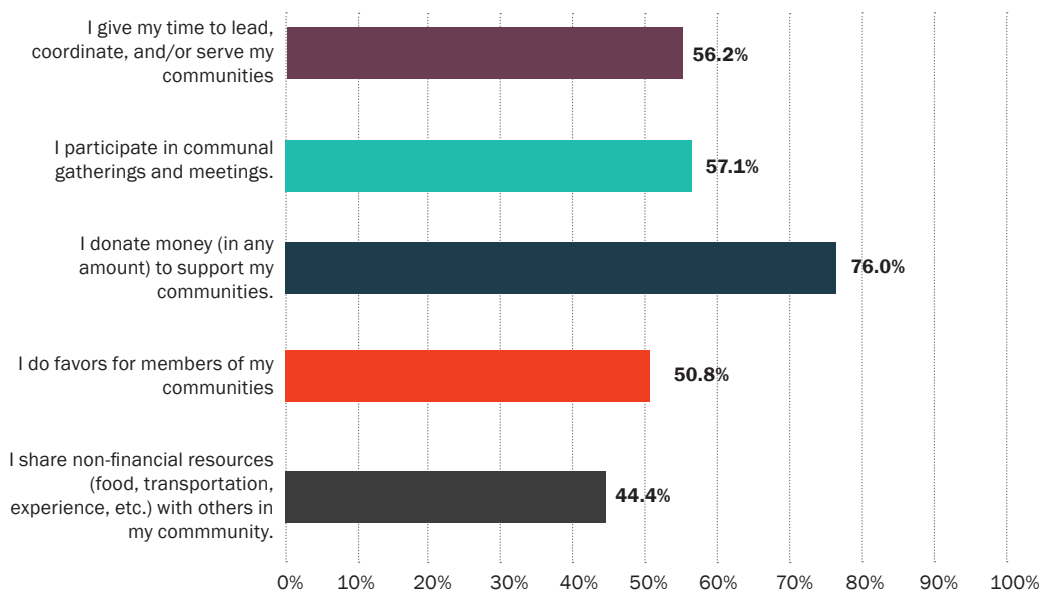
The 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement shows Rhode Islanders as strong financial donors, but indicates comparative weakness in the more proactive forms of public participation, such as volunteering and group participation. However, the CHI Survey indicated that Rhode Islanders might be more involved than rankings show, particularly when we look to non-governmental civic institutions, and widen our definitions of contributions.

The 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement ranks Rhode Island at 6th in the nation for donations of \$25 or more, indicating that Rhode Islanders are more likely to give to political, charitable and religious organizations than residents of 44 other states. However, when it comes to more proactive forms of participation, Rhode Island's standing in national rankings falls. According to the 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement, nearly 79% of Rhode Islanders indicated they volunteer infrequently. With an average of 84 annual volunteer hours per person, the state ranks 18th nationally. Moreover, the state ranks 40th in the nation for group participation—measured by voluntarily participating in community groups—with most participating in two groups on average.

Rhode Island is ranked 6th in the nation for donations of \$25 or more.

The CHI Survey further explored how Rhode Islanders most commonly contribute to their neighborhood and communities, as giving occurs in many forms. In alignment with the findings of the 2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement, 76% of respondents indicated they donated money in any amount to show support. In addition to these financial donations, 57% of respondents also indicated they contributed by participating in communal gatherings and meetings. Other notable means of contribution included leading, coordinating and serving within communities; volunteering; doing favors for members of communities; and sharing non-financial resources (food, transportation, experience) with others.

Chart 2. CHI Survey Results: Respondents' Forms of Public Participation in Rhode Island



CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

Survey responses provided robust affirmations of how community members visit cultural institutions, patronize local businesses and use public recreation sites—all community venues of civic life. Respondents also strongly affirmed that these activities strengthen their feelings of community connection:

- » **64% of respondents shopped at local independent businesses on a daily/weekly basis,** and 80.5% of respondents agreed that patronizing these businesses made them feel more connected to communities.
- » **63% of respondents visited cultural organizations or events on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.** 78% of respondents agreed that visiting these organizations and events made them feel more connected to communities.
- » **70% of respondents indicated they visited local and state parks, public beaches and other public recreation facilities on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.** 63% of respondents agreed that visiting these places allowed them to feel more connected to communities.

Over 80% of cultural organizations surveyed for the Culture Is Key report orient their missions and activities towards impacting civic health.

These responses echo the findings of the Humanities Council's 2021 *Culture Is Key: Strengthening Civic Health through Cultural Participation* report, which explored the contributions of cultural organizations to the state's civic health. Over 80% of cultural organizations surveyed in that project responded that they oriented their missions and activities towards impacting civic health “moderately,” “a lot,” or a “great deal”—an effort that is clearly reaching Rhode Islanders.



