CALIFORNIA CIVIC HEALTH INDEX 2026



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Acknowledgments

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Data Partner

We are proud to utilize data from the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey in partnership with AmeriCorps.

About the Partners

Purpose of Education Fund

The Purpose of Education Fund

The Purpose of Education (POE) Fund is a collaborative grantmaking initiative focused on creating the conditions for young people to be informed and engaged agents of change in their communities. The POE Fund centers the role of public education in preparing adolescents to participate in the country's diverse democracy and seeks to make California a national example of how to support and enliven civic engagement for today's adolescents. Learn more at stuartfoundation.org/purpose-of-education.

National Conference on Citizenship

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) 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 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.

Foreword



As our nation marks its 250th anniversary, it's worth asking a simple question: How do we support a thriving, healthy, and inclusive democracy?

This report makes clear that the answer isn't found only in ballot boxes or statehouses. It lives in the everyday connections between neighbors, in the conversations we have around kitchen tables and in living rooms, and in the experiences young people have to develop and use their voice, leadership, and agency. This is the core of the work of the Purpose of Education Fund — ensuring that young people have opportunities to practice democracy in expansive ways.

We believe learning, both in and out of school, must prepare young people for college, career, and a rich civic life. That's one of the reasons we partnered with the National Conference on Citizenship on this report, which establishes a baseline for understanding civic engagement in California and identifies challenges and opportunities for growth.

There is much to celebrate within the state. Californians trust and help their neighbors. During the pandemic, young people in California helped their neighbors more than any other age group in the state. Seventy-seven percent of teens say they care deeply about issues in their communities, and two-thirds feel connected to others working to make a difference. These numbers illustrate that young people have opinions on issues that shape their lives and are eager to contribute to their communities. The data also point to opportunities to connect this interest into more formal modes of civic participation — including voting, volunteering, or engaging with public officials — and to ensure access to these opportunities is evenly distributed across income and education levels and regions.

The report highlights early entry points as a moment of opportunity. The earlier young people engage in their communities, the more likely they are to stay engaged for life. That makes schools, libraries, and other third spaces, where young people can gather, learn, and connect with trusted adults, essential civic infrastructure. Most of all, young people need real opportunities to inform and co-lead the decisions that affect them.

California already has promising practices, policies, programs, educators and young people. The state incentivizes civic learning and engagement by awarding a Seal of Civic Engagement on the high school diplomas of students that demonstrate excellence in civics education and participation. The state has also committed ongoing funding to community schools that prioritize authentic student voice and community connected learning, operates the nation's largest service corps, envisions students as "community contributors" in its Portrait of a Learner framework, and has a robust ecosystem of youth organizing groups working on issues from climate change to youth vote efforts. Embedding and prioritizing high-quality civic learning within these initiatives and ecosystems acknowledges and develops youth as key members of our democracy.

Our challenge and opportunity is to make sure these commitments reach every young person in every region, especially those furthest from opportunity. We do this, in part, by recognizing that the skills that make strong citizens — like collaboration, problem-solving, and communication — are the same ones that build resilient learners and a strong workforce. These are not unrelated efforts. They are part of a holistic approach to supporting and preparing young people to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

This work requires collective action. It will take educators, community leaders, policymakers, philanthropy, young people, and families to expand and deepen our civic infrastructure and civic engagement. This report serves as both a mirror and an invitation. We hope you'll join us in this vital work to sustain a thriving democracy.

Kathryn Bradley

Kathryn Bradley
Director, Purpose of Education Fund



San Francisco, CA

Section 1: Executive Summary

California is defined by its diversity—of people, languages, landscapes, and ways of life.

That diversity is a strength for the state, and it is central to how Californians approach civic life. It also makes California a microcosm of the nation, containing within its borders so much of the range of American civic experience. What civic health looks like in California, and what it takes to strengthen it, can offer a window into the civic health of the country as a whole. So while no set of statistics can capture the breadth of California's civic ecosystem, it is worth looking for signals.[1]

California's future will be shaped by its young people. Contrary to the assumption that young people are disengaged, young Californians largely keep pace with older adults across many civic behaviors, and match or nearly match their peers nationally on most measures. Large majorities of the state's teens say they care deeply about their communities and feel connected to others working to make a difference. With the right supports, these sentiments and behaviors can grow into lifelong habits of participation—and, in time, shape the civic leadership of the state.

Data show that Californians have a solid foundation of civic connection and trust that years of dedicated work across the state have helped sustain. They find their neighbors helpful and trustworthy, feel safe in their neighborhoods, and regularly do favors for each other.

But there is a persistent gap between connection and more formal types of civic participation—and it is wider for some Californians than others. Half of residents help a neighbor at least once over the course of a year, yet fewer than one in ten attend a public meeting or contact a public official. And the pathways into civic life are unevenly distributed as participation tracks closely with income, education, and region, leaving lower-income communities, and parts of the state like the San Joaquin Valley with fewer opportunities to take part.



Photo: Ant Armada on Pexels

The data also shows warning signs that make the case for acting now. California's trend lines in civic confidence and civic information consumption, in particular, are starting to flash red. According to unique California statewide data, confidence that one could contact a public official has fallen. Frequent news and information consumption (more than once a week) has dropped in California and nationally. They have done so precipitously among young adults and Latinos. While similar to national trends, these are some of the civic capacities that lead to participation and their erosion could put the future of California's civic health at risk.

California has already taken bold strides on neighborly connection, engaging populations that have traditionally been sidelined, and civic learning for youth. The state operates the nation's largest service corps, institutionalized civic learning through the State Seal of Civic Engagement and a civic-readiness commitment in its Portrait of a Learner, and supports effective neighbor-to-neighbor programs. These initiatives draw more Californians together, and into local decision-making. Through these and many other efforts, the state finds itself holding its own when many other states are facing steeper declines in civic health indicators.

But the gaps and warning signs mean that state leaders have a window to act with urgency: to shore up what is working, and push to address the most important gaps before they widen. Doing so would accelerate California beyond a steady state of civic health to leading the nation.

“California has already taken bold strides on neighborly connection, engaging populations that have traditionally been sidelined, and civic learning for youth.”

MAJOR FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

California's young people are a bright spot.

On most civic behaviors, young Californians match or nearly match both older Californians and their peers nationally, and on a few, they lead. During the pandemic, they increased engagement on measures where young adults nationally held steady or declined, including larger gains in self-reported local voting in 2021 and the 2020 federal election. Among teens, 77% say they care deeply about their communities and about two-thirds feel connected to others working to make a difference.

A solid foundation of connection and trust.

Over 80% of Californians find their neighbors helpful and trustworthy, 87% feel safe in their neighborhoods–figures largely unchanged since the 2000s. Half help a neighbor each year, and one-third do so at least once per month–rates that have risen since 2017, and now track closer to the national average. These are among the state's clearest civic strengths.

A gap between connection and formal action.

California ranks in the bottom ten states in the nation on several formal participation metrics including self-reported voting in local elections. Fewer than one in ten Californians attend a public meeting or contact a public official: The state never breaks 10% in seven years of data. People are now more likely to express a view by boycotting or buying a product (17%) than by showing up to a meeting or reaching out to an official–mirroring national trends.

Volunteering: strong commitment, room to grow.

This formal action gap also applies to volunteering. California ranks 43rd nationally on the rate of formal volunteering for an organization or association (24%, below the 28% national average). But among those volunteering, almost 22% do so at least once per week, which is slightly higher than the national rate. The gap is one of breadth, not depth, and the opportunity is to bring more people into the process.

Worrying drops in civic confidence and information.

Most civic participation indicators have held steady since 2017 (the first year these measures were collected consistently) but there are two that fell sharply. Confidence that one could contact a public official dropped ten points (54% to 44%)[2]. And there was a 12-point drop in frequently following news or information about political, societal, or local issues (meaning more than once a week). This drop mirrors a national decline, as does the 21-point drop among young adults. Because these are two of the very capacities that engagement can depend on, their erosion should warn the state against losing ground on participation itself.

The sections that follow examine where Californians participate, how young people are showing up, what the ecosystem around them looks like, and what leaders across the state can do to broaden and deepen civic life — knowing that when they do, young people and communities rise together.

HOW CALIFORNIA RANKS NATIONALLY, 2023

Compared to other states, California's overall rates of civic participation fall mostly on the lower side. Some measures capture frequency and the ranks below reflect all responses including those who participate at least once in the prior 12 months. It is also important to note that the percentage point difference between the highest and lowest ranked states may be small for some indicators.

Neighboring	
ENGAGING WITH NEIGHBORS At least once in the prior 12 months	**NATIONAL RANKING**
Talking with neighbors	**#44**
Discuss issues with neighbors	**#40**
Informal helping	**#42**
Taking action with neighbors	**#41**
Information and Connection	
ENGAGING WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ISSUES At least once in the prior 12 months	**NATIONAL RANKING**
Talking with friends and family	**#42**
Discussing issues with friends and family	**#36**
ENGAGING WITH INFORMATION At least once in the prior 12 months	**NATIONAL RANKING**
Posting views online	**#12**
Follows news	**#40**
Follow news *more than once a week*	**#39**
Joining	
VOLUNTEERING AND GIVING At least once in the prior 12 months	**NATIONAL RANKING**
Formal volunteering	**#43**
Formal volunteering *more than once a week*	**#13**
Organizational membership	**#42**
Government Engagement	
ENGAGING WITH GOVERNMENT At least once in the prior 12 months	**NATIONAL RANKING**
Voting in local elections	**#41**
Attending public meetings	**#43**
Contacting public officials	**#43**
Donating to a political cause	**#15**
Buycotting or boycotting	**#30**

When crises and disasters strike—be they wildfires, financial meltdowns, or pandemics—parts of our nation's civic capacity surge.

Neighbors help one another, contribute, and work together to rebuild. Disaster preparedness and response is, unfortunately, a familiar part of being a Californian; too many have a story of a fire, a flood, an earthquake, or mudslide. As in states and communities across the country, these moments call forth the state's collective spirit precisely when its people need it most.



Los Angeles, CA

Photo: Kimberly Fowler on Unsplash

Our nation today faces numerous threats and crises, from natural hazards to technological risks. Through that lens, civic health is a snapshot of our nation's ability to function as a self-governing democracy — not only when times are easy, but when they are most challenging. It measures whether people trust one another and their institutions, participate in public life, and can collaborate to solve shared problems even when they disagree. On a range of indicators, that capacity is under strain: polarization runs deep, civic discord has grown, and trust has declined. That strain makes the condition of civic life not a peripheral concern but a central one — and it is often in local communities, where people still know their neighbors and cooperate on concrete problems, that the green shoots of renewal appear.

Research increasingly shows that one crucial way communities can prepare for a crisis is to strengthen civic capacity before it strikes. Creating community networks and building belonging and trust ahead of a disaster puts neighborhoods and towns in a far better position to respond when a threat arrives. In Japan, a study of mortality across hundreds of neighborhoods struck by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami found that communities with stronger social ties and higher trust had lower death rates — their connections, not just their seawalls, helped save lives.[3] In the United States, Eric Klinenberg's study of the 1995 Chicago heat wave reached a similar conclusion: among demographically comparable neighborhoods, those with more community connection and vibrant shared spaces lost far fewer residents than those without them.[4] The federal government has taken notice. At FEMA's request, the National Academies' Resilient America Program made social capital and community connectedness a focus of its research on how communities withstand and recover from disaster.

Building local connection, engagement, and collaboration creates stronger communities along many dimensions: health, safety, economic prosperity, and more. These are desirable outcomes for neighborhoods and towns all year round. But they also mean that when a crisis hits, residents fare better, both for those underlying reasons, and because they already have the relationships, trust, and collaborative muscle a crisis demands.

This section reviews some of the evidence for why civic health matters, especially for our younger populations. In a state like California, where natural hazards are predicted to be more frequent and more severe in the future, it may matter even more.[5, 6]



Photo: Nayla Bernardes on Pexels

Los Angeles, CA

THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC HEALTH TO COMMUNITIES AND OUR YOUTH

Community connection and participation have powerful impacts on our neighborhoods, towns and cities. Decades of research have shown that it can improve public health and safety, generate and maintain economic development, and more. In a 2023 U.S. Surgeon General's advisory on social connection, the case is made through rigorous evidence that paints a compelling picture of the importance of our civic connections and civic life.[7]

The evidence around economic development is particularly striking. When comparing apples-to-apples demographically, connected and engaged communities are more likely to experience greater economic prosperity and resilience. For example, a National Conference on Citizenship analysis of economic factors found that communities with higher levels of connection and participation faced less unemployment in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.[8] Another study, tracking 26 American cities over three years, found that the cities where residents felt most "community attachment" thanks in part to their connection and relationships, saw the strongest GDP growth.[9]

Members of communities that are better networked and more engaged are more likely to help one another, do favors for one another, share information like job openings or other opportunities.[10, 11] Connecting and collaborating in neighborhoods and towns makes it more likely to form varied networks with people who differ in age, ethnicity, or income-level. Research shows that these varied networks, especially among people of differing socioeconomic status can have an impact on upward mobility as relationships facilitate access to jobs or other assets.[12, 13]

> "Connected and engaged communities are more likely to experience greater economic prosperity and resilience."