Photo Credit: Local Farmers Market - courtesy of Farm Fresh RI



Photo Credit: Accessible Table in Kennedy Plaza - courtesy of Tina Guenette Pedersen

COMMUNITY GROUPS

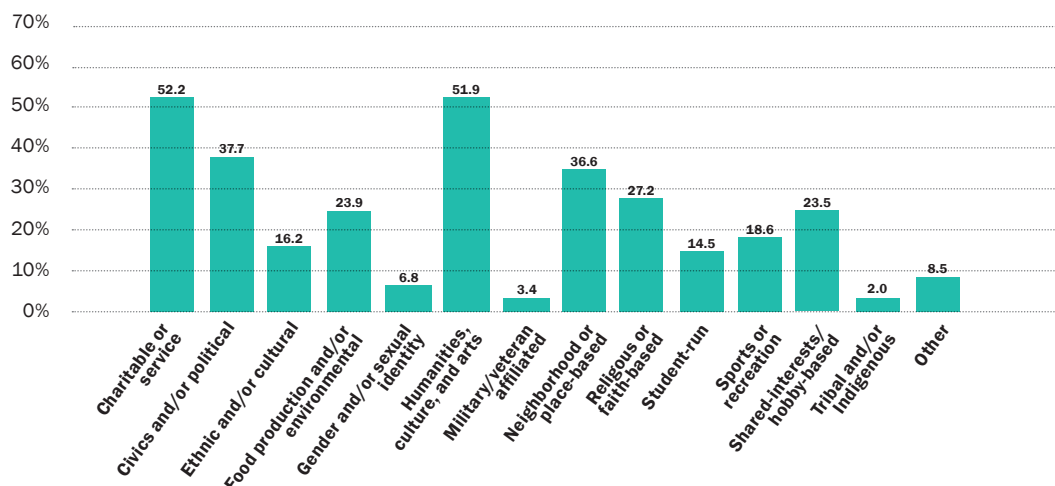
While the 2019 *CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement* reported that only 25.8% of Rhode Islanders participated in community groups, 86% of respondents to the *CHI Survey* indicated that they participate in some sort of community group. While it is not possible to generalize this finding to all Rhode Islanders, this discrepancy suggests that the extent and type of Rhode Islanders' involvement in community groups is worth further investigation.

One known area of strength in Rhode Island is union participation. The state boasts the third-highest union membership rate in the country and the highest rate in New England—a legacy of the state's strong manufacturing history.⁵⁴ Almost 18% of Rhode Island's public and private sector workers were union members in 2020, representing a powerful constituency in the state's politics and culture.⁵⁵

The *CHI Survey* results showed that respondents participated in a variety of other community groups. Most prevalently, 52% of individuals participated in charitable or service groups, and humanities, culture and arts groups, while 37% of respondents participated in civic or political groups and neighborhood associations. Other prevalent types of community groups included religious and faith groups, food and environmental groups and groups focused on hobbies or shared interests.

Almost 18% of Rhode Island's public and private sector workers were union members in 2020.

Chart 3. CHI Survey Results: Group Participation Rates in Rhode Island



Of note, individuals that participated in neighborhood/place-based associations were more likely than participants in other kinds of groups to agree that they knew and trusted their neighbors. The survey also found that while many organized religions promote charity and/or acts of service, survey respondents that indicated participation in religion and faith groups were neither more or less likely than other respondents to participate in charitable or service groups.

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

To better understand the pandemic's impact on public participation, survey respondents were asked to share if and how their community contributions may have changed during this period. Counter to the assumption that individuals might be contributing less during a time of great economic turmoil and hardship, nearly 41% of respondents indicated they contributed more during the pandemic, while 41% of other respondents noted their contributions stayed the same.

However, numerous survey respondents noted that the threat of contracting COVID-19 hampered their ability to participate in public life in-person. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults, people with underlying medical conditions, people living in congregate settings, and/or people facing barriers to health care are at higher risk for severe COVID-19.⁵⁶ As discussed in the “Community Well-being” section (p. 15), these higher-risk groups had existing material and social disadvantages prior to the pandemic, with the pandemic adding yet another barrier to participation for these populations.

Newcomers to Rhode Island also indicated that the pandemic made it hard for them to connect with different forms of public participation.

Voices of Rhode Islanders



I am much less active in my community now due to the pandemic. I miss interaction more with my community.

Recently the pandemic has been a barrier; prior to pandemic the high point of my week was tutoring students in the local elementary school.

Covid - I have always been more safe than the community and never feel like I can safely participate.

Difficult to connect because we moved here shortly before the pandemic.

However, some pandemic-driven changes strengthened accessibility in public life in other ways. A number of respondents commented that the shift to virtual/hybrid events and programs enabled them to better participate in public life, and called for their continuation even after the end of the pandemic. For some, including people with mobility issues, inadequate transportation, high risk for COVID-19, and/or caregiver responsibilities, virtual/hybrid events can be more accessible than in-person events, and virtual platforms often have integrated accessibility accommodations that in-person venues may not. However, as mentioned earlier, only 75% of households report a broadband connection in the state, reducing accessibility for virtual events to those without reliable Internet access.