Engaging in communities is related to economic prosperity in other ways, as well. Strong research has found that local activities like volunteering can deliver workforce skills and also increase the chance of employment.[14, 15, 16]

These dynamics are doubly important for our nation's young people. The relationships and networks they are connected to, the opportunities they are afforded, and the belonging they feel within the places they live can have life-changing implications. They can improve academic achievement, increase graduation rates and higher education matriculation, and increase earning potential. A 2018 longitudinal study of 9,471 people found that every form of civic engagement examined during adolescence and young adulthood was positively associated with higher income and educational attainment later in life.[17]

Another strong area of research has found that young people with high-quality, healthy relationships, including with peers and community figures like teachers are more likely to see improved academic results. The relationships that are formed through efforts such as mentoring programs, for example, have been correlated to academic outcomes like better attendance and higher grades and test scores.[18] In fact, positive connections young people experience at home as well as at schools may lead to a higher likelihood of graduating college.[19]

In fact, positive connections young people experience at home as well as at schools may lead to a higher likelihood of **graduating college.**

This and other research shows that we can set our young people up for a lifetime of success through prioritizing community connection and engagement. But these outcomes that benefit young peoples' own success are also deeply intertwined with the success and thriving of the places they live. Through community relationships, participation, civic learning in and out of schools; through modeling by peers, parents, and community members and leaders, and other mechanisms, our young people come to prioritize civic life and thereby enrich, improve, and sustain it for the future.

A rigorous 2011 meta-analysis provides a good example of this. Covering 62 studies and around 12,000 students, the findings show that service-learning participation improved "attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance."[20] Another major longitudinal study of 7,000 fifth through twelfth grade students found that youth participating in their community through the 4-H program were more likely to see some improved academic outcomes in addition to continuing to engage actively in their communities.[21]

More evidence of these multi-faceted and multi-directional dynamics come from analysis of the California Health Interview Survey.[2] Data from this 1,002 sample size study of teens in 2024, finds that hands-on civic experience is strongly associated with a stronger sense of agency and connection. Teens who have volunteered to solve a problem in their community are markedly more likely to feel connected to others making a difference (73–84%, compared to 52–61% of those who haven't volunteered). They are more likely to believe they can make a difference themselves (76–88% versus 60–69%) and to express confidence that they could contact a government representative on behalf of their community (33–46% versus 17–24%). Participation in a club or group outside of school shows a similar, if narrower, pattern: those teens are more likely to feel confident contacting a representative (27–39% versus 18–26%) and to believe in their own capacity to make a difference. (The survey did not find evidence of increased connection via clubs or groups.)

Notably, these relationships appear to reinforce one another. Teens who feel connected to others working towards social good are far more likely to believe they can make a difference (81–89%, compared to 36–50% of those who don't feel connected) and to feel confident engaging government (29–37% versus 9–18%) — and the reverse holds as well, with belief and confidence feeding back into a sense of connection. The pattern suggests a mutually supporting cycle: volunteering and group participation build connection and confidence, which in turn deepen the belief and willingness to engage that motivate further civic action.

This and other evidence reinforce a truth humans have known since the dawn of time: That the relationships, networks, and collaboration in our communities make us better and stronger as individuals and better enable our collective prosperity. For young people especially, the habits of community engagement formed early can cascade outward across a lifetime, shaping how far they go in school, how much they earn, and how deeply they invest in the places they live.

But fostering connection and participation in our communities requires intentionality. This report will take a closer look at both the current state of civic life in California, how youth are showing up, what the ecosystem around them looks like, and what leaders in the state can do to build and improve. In doing so, they can chart a path in which California's young people and communities will rise together.

Teens who have volunteered to solve a problem in their community are markedly more likely to feel connected to others making a difference **(73–84%,** compared to 52–61% of those who haven't volunteered).

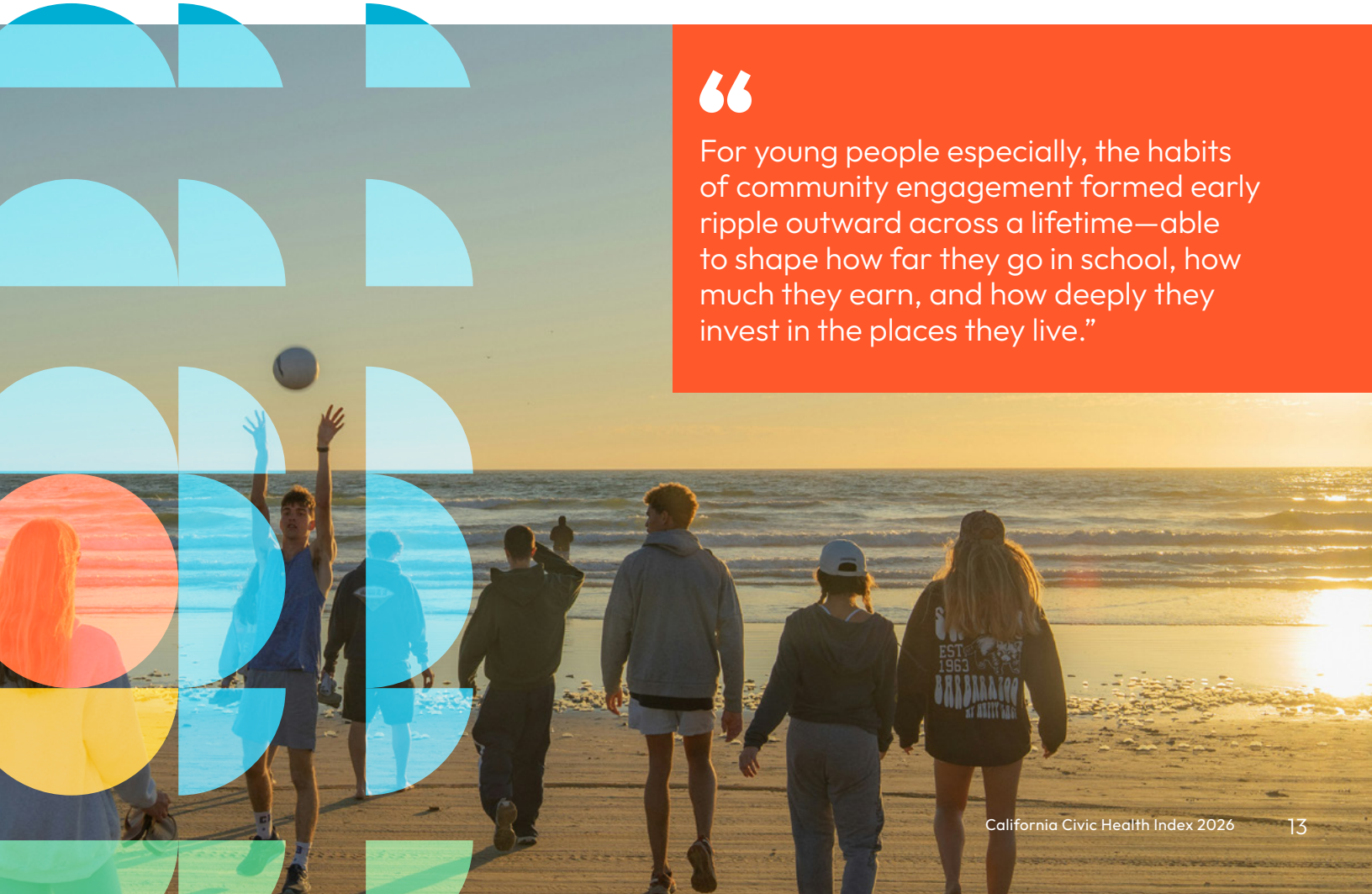

Pismo Beach, CA

Photo: Luciani Koroshec on Unsplash

TEEN CIVIC PARTICIPATION OUTCOMES

The California Health Interview Survey data show that compared to teens without these civic experiences, teens with civic experience report a stronger sense of agency and connection, which are important to sustaining ongoing engagement.

EXPERIENCE	OUTCOME	WITH EXPERIENCE	WITHOUT
Volunteered to solve a community problem	Feel connected to others making a difference	73–84%	52–61%
	Believe they can make a difference	76–88%	60–69%
	Confident contacting a government representative	33–46%	17–24%
Participated in a club/ group outside school	Confident contacting a government representative	27–39%	18–26%
Feel connected to others making a difference	Believe they can make a difference	81–89%	36–50%
	Confident contacting a government representative	29–37%	9–18%



> “For young people especially, the habits of community engagement formed early ripple outward across a lifetime—able to shape how far they go in school, how much they earn, and how deeply they invest in the places they live.”

Section 3: California Findings



INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

The state of California is notable for many reasons. California's population and geographic size are bigger than many countries. If it were its own nation, California would be the fourth-largest economy in the world. The state is home to a unique mix of rural, suburban, and urban areas, large populations of people of many nationalities, and an economy based on a wide variety of engines from technology, to farming, to film.

This rich diversity is a strength that filters into California's civic health. But it does make it challenging to summarize a snapshot of the state's participation without losing the variation and texture that defines it. There is no one set of numbers, or one report that could capture it all.

Yet, there is value in drawing insights from data on the ways that Californians participate in community life. This report relies mostly on the AmeriCorps-Census Bureau's Civic Engagement and Volunteering survey. Woven in with that are additional rich state-and county-level data, as well as work researchers and local leaders have done to assess California's civic strengths and challenges in more specific ways. This report is informed by California-specific analyses of Kindergarten through 12 civic education, the regional news ecosystem, polling on trust in the state, as well as data on civic opportunity, among other aspects of community life.

Broadly, Californians have shown consistent, steady community engagement between 2017 and 2023 on 13 of 17 indicators and largely tracks national trends. In a sign of strength for the state, young adults (ages 16–29) mirror the patterns of older adults on many metrics. Even more encouragingly, the pandemic years saw young-adult engagement rise on several measures, in a few cases surpassing the rate of young people nationally — a sign that patterns are not fixed, and can shift.

These steady trendlines and bright spots tell two equally true stories: first, one of quiet success where the state has buffered some downward trends seen nationally; and a second, of a plateau in need of acceleration. In both cases, the narrative is incomplete without looking beneath the statewide averages where major gaps can be seen between youth and older age-groups, between different regions of the state, and among other demographics as well.

These data represent the local relationships and interactions that drive community thriving, undergird the basic functioning of society, and serve as the fundamental building blocks of democracy. So while California may be holding its own across most measures, that standing is an opportunity for urgent improvement, not a resting point. To grow from here, Californians will need to answer challenging questions: Where is attention needed most to close gaps? What opportunities have the power to draw people into civic life in a durable, long-lasting way? And, which barriers can be effectively addressed, and how?

> “Where is attention needed most to close gaps? What opportunities have the power to draw people into civic life in a durable, long-lasting way? Which barriers can be effectively addressed, and how?”

HOW CIVIC HEALTH AND BEHAVIORS ARE MEASURED

Civic health is a multidimensional composite of how Americans engage with their communities, their neighbors, and their government.

This report examines California's civic health primarily through the lens of the most comprehensive and reliable data available on civic participation: the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), specifically the alt-annual September Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement sponsored by AmeriCorps. These data, collected from a probability-selected sample, allow us to track trends over time, compare California to other states and the national average, and understand how civic participation may vary across different communities within the state. Respondents answer a series of questions about their civic behaviors making all data self-reported. The full list of survey questions can be found in the appendix.

Important Note on Demographics: The two main datasets used in this report ask survey participants about race and ethnicity using separate questions. The Census Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement and the California Health Interview Survey ask one question about self-identified race and a separate question about Latino or Hispanic ethnicity. However, the Census data that was used for this report does not allow for sharing both race and ethnicity at the same time. When possible, we distinguish when both race and ethnicity are considered.