TOP 3 BARRIERS TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

BARRIERS TO PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The *CHI Survey* also investigated the barriers Rhode Islanders face to community participation. The top three barriers noted were the following: lack of time and/or scheduling conflicts (71.73%); family obligations (36.35%); and information being difficult to find (36.35%). In addition to the barriers discussed below, other hurdles included a lack of financial resources (13.73%); access to transportation (8.24%); not thinking it is important (6.62%); a lack of accessibility accommodations (4.36%); and language barriers (3.39%).

Notably, 21% of respondents indicated that they “do not feel welcome” in community participation and 8% indicated that they had had a negative prior experience with community participation. These responses suggest that Rhode Island’s perceived culture of social insularity, as described in the “Social Connection” section (p. 17), can negatively impact if and how residents choose to participate in public life in Rhode Island.



71.7% lack of time and/or scheduling conflicts

36.4% family obligations

36.4% information to difficult to find

Voices of Rhode Islanders

It seems that information for meetings, etc. are distributed by internal networks that don't recognize that there are people living in the community who are outside of those networks.

The culture of civic engagement...is one of conflict and in-fighting, layered over with the idea that the voice of anyone who is not a “townie” or multi-generational member of the community does not matter, makes it difficult to engage in civic activities here.

Rhode Island is a closed system. Non-natives need not apply.

As the ‘newcomer’ having people follow up and encourage further participation would go a long way to making me feel more welcome & ultimately sustain my commitments. Often feels like I’m still searching for the best ways to get involved even after nearly a decade in the state.



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

Rhode Islanders’ collective understanding of civics, history, and media all have significant room for improvement. Race and age may also affect Rhode Islanders’ perceptions of the state’s public history, including monuments in city squares and neighborhoods. Many Rhode Islanders feel frustrated by the lack of relevant information and local coverage from the state’s media outlets.



This section focuses on how Rhode Islanders understand local issues and factual information about their communities and state, including both history and current events. As such, this indicator includes the state of civics, history, and media literacy education in K-12 schools; perceptions of the state’s history and historical monuments; and the local media landscape.

K-12 CIVICS, HISTORY, AND MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

Civics education prepares future generations to participate in a democratic society through civic actions such as voting, volunteering, and protesting. Civics includes the study of government, the rights and duties of citizenship, and current events, and typically is taught in classes such as history, government, or social studies or by taking part in certain extracurricular activities.

In recent decades, civics education in Rhode Island has deteriorated to the point of legal action: in 2018, 14 public school students filed a lawsuit arguing that the state was failing to provide civics education and thus violating a Constitutional right.⁵⁷ While the case was dismissed due to lack of precedent, Rhode Island District Court Judge William Smith stated that the case “does not represent a wild-eyed effort to expand the reach of substantive due process, but rather a cry for help from a generation of young people who are destined to inherit a country which we—the generation currently in charge—are not stewarding well.”⁵⁸

As one outcome of the lawsuit, the Rhode Island Department of Education agreed to establish a civic education task force, currently in formation.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in 2021, the Rhode Island State Legislature passed the Civic Literacy Act, which requires all public high school graduates to demonstrate civics proficiency and offers students the opportunity to complete a student-led civics project. Implementation of these initiatives is currently in process, with the potential for current research to inform next steps, and with the final outcomes to be seen.

In light of this climate, non-profit Generation Citizen, in partnership with the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University and the Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition, conducted the *2022 Rhode Island Survey on Civic Learning* in Spring 2022. This study surveyed Rhode Island K-12 teachers, students and administrators to gain a better understanding of the status of civics education in the state. As described by the following findings, there are significant inequities in access to high-quality civics instruction. There is also significant room for growth in preparation for civic participation, a key factor for civic health.⁶⁰

Student Perceptions of Civics Education

About 95% of 960 student respondents noted that they had learned about civics and/or U.S. government in school. For these students, this education had a range of impacts on their preparation for community participation:

- » approximately 42% of respondents agreed that their K-12 civics education prepared them to be active members of their community;
- » 35% of respondents indicated a neutral response;
- » and 17% disagreed entirely.

Notably, white students with college-educated parents in districts with high socio-economic status were more likely to agree with this statement than non-white students; students whose parents are not college-educated; and students in districts with low socio-economic status.

Aligned with the overall distribution, students also held varying opinions on how their civics education provided an understanding of the issues facing their communities: 48% of students agreed that their education provided a greater understanding of the issues, 35% felt neutral and 16% disagreed.

Overwhelmingly, the majority of student responses showed tepid interest in community involvement:

- » 29% indicated they would be extremely or somewhat likely to get involved in issues that affected their community;
- » 43% indicated they would maybe get involved;
- » and 28% little or not likely at all to get involved.

42% of surveyed students felt their K-12 civics education prepared them to be active members of their community.

Consistent with the demographic differences noted earlier, white students with college-educated parents in districts with high socio-economic status were more likely to get involved in issues than non-white students, students whose parents were not college-educated, and students in districts with low socio-economic status.

When asked about their likelihood to get involved in response to unjust laws, respondent reactions changed only slightly: 33% indicated they would be extremely or somewhat likely to work with others to change unjust laws, 40% indicated they would maybe inclined to work with others, and 26% indicated they would be little or not at all likely to do so.