San Francisco, CA

Photo: Dan Dennis on Unsplash

CALIFORNIA'S CIVIC HEALTH INDEX FINDINGS

This next section will review data that represents different areas of civic life in the state of California, along with some of the ecosystem factors that can impact it. It reports on Californians' civic behaviors across the four categories of engagement named in the previous section: **Neighboring, Information & Connection, Joining, and Government Engagement.**



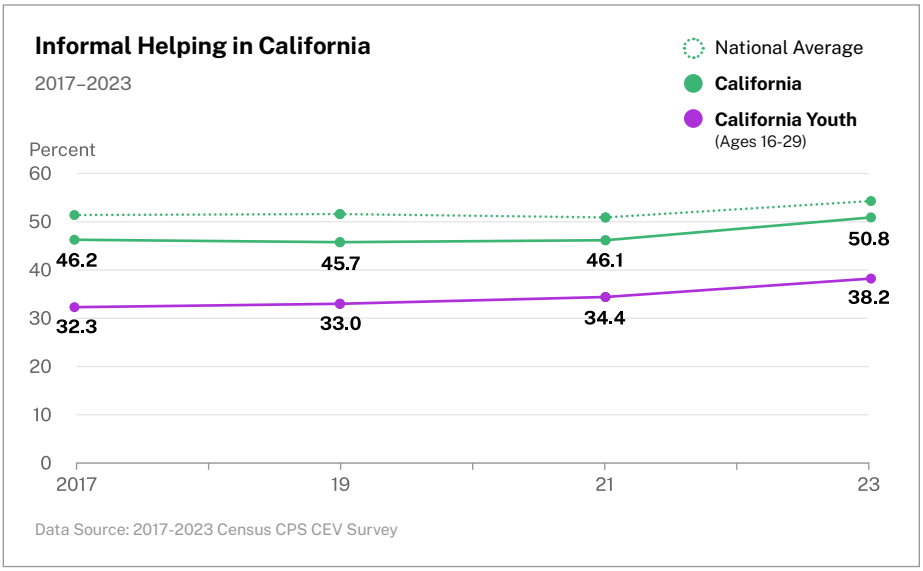
Photo: Sum Sum on Unsplash

Neighboring activities are one way that communities create local culture, generate belonging and trust, and can build towards thriving for all.

Whether it is getting to know others through conversation, helping neighbors with favors, talking about a particular community issue, or working together on a community event, these actions create the communication channels, relationships, care, and support that are the basis of civic life. They can help demonstrate and deliver a basic human need — the feeling that someone has your back.

TAKEAWAYS

While flat over time, neighborhood connections in California are a clear strength. Half of Californians take part in informal helping in their neighborhood over the course of a year (10% do so often) and young adults in the state did this more than other youth during the pandemic, which could be an asset to increase hyperlocal connections in other ways. This is a key area to build on for broader engagement and to influence early youth civic learning.



TRENDS

Statewide, rates of neighboring activities among Californians largely stayed the same between 2017 and 2023, with a slight dip in talking with neighbors over that time period. Over 27% of Californians discuss issues with their neighbors at least once per year and 6.7% do so more than once per week. Taking positive action with neighbors is back to pre-pandemic levels after a slight dip.

These statewide trends, including those among 16-to-29-year-olds, track national trends. But during the pandemic, California's young adults in that age group stepped up. When their neighbors needed them most, they increased their informal helping more than the both the national average for their age group, as well as all other age groups in the state.

Neighboring in California, 2023 All ages, Ages 16-29, National				
ENGAGING WITH NEIGHBORS At least once in the prior 12 months	**CALIFORNIA**	**NATIONAL**	**CALIFORNIA** Ages 16-29	**NATIONAL** Ages 16-29
Talking with neighbors	67.0%	70.2%	52.4%	54.2%
Discuss issues with neighbors	27.0%	28.8%	18.8%	17.5%
Informal helping	50.8%	54.2%	38.2%	38.0%
Taking action with neighbors	18.0%	21.5%	12.7%	14.9%

A CLOSER LOOK

Talking with neighbors is stratified **by age** much more than other indicators.

Among Californians, however, there are differences in ways that people engage in their neighborhood. For example, talking with neighbors is stratified by age much more than other indicators — those who are older are more likely to talk with neighbors compared to those who are 16 to 29 years old. That said, interactions with neighbors have increased slightly among young adults in the state since 2019. Several other groups also saw increases in talking with neighbors up to 2023 — those without a high school diploma, Millennials, and Asian Californians. Among Latino Californians, frequent discussion of issues with neighbors (more than once a week) appears to have risen between 2017 and 2021, likely with some pandemic influence, and held at that higher level in 2023. However, all demographic breakdowns warrant more study due to smaller sample sizes.



San Francisco, CA

Photo: Mauro Lima on Unsplash

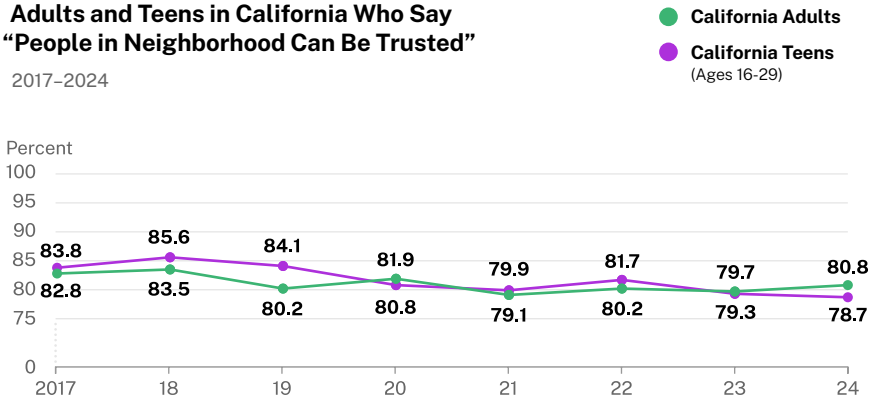
“Among Californians, there are differences in ways that people engage in their neighborhood.”

CIVIC ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

Many factors influence whether neighbors connect in these ways. For example, levels of trust and safety Californians feel in their neighborhoods may buoy and contribute to rates of talking with, and taking action with, neighbors. The California Health Interview Survey allows for insights into neighborhood trust and safety in the state. In 2024, 87% of adults and teens reported feeling safe all or most of the time in their neighborhoods, a rate that has stayed the same since 2019. Over 80% of those living in California felt their neighbors were helpful (a rate that is consistent since the 2000s) and that their neighbors could be trusted. While young adults in the state were slightly less likely to trust neighbors and find them helpful, teens 12-to-17 years old in the state are more likely to trust neighbors than young adults. Among them, 76% of 18-29 year olds feel their neighbors are helpful and even more among teens (87%), and 73% of 18-29 believe they can be trusted (79% teens).

Adults and Teens in California Who Say “People in Neighborhood Can Be Trusted”

2017–2024



Data Source: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research CHIS 2017-2024 Data Set

Neighborhood sentiments do differ across the state, however, which may influence whether Californians are helping neighbors or taking action with them. For example, across 2023 and 2024, teens in Los Angeles County reported feeling less safe in their neighborhoods “all the time” than teens across the rest of the state. Among adults 18 and over, neighborhood safety is high across all regions, but Los Angeles County reported comparatively lower levels of feeling safe “all the time” or “most of the time” than the state overall, and the Sacramento area, far north and Sierra counties reported comparatively higher levels of safety.

About eight in ten Californians agree that neighbors are willing to help. This is particularly the case in the far north of the state and in the greater Sacramento area. Additionally, Asian and white Californians were more likely than the state overall to find neighbors helpful, and the perceived helpfulness of neighbors increased for white Californians between 2019 and 2023.

Safety and support may engender trust, and a large majority of adults in California do trust neighbors, including in each region. Levels of trust are slightly lower in the San Joaquin Valley and Los Angeles County. Among young adults ages 18 to 29 in San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles County and other Southern California counties, trust in neighbors was lower than older adults in those regions (though over half of young adults in those regions agreed that neighbors can be trusted). In most regions, neighborhood trust among non-Latino whites is higher than the state average and among Latino communities it is lower than the state average.



Livermore, CA

Photo: Deane Bayas on Pexels



Photo: Alex Meza on Unsplash

Los Angeles, CA

LOCAL PROFILE

Civic Health in Los Angeles County, CA

Civic participation and opportunity in Los Angeles County have a long road ahead. The nation's largest county scores low across multiple measures of civic health and falls beneath the national average on several participation indicators.

The Civic Information Index, which combines 21 publicly available county-level datasets into a single measure, gives Los Angeles County a score of 41 out of 100—better than only about two in five counties nationally. In L.A. County, the two civic categories in the index fall below the midline: News and Information (15), Civic Participation (37). A cluster of interlocking factors drags the score down—voter turnout, few library visits per capita, and sparse volunteering and organizational membership.

The county's civic opportunity infrastructure tells a similar story. The MapAgora Dashboard, which examines civic opportunities across the country, rates Los Angeles County at three out of five. Of the roughly 36,250 nonprofits in the county, about 12,000, or a third, offer civic opportunities to residents, and 6% fall into the "take action" category that provides government or political engagement. The county's civic opportunity score ranks 31st of California's 58 counties, and 1,563rd out of 3,234 nationally.

Given this landscape, relatively low participation numbers follow. Formal volunteering sits well below the national average—21.8% against 28.3% nationally—though residents who do volunteer, do so frequently at rates similar to the country as a whole, with about 17% volunteering more than once a week. Self-reported turnout in local elections runs below the national figure (46.0% versus 53.2%), as does organizational membership (18.8% versus 24.9%). And while Angelenos socialize with family and friends at rates close to the national norm, they are markedly less likely to take action alongside their neighbors—a gap made starker by the fact that, while the rest of the country has rebounded from its pandemic low, Los Angeles has barely moved, inching from 12.5% in 2021 to just 12.9% in 2023.

BRIGHT SPOT

Young people in L.A. have been working to shift these numbers. For several years, teens in Culver City have been advocating to lower the voting age in city and school district elections.[23] This is something three municipalities in the state have already done.[24] In 2026, voters in Culver City voted on this question, which is on the ballot as Measure YV.[25]

Data suggests that social disconnection may carry a cost: about 41% of residents report experiencing loneliness, and 31% say they lack social and emotional support. The number of Los Angeles County residents lacking social and emotional support is nearly triple that of state-wide and national rates, 10.9% and 9% respectively.[22]



Photo: RDNE Stock project on Pexels

Information about what's happening in a community, in a state, and at the national level has implications for the lives of Californians.

Access to information about issues, opportunities to discuss and process information, and awareness of when community members can have a voice in decision-making are critical to a thriving community. While levels of neighboring activities at the state level have been relatively flat across the six years analyzed in this report, when it comes to indicators of information and discussion, there are rare, and in some cases, dramatic decreases that have occurred.

TAKEAWAYS

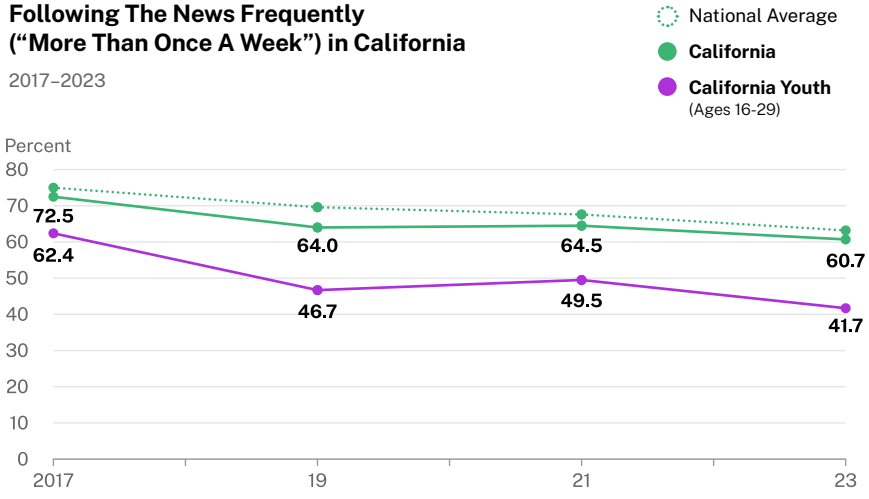
Civic information and discussion are the greatest areas of concern for California's civic participation. Almost all Californians talk with friends and family (including those 16 to 29 years old) over the course of a year, but fewer are discussing political, societal, or local issues with them. In 2023, six in ten Californians reported reading, watching, or listening to "news or information about political, societal, or local issues" more than once a week over the previous 12 months, with another 18% consuming news less often, and 21% saying they didn't at all.

TRENDS

State trends among the four information and connection indicators have roughly mirrored national trends over the better part of the last decade. Young adults ages 16 to 29 show similar trendlines in California as they do nationally. However, the largest shift in any indicator analyzed here, is the drop seen in following the news frequently (more than once a week) which sank 12 points between 2017 and 2023. This puts California's trendline consistently just below the national average. Notably, the decline was 21 points when looking only at young adults.