Teacher Perceptions of Civics Education

Teacher responses from the 2022 Rhode Island Survey on Civic Learning data also show some concrete opportunities for investment at the school and district level.

- » 36% of respondents indicated that they did not have access to district- or school-provided curricula or teaching materials for civics;
- » 23% of respondents found it to be somewhat or very difficult to locate, access, and use district provided curriculum or materials;
- » 55% of teachers reported having no professional development related to civics within their school or district;
- » and 50% reported not having adequate opportunities (time, space, rewards) to develop civic lessons.

Greater and more equitable access to teaching resources across schools and districts may bolster civic teaching capacity across the state to improve student-led civic action.

Moreover, consistent prioritization at the school and district level may also help improve student-led civic action across the state. Nearly 38% of teachers indicated they saw civic learning and development as “little or not at all a priority” for their school and district, 31.5% saw it as “somewhat a priority” and 30% saw it as a “definite or top priority” in their schools or districts.

History and Media Literacy Education

Student understanding of history has also declined in recent decades, a phenomenon noted as of the late 1980s. For instance, only 15% of 8th graders scored proficient or above in history on the 2019 *National Assessment of Educational Progress*, a lower percentage than five years earlier.⁶¹ Some educators attribute this phenomenon to a focus on standardized test preparation in math and reading at the expense of learning subject-area content. Furthermore, the gap between highest and lowest scores continues to widen, with children of more highly educated parents scoring higher than children of less educated parents.

In terms of education for media literacy, K-12 schools each integrate media literacy curriculum differently based on access to technology, school culture and student readiness for the material. The University of Rhode Island's 2021 *Media Literacy in Rhode Island* report showed that despite its perceived importance by parents and educators, only one in three Rhode Island students learn how to comprehend and analyze news media in school. Similarly, although some watch and discuss TV shows and movies with their children, most parents and guardians do not use a wide range of activities to build media literacy competencies with their children at home.⁶²



HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL ABOUT CIVICS EDUCATION IN RHODE ISLAND?

36% Indicated that they did not have access to district- or school-provided curricula or teaching materials for civics

23% found it to be somewhat or very difficult to locate, access, and use district provided curriculum or materials;

55% reported having no professional development related to civics within their school or district.

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF CIVICS AND HISTORY

Rhode Islanders not enrolled in K-12 education also have different understandings of civics and history, which shape perceptions of local issues and factual information. The *CHI Survey* found that the oldest Rhode Islanders (75+), lifelong Rhode Islanders, and weekly visitors to cultural organizations were most likely to be confident in their understanding of the state's history. The oldest Rhode Islanders likely received their education prior to the decline in K-12 civics and history education detailed above, perhaps leading to their confidence in their understanding.

Of course, research about, and understandings of, Rhode Island's state history have also changed over time, particularly around scholarship and public acknowledgment of Indigenous nations in Rhode Island and the state's dominant role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. A number of Rhode Island historians, educators and legislators are working to incorporate these histories into K-12 curricula across the state, efforts that include the passage of a 2021 law that mandates the teaching of Black heritage and history and the passage of a 2022 law that mandates the teaching of Asian-American history.^{63,64} Additionally, as part of the City of Providence's ongoing Truth-telling, Reconciliation, and Reparations Process, the city released *A Matter of Truth*, a report detailing four centuries of racial injustice in the city.⁶⁵ Some school boards and representatives in state government, however, have protested the teaching of inclusive and complex narratives. A bill was introduced in the 2022 state legislative session that would prohibit the teaching of "divisive" topics in class.⁶⁶ It was not passed, however.

Rhode Island's built environment is filled with historical monuments and sites. The *2021 National Monument Audit*, conducted by Monument Lab in partnership with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, documented 262 monuments in Rhode Island, an initial indication of the density and prevalence of history in the everyday environment.⁶⁷

While closer examination of the particular character of Rhode Island's monuments is warranted, the *Audit* states that, on a national level, "the commemorative landscape is dominated by monuments to figures who would be considered white, male, and wealthy in our common understandings today," and that "the most common features found in American monuments reflect war and conquest."⁶⁸ A number of organizations are currently working to document and transform the landscape of memorialization in Rhode Island, including the City of Providence's Special Committee for Commemorative Works, the Middle Passage Ceremony and Port Marker Project, and the Rhode Island Slave History Medallions project.

Aligned with the national movement to analyze the impact of public monuments and memorials, the *CHI Survey* investigated whether respondents felt that these structures represented their understanding of state history. Nearly 25% of survey respondents indicated that they agreed with how monuments and historical sites in their community represented their understanding of history. While a significant majority of responses to the question indicated they neither agreed or disagreed, respondents of different races, ages, and lengths of residence in the state had different opinions:

- » Black/African/African-American respondents were more likely than white respondents to disagree that monuments and historical sites represented their understanding of history.
- » Older generations were more likely than younger generations to agree that monuments and historical sites represented their understanding of history, with the oldest Rhode Islanders (75+) most likely to agree with the statement.
- » Lifelong Rhode Islanders were also more likely to agree with the statement than most other demographic groups.