Following The News Frequently ("More Than Once A Week") in California

2017–2023



Data Source: 2017-2023 Census CPS CEV Survey

Information & Connection in California, 2023 All ages, Ages 16-29, National				
ENGAGING WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ISSUES At least once in the prior 12 months	**CALIFORNIA**	**NATIONAL**	**CALIFORNIA** Ages 16-29	**NATIONAL** Ages 16-29
Talking with friends and family	96.2%	96.9%	94.6%	96.5%
Discussing issues with friends and family	65.4%	67.3%	61.7%	62.5%
ENGAGING WITH INFORMATION At least once in the prior 12 months	**CALIFORNIA**	**NATIONAL**	**CALIFORNIA** Ages 16-29	**NATIONAL** Ages 16-29
Posting views online	19.0%	17.3%	22.6%	20.5%
Following news	78.6%	81.3%	68.8%	72.1%
Following news more than once a week	60.7%	63.2%	41.7%	44.2%



San Juan Capistrano, CA

Photo: Small Group Network on Unsplash

A CLOSER LOOK

Since 2017, discussion of issues with friends and family fell three points statewide, with data suggesting a steeper drop among Black Californians (as much as nine points at the highest end of the margin of error). Asian communities in the state were the most likely to talk with family and friends (86%) multiple times per week, but were eight points less likely than the state overall to discuss issues with them at the same cadence.

Discussing issues with friends and family is a civic behavior that the data show has been stratified by education and income for many years — generally, the higher a person's income or education, the more discussion they report engaging in. Since 2021, discussing issues with friends and family a few times a week rose among those with a high school diploma and those earning $35,000–50,000, though these groups still trailed higher-income brackets.

A closer look at California's trendlines on following news frequently (more than once a week) suggests a dip of around 18 points among Latinos between 2017 and 2023. Among young adults, a sharp 21-point decrease appears to be driven by fewer people paying attention to news or information on a daily basis, which went from 35% in 2017 to 17% in 2023. These are major areas requiring additional, more precise and targeted surveys and research, especially by region of the state.

The desire to spread awareness about an issue is one motivation for sharing information or opinions online. Californians were more likely than other states to post online about their views on issues at least once in the last year, coming in at #12 among states. But as in most states, the rate is generally low (19%). In 2017 Black Californians were more likely to post online about their views, but that rate was cut by nearly one-third by 2023. And while most indicators are stratified by education and income, posting views online is one where rates across those groups are similar.



Photo: Candelario Benítez on Pexels

Julian, CA

CIVIC ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

When it comes to news and civic information, exposure and discussion of that information can differ based on resources in a community, and this may have a connection to the rates above. The Listening Post Collective, as a part of a larger initiative, gathered publicly available data about the news and information environment in each county in the United States. They created a news and information score for each county based on these data. Elements of these scores do not only include the number of news outlets, but other keys to civic information such as local journalists per capita, households with broadband, library visits per capita, and civic-oriented Facebook pages.

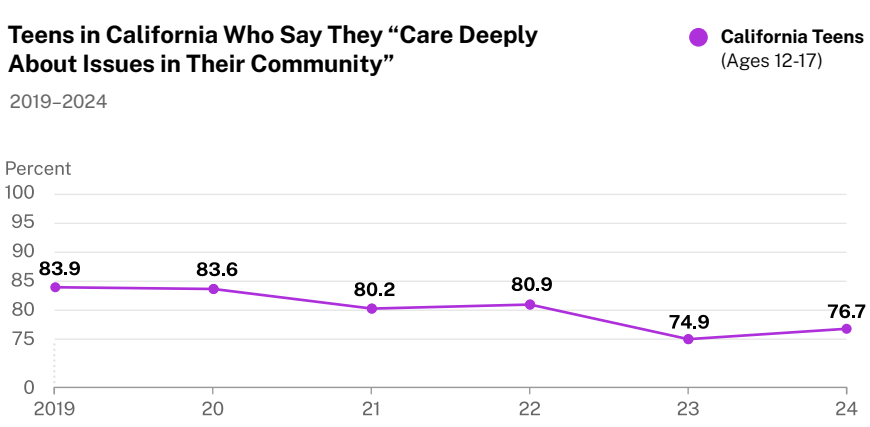
California's counties score everywhere from zero (fewest resources) to 100 (many resources).[26] Counties in the single digits include Sutter, Fresno, and Kings Counties; and the state's highest rates can be found in San Luis Obispo, Marin, Nevada, and Alpine Counties. Libraries are one place people can access civic information, but library visits per capita differ greatly among these counties, from well under the state average of 21,000 visits per capita in the former counties to two or more times the state average in some of the latter counties. Similar dynamics hold in a digital environment, in this case the number of Facebook pages about the public interest per capita. Most of the lowest rated counties have half or a quarter of the state average of 200 pages per capita, but the higher rated counties have 25% to 50% more.

> “Discussion can result in important civic skill-building, like learning how to disagree, and also lead to people learning about possible actions they can take.

Low rates of civic discussion, along with decreases in exposure to civic information at the state level could be affecting teens in the state. Discussion can result in important civic skill-building, like learning how to disagree, and also lead to people learning about possible actions they can take. These dynamics can contribute to the visibility of community role models for civic behaviors, teens picking up civic information, and being a part of discussions. In fact, in 2024, 77% of Californians ages 12 to 17 reported caring deeply about issues in their community or society and two-thirds reported feeling connected to others making a difference. This rate was even higher among Asian teens. These are strengths to build on to combat declines in other areas.

Teens in California Who Say They “Care Deeply About Issues in Their Community”

2019–2024



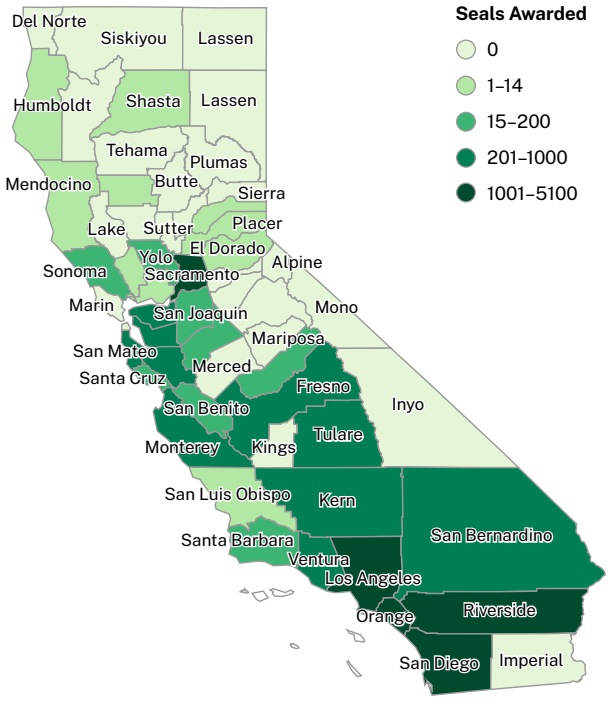
Data Source: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research CHIS 2017-2024 Data Set

> Civics and social studies classrooms can be places where teens are exposed to discussion skills and civic information."