Black/African/African-American respondents to the CHI Survey were more likely than White respondents to disagree that monuments and historical sites represented their understanding of history.

Without further investigation, it is not possible to definitively explain the racial disparities in respondents' perceptions of Rhode Island monuments. However, the national predominance of white figures in monuments indicates, at the very least, the need for greater commemoration of Rhode Island's Black/African/African-American history, and the histories of all Rhode Islanders of color, as well as greater recognition of the monuments that already exist. The disparities among generational perceptions also demand further exploration. One initial consideration is that monuments reflect the historical knowledge and cultural forces of the times they were created. As such, the oldest Rhode Islanders may better understand the perspectives of monuments created during their lifetimes, or during their parents' lifetimes, than younger Rhode Islanders do.

MEDIA

The local media landscape also shapes Rhode Islanders' collective understanding by providing information and an arena for public discourse. The *2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement* highlights Rhode Islanders as passive rather than active consumers of news, especially via social media. According to this data, 73.3% of Rhode Islanders frequently read, listen or watch new information on social media and the web, ranking 21st in the nation for consumption. However, 81.7% never post their own views on the news that they consume, nationally ranking 34th in this regard. Similarly, while strongly connected to family, friends, and neighbors, Rhode Islanders are unlikely to discuss news and current events with family and friends (ranking 35th in the nation) and to discuss news and current events with neighbors (ranking 41st in the nation).

The comments from the *CHI Survey* conveyed an overwhelming sense of disappointment with the state of local media within Rhode Island. Thirty-six percent of respondents cited a lack of information as a barrier to community participation, and only 34% agreed that issues in their community are represented in the local news. Respondents were also concerned with the negative bias of the local reporting that does exist, as well as the inconsistent information and perspectives among different media outlets.

Only **34%** of *CHI Survey* respondents agreed that issues in their community are represented in the local news.

Voices of Rhode Islanders

Issues in my community are on the local televised news, but achievements and positive highlights rarely make the TV news.

I think more news coverage would be helpful. I feel like a lot happens in RI that doesn't get the attention it deserves because there aren't enough journalists.

I get frustrated with watching the news. It's largely negative and creates negative attitudes among the population.



In a trend present across the country, many independent news outlets in Rhode Island have either closed or been nationally acquired in the last two decades. *The Providence Journal*, Rhode Island's largest newspaper, was purchased by a Dallas-based corporation in 1996, and is currently owned by Gannett, the largest newspaper publisher in the country.⁶⁹ In a 2020 analysis of existing Rhode Island local news content, Yinjiao Ye, Professor of Communication Studies and Director of Graduate Studies at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island, focused on "37 local news outlets, including most of Rhode Island's local newspapers and a selection of local TV and radio stations, magazines, media with special interests and college newspapers." The analysis found that "the most common topics are government and politics, arts and culture, and economic development," and that "the local news media mainly focus on local and state topics, and do not replicate the coverage of national news outlets."⁷⁰

This apparent contradiction—that survey respondents felt that local news coverage was inadequate, while a survey of local news demonstrates a focus on local and state topics—warrants further investigation. One possible explanation is that the volume of local news may simply be too low to address needs reported by respondents; in other words, it is not that local news coverage does not exist, but that more of it is needed.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT

Rhode Islanders engage with government at high rates compared to the rest of the nation, but many are concerned about nepotism and corruption in government.

Individual and collective engagement with government is the lifeblood of a functioning democracy—a system of government designed to represent its people—and perhaps the most visible form of civic life. For this reason, public trust in the integrity and transparency of government is critical for a healthy democracy. Individuals of different citizenship statuses have many formal and informal ways of engaging with their governments: from voting to attending a town meeting, from participating in a protest at the State House to visiting a municipal library.

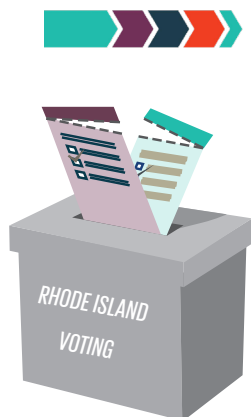
PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

Compared to the rest of the nation, Rhode Islanders' participation in government is quite strong. For nearly 50 years, voter turnout in the state's general elections has remained consistent, and consistently high. In November 2020, the time of the last national general election, 809,812 Rhode Islanders were registered to vote with 732,125 as active voters—roughly 67% of the population of the state.⁷¹ These numbers, no doubt, were aided by the 2017 adoption of automatic voter registration in the state.⁷²

Rhode Islanders turn out significantly for local elections, ranking 11th in the nation in the 2019 *CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement* for voting in local elections. For the 2020 general election, voter turnout was at its highest since 1970, with 64% of registered voters participating.⁷³ According to the 2020 *CPS Voting and Registration Supplement*, the state ranked 28th nationally for its voter turnout in the 2020 federal election. Voters engaged robustly with the Rhode Island Department of State's online voter information in 2020, with almost 6 million visits to the vote.ri.gov website that year—roughly six times the number of Rhode Island residents.⁷⁴



Photo Credit: Rhode Island State House - courtesy of GoProvidence



732,125 Active Voters

67% of the state population
registered

64% of registered voters
voted in 2020

11th in the Nation for Voting

Beyond the American government, Rhode Island also includes Indigenous nations, including the federally recognized Narragansett Indian Tribe. In the *CHI Survey*, respondents who identified as members of tribal and/or Indigenous nations indicated that they participate through community meetings (45%), elections (39%), powwows (26%), and socials (29%), reflecting how dual citizens engage with both of their governments.

Rhode Islanders are also engaging with local and state governments beyond voting. According to the *2019 CPS Volunteering and Civic Engagement Supplement*, the state's residents rank 8th nationally for attending public meetings, and 14th nationally for contacting or visiting public officials. Visits to the seat of government are also robust: from January-March 2020, the State Capitol Police counted 24,644 visits to the State House, the home of the State's General Assembly and Executive Offices as well as the State Library. In March 2020, the State House closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and did not reopen until June 2021. From June-December 2021, Capitol Police counted 19,975 visitors.⁷⁵ In 2019, 1,386 State House tours were given to 17,768 people, including 11,604 schoolchildren. Department of State staff continued offering virtual self-guided and docent-led tours during the pandemic, reaching over 6,775 people.⁷⁶

Rhode Islanders rank 8th for attending public meetings, and 14th for contacting or visiting public officials.



Photo Credit: Central Falls Library Fotohistorias exhibit - courtesy of RI Latino Arts

State and local libraries and archives are also a strong point of contact between the government and Rhode Islanders, especially during the pandemic. In 2019, the State Library welcomed 39,498 visitors and received 2,043 reference questions; in 2021, the Library had 7,977 visitors and received 1,067 questions. Also in 2021, the State Archive provided almost 1.2 million digital file downloads, and assisted over 2,000 researchers.⁷⁷ That same year, Rhode Islanders visited the state's 48 local public libraries—all of which offered outdoor services—almost 2 million times, with around 31% of residents holding library cards.⁷⁸

Over the course of 2020, an increasing number of public gatherings responded to police and state violence against Black lives: an estimated 10,000 people gathered for a youth-led march in Providence in June, and activist groups and community organizers held several other events.^{79,80} While groups continue to rally for racial justice, reports of 2021 and 2022 protests reflect Rhode Islanders' concerns with a broader range of issues, including climate change, abortion rights, COVID-19 vaccine mandates, and eviction moratoriums.^{81,82,83,84}

Rhode Islanders frequented libraries almost 2 million times in 2021, with approximately 31% of state residents holding library cards.

***From 2002-2017,
15 Rhode Island
elected officials were
criminally charged.***

CONCERNS ABOUT GOVERNMENT

While Rhode Islanders engage with the state government comparatively more than many other Americans, these measures only capture individual actions, and do not include the reasons why individuals may choose not to participate in formal mechanisms of government.

Rhode Island has long had a national reputation for corruption and nepotism in state and local government. In the twentieth century, the state was also known as the “capital” of organized crime in New England, which is well-documented as an influence on some government officials.⁸⁵ This culture is most famously exemplified by former Providence Mayor Vincent “Buddy” Cianci, Jr. Cianci, who served from 1975-1984 and 1991-2002, left office before completing his terms due to criminal convictions. Cianci’s contemporary, former Governor Ed DiPrete, was also convicted on corruption charges related to his time in office (1985-1991).⁸⁶ This legacy has persisted into the twenty-first century; from 2002-2017, 15 Rhode Island elected officials were criminally charged.⁸⁷ Rhode Island’s business community has also experienced a number of high-profile scandals in areas with government involvement, including the banking crisis of the early 1990s (precipitated by fraudulent loans) and the 2012 collapse of a video game company subsidized by a \$75 million loan guarantee from the state.^{88,89}

To address this, a number of key transparency and ethics reforms have been implemented since the 1990s, including the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers in 2008, and a 2016 change to the State Constitution that restored Ethics Commission oversight of the General Assembly.^{90,91}

However, culture and perception move more slowly. In 2017, Attorney General Peter Neronha commented that, while public outrage over corruption has increased over time, “the public’s change in attitude hasn’t necessarily stopped the politicians from abusing their offices,” and a 2021 *Washington Post* article named Rhode Island one of the six most corrupt states in the country.^{92,93}

With numerous comments reflecting negatively on the state’s politics, respondents to the *CHI Survey* highlighted concerns about nepotism and corruption.

Voices of Rhode Islanders

Too much nepotism in Rhode Island, in general. Politicians make decisions based on greed and personal connections. The community has no power, especially neighborhoods that are poor.

We need more advocates “in the middle” between people on the street like me and people with power—our City Councilor works hard at playing that role but he’s only acting at the city level. No real voice at the state level: my Rep & Senator only have so much influence over or ability to get regular people into the conversation with executive departments or private actors.

Knowing and engaging with the state of our civic health, as described in the preceding sections, will allow us to take steps to strengthen it. With this understanding, Rhode Islanders can work to achieve a vision of civic life that inspires participation in community, promotes conversations that bridge differences, and ultimately helps us address some of our most difficult challenges.

The following sections explore where we can go from here, and how we can move forward, together.



WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

Given our collective assets and challenges, Rhode Islanders can consider a number of critical next steps to strengthen the state's civic health.



- » ***Strengthening community well-being calls for greater investment in rectifying racial inequities across Rhode Island.***
Racial inequities affect many facets of community well-being, which, in turn, affect the ability of Rhode Islanders of color to fully participate in the state's civic life.
- » ***Strengthening social connection calls for tools and venues for civic dialogue.***
Rhode Island's greatest civic asset is also one of its greatest civic challenges: the strength of connections among family, friends, and neighbors. These connections can cause social insularity that reinforces inequities, polarization, and civic stagnation. If Rhode Islanders can access more tools to build trust and begin conversations about local issues, social connections may then translate into civic dialogue, and positive collective action.
- » ***Strengthening public participation calls for greater acknowledgment of Rhode Island's non-governmental civic institutions.***
Rhode Islanders frequent non-governmental civic institutions, including cultural organizations, local independent businesses, and public recreation sites, which strengthen their sense of connection in the state. Investing in these institutions, and their capacities for dialogue and exchange, will provide more opportunities for public participation and strengthen Rhode Island's civic health.
- » ***Strengthening collective understanding calls for greater attention to civics, history, and media literacy education, and in inclusive monuments and historic sites.***
Improving education in civics, history, and media literacy will allow students to more fully participate in Rhode Island's civic life. Ensuring that the state's monuments and historic sites accurately represent all facets of the state's history—including the histories of Rhode Islanders of color—will inclusively reflect the stories of all Rhode Islanders.
- » ***Strengthening collective understanding also calls for greater commitment to local independent media.***
Rhode Islanders are hungry for thorough and holistic representation of their communities in the media, as well as information about how they might participate in local groups and events. Investment in local independent media will help to address this need and in turn bolster Rhode Island's civic life.
- » ***Strengthening engagement with government calls for continued emphasis on government transparency.***
Rhode Islanders are engaging with their governments at nationally strong rates both formally and informally. However, the state's legacy of corruption and nepotism continues to undermine trust in government and belief in the possibility of positive civic change.

HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD, TOGETHER?

This report is an invitation to all Rhode Islanders for reflection and action. We hope all those who encounter the Index, regardless of background, can find in this baseline information a spark for meaningful conversation in communities across the state. Ultimately, the path forward is what we, together, make it.



CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION:

Community Well-Being: How would Rhode Island, your city, or neighborhood look, feel, and operate if addressing racial inequities were a priority? What investments would be required to do this in meaningful ways?

Community Participation: Social Connection: What tools or spaces have proven useful or accessible for starting dialogues with Rhode Islanders unlike yourself? If you have not found these tools or spaces yet, what do you feel would be most helpful?

Community Participation: Public Participation: Think about the non-governmental civic institutions that have been most impactful in your life—for example, local heritage societies, parks, and independent corner stores. What resources would allow those institutions to impact even more Rhode Islanders? What would it require to provide those resources?

Community Participation: Collective Understanding: What ripple effects can you envision in your community from improvements in civics, history, and media literacy education? What impact would more inclusive monuments and historic sites have in your neighborhood?

Community Participation: Collective Understanding: What will it take to achieve greater investment in local independent media? How could this transform the state's civic landscape?

Community Participation: Engagement with Government: What do you see working well in Rhode Island when it comes to government transparency on the state, city, or neighborhood levels? What needs improvement, and how could that improvement be made?

Share your thoughts with us at rihumanities.org!

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TECHNICAL NOTES

A NOTE ON TERMS REFERRING TO RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS

Throughout the 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index*, the terms used to refer to different racial and ethnic groups vary. This variation reflects the variation in terms used in the different data sets that the *Index* draws upon. When referring to the findings of a particular data set, the *Index's* authors, to the best of their ability, used the terms used in that data set.

2022 RHODE ISLAND CIVIC HEALTH INDEX SURVEY (CHI SURVEY)

The *CHI Survey* was open to all Rhode Islanders aged 16 and older from April 21-May 4, 2022. The *Survey* was available online via SurveyMonkey in English and Spanish, and was screen-reader compatible. Respondents were contacted via community outreach efforts to yield representation from all 39 cities and towns within the state, and respondents participated in the survey anonymously and without compensation.

This survey used a non-probabilistic sample and does not constitute a statistically representative sample of Rhode Islanders. As such, findings are characterized as statistically significant within the pool of the 751 survey respondents who completed the survey, but not externally valid to the state population of Rhode Islanders. The survey's findings may be used for further exploratory research and study of Rhode Islanders at large.

For the *CHI Survey* question list and aggregate results, please visit rihumanities.org.

CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY (CPS)

Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this report are based on the National Conference on Citizenship's (NCoC) analysis of the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any and all errors are NCoC's own. Volunteering and Civic Engagement estimates are from *CPS September Volunteering/Civic Engagement Supplement* from 2019 and voting estimates from 2020 *November Voting and Registration Supplement*.

Using a probability-selected sample of about 150,000 occupied households, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the single-year Rhode Island CPS sample size used for this report ranges from 135-519 (volunteering/civic engagement supplement) and to 762 (voting supplement) residents from across Rhode Island. This sample is then weighted to representative population demographics for the district. Estimates for the volunteering and civic engagement indicators (e.g., volunteering, working with neighbors, making donations) are based on U.S. residents ages 16 and older. Voting and registration statistics are based on U.S. citizens who are 18 and older (eligible voters). When we examined the relationship between educational attainment and engagement, estimates are based on adults ages 25 and older, based on the assumption younger people may be completing their education.

Because multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes are used, the report is not able to compute one margin of error for Rhode Island across all indicators. Any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples, and therefore the margin of error will increase. Furthermore, while helpful in benchmarking, national rankings may be small in range, with one to two percentage points separating the state/district ranked first from the state/district ranked last.

It is also essential that our margin of error estimates is approximate, as CPS sampling is highly complex, and accurate estimation of error rates involves many parameters that are not publicly available.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The **Rhode Island Council for the Humanities** is deeply grateful to all who conceptualized, supported, and participated in the 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index*. This *Index* draws upon the contributions of thousands of Rhode Islanders, and we extend our thanks to each of them.

Funding through the “**A More Perfect Union**” initiative of the **National Endowment for the Humanities** and the **Rhode Island Foundation** supported the creation and completion of this report.

This report was primarily written by **Julia Renaud**, Associate Director of Strategic Grants and Initiatives, and **Neelam Sakaria**, Data Consultant, at the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. Executive Director **Elizabeth Francis** and all other members of the Council's staff—**Rachael Jeffers**, **Sophia Mackenzie**, **Scott Raker**, **Micah Rodriguez**, and **Melissa Wong**—provided key contributions.

Thank you to our institutional partners, the **National Conference on Citizenship**, particularly primary contributors **Cameron Blossom** and **Jeff Coates**, and to **Jessica Cigna**, **Nicole Lagace**, **Kaitlynn Morris** and **Lane Sparkman** at **Rhode Island Department of State**, who contributed expert insights in every phase of the project as well as key data sets and analyses. We are also grateful for the invaluable guidance of **The Policy Lab at Brown University** throughout the process. Additionally, we thank **Generation Citizen** for their collaboration and generous sharing of data.

The 2022 *Rhode Island Civic Health Index* builds upon an invaluable foundation of data collection and publications related to civic health in Rhode Island, and we thank all those whose work has contributed to this project.

We gratefully acknowledge the Rhode Island Civic Health Index Community Partners, who generously shared their time, energy, and perspectives: **Cathleen Carr**, **Christine Costa**, **Diana Figueroa**, **Wanda Hopkins**, **Mariam Kaba**, **Alex Kithes**, **Mr. Joel Rosario Tapia**, **MSc/Chief Tureygua Taino Cay**, **Doug Victor**, **Kilah Walters-Clinton**, and **Jannessa Ya**.

We also thank the project's academic advisors, who provided critical context and feedback: **Julie C. Keller**, Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy, University of Rhode Island; **Nicholas V. Longo**, Professor of Global Studies and Co-Director of the Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy Lab, Providence College; **Evelyn Sterne**, Associate Professor of History and Director of the Center for the Humanities, University of Rhode Island; and **Yinjiao Ye**, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Communication Studies, University of Rhode Island.

We are grateful to the 751 Rhode Islanders who completed the RI Civic Health Index Survey in Spring 2022. We also appreciate all who helped to circulate the survey throughout the state, including the Rhode Island Civic Health Index Community Ambassadors: **Mischa Downing**, **Susan Gorelick**, **Debra Harris**, **Rochelle Leach**, **Amanda Nacci**, **Silaphone Nhongvongsouthy**, **Nwando Ofokansi**, **Trinit Schell**, **Allessandra Soares**, and **Nadine Tavares**.

ADDITIONAL THANKS TO:

Jeannine Chartier, Arts Equity

Phoebe Stein and the staff of the Federation of State Humanities Councils

Michael R. Fein, PhD, Johnson & Wales University

Renee Hobbs, EdD, University of Rhode Island

Arielle Jennings, Generation Citizen

Fran Leazes, MPA, PhD, Rhode Island College

Matthew Lyddon, PhD, Brown University

Allison Pao, Generation Citizen

Kristina Pires, Generation Citizen

Kelly Siegel-Stechler, PhD, Tufts University

Pamela Steager, University of Rhode Island

Todd Trebour, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts

Kevin Wilson, PhD, Brown University

David Yokum, JD, PhD, Brown University

All Rhode Islanders past, present, and future.

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CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

State and Local Partnerships

NCoC began America's Civic Health Index in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act directed NCoC to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the US Census Bureau.

NCoC now works with partners in more than 35 states and cities to use civic data to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America and to drive sustainable civic strategies.

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Got Your 6

Millennials Civic Health Index

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