Civics and social studies classrooms can be places where teens are exposed to discussion skills and civic information. In California, there is a requirement for high schoolers to take one semester of U.S. government and civics.[27] In 2021, the implementation of a "civic seal" program for high school graduates institutionalized California's commitment to recognizing civic learning. The seal is given to graduating public school students who "demonstrate excellence in civics education and participation, and an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government."[28] Early adopters of the civic seal program were documented by the LEADE project, a collaboration between the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of California, Riverside. That review shows examples of school districts in varied contexts integrating the seal not as a separate program, but in-line with existing educational emphases like social-emotional learning or career technology education. Other examples in the review are district-wide civic learning plans that implement the civic seal program.[29] The state also will be highlighting the seal as a 'readiness' indicator on the state education dashboard.

California State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) County Participation Map

2024–2025



Data Source: Expanding Access: CA State Seal of Civic Engagement report

While incidents of California students receiving the civic seal have increased since implementation in 2021, further analysis shows that not all of the state's teens have access to take advantage of the opportunity. Research shows that only 29% of school districts awarded these civic seals, which means 385 school districts in the state did not award civic seals.[30] Additionally, these researchers found less representation among schools awarding civic seals of non-traditional schools such as specialized support schools.[30] The newly passed Seal of Climate Literacy provides another opportunity to embed civic learning into curricula across school types and integrate with career and technical education so a wider range of students in the state have access.[31]

LOCAL PROFILE

California Civic Media Fund

The state of California has recently taken action to support local civic information provision. The state initiated a public-private partnership called the California Civic Media Fund, to support, "organizations doing original, fact-based journalism, the program aims to close information gaps, strengthen communities, and ensure California's press reflects the people it serves".[32] Additionally, the state legislature passed a bill focused on supporting the retention of journalists at local news outlets largely through tax credits.[33] The implementation of such efforts may be telling on whether this addresses the above opportunities and supports more Californians to engage in civic life.

Joining organizations, groups, or associations online and offline is a common way to participate in a community.

Whether it is a local group focused on a neighborhood or a particular issue, or a hobby, or a particular identity, joining and volunteering can have many benefits individually and for a community, as mentioned in Section 2. People can find purpose and meaning in connections to organizations, it can make us feel a part of something larger, and connect us to our communities. Data show that many Californians appreciate these formal opportunities to participate or contribute to a group.



San Diego, CA

Photo: Steve Jewett on Unsplash

TAKEAWAYS

As in the nation as a whole, the rate of Californians volunteering with an organization has rebounded from a drop during the pandemic. But Californians' frequency of volunteering did not change across those years. The rate of those volunteering more than once a week (22%) is high compared to other states putting California's rank at #13 on this measure. On the other three measures: overall likelihood to volunteer, belonging to groups, and charitable giving, the state sits well below national averages and ranks near the bottom of the nation in comparison to other states (Numbers 43, 42, and 45 respectively).

TRENDS

Across the joining indicators, California largely tracks national trendlines. Three of the four measures–organizational membership, volunteering frequency, and formal volunteering (which rebounded after the pandemic)—have held relatively stable, moving no more than two or three points since 2017. Charitable giving is the exception: it fell from 47% to 42% over that period. But there are bright spots. In 2023, 16-to-29 year olds were just as likely as those 65 and up to volunteer, closing a gap since 2017. And Californians 65 and over who volunteer more than once a week reached 34%, just surpassing their prepandemic high.

Several joining indicators are lower among mid-to low-income communities and organizational membership has remained widely stratified by education and income.

> "In 2023, 16-to-29 year olds were just as likely as those 65 and up to volunteer, closing a gap since 2017."

Joining in California, 2023 All ages, Ages 16-29, National				
VOLUNTEERING AND GIVING At least once in the prior 12 months	**CALIFORNIA**	**NATIONAL**	**CALIFORNIA** Ages 16-29	**NATIONAL** Ages 16-29
Formal volunteering	24.1%	28.3%	21.2%	24.3%
Volunteer at least once a month	*67.8%*	*67.6%*	*	*55.6%*
Volunteer more than once a month	*48.2%*	*45.9%*	*	*33.0%*
Volunteer more than once a week	*21.8%*	*18.8%*	*	*15.3%*
Organizational membership	21.1%	24.9%	15.0%	17.6%
Charitable giving	42.0%	48.5%	22.6%	27.4%

* Sample sizes for these items are smaller, making estimates more challenging. Closer study is warranted to confirm estimates.



Riverside, CA

Photo: Elissa Garcia on Unsplash

A CLOSER LOOK

Organizational membership among Californians generally stayed consistent between 2017 and 2023 with a slight drop and rebound around 2021 likely due to the pandemic. But a closer look suggests significant and complex shifts among different demographic groups. For example organizational membership appears down among white Californians and up among Asian Californians. While Latino communities are about as likely to volunteer more than once a week as other Californians, their organizational membership rates appear much lower. These are important dynamics to consider, but as with all demographic breakdowns where margins of error may introduce variability, closer study is needed to confirm and contextualize these signals.

Giving money or other resources is another way to join a group. In 2023, about four in ten Californians (42%) reported that they did "give money or possessions with a combined value of more than $25 to a non-political group or organization, such as a charity, school, or religious organization." Across the state there was a drop from 47% in 2017, though some groups saw larger drops, including those most likely to give. For example, giving among those making greater than $75,000 per year dropped ten points since 2017. But giving is also up among Asian Californians and women, who almost doubled the difference in giving compared to men since 2021 (now 46% compared to 38%).

In 2023, about **four in ten** on Californians (42%) reported that they did "give money or possessions with a combined value of **more than $25** to a non-political group or organization, such as a charity, school, or religious organization."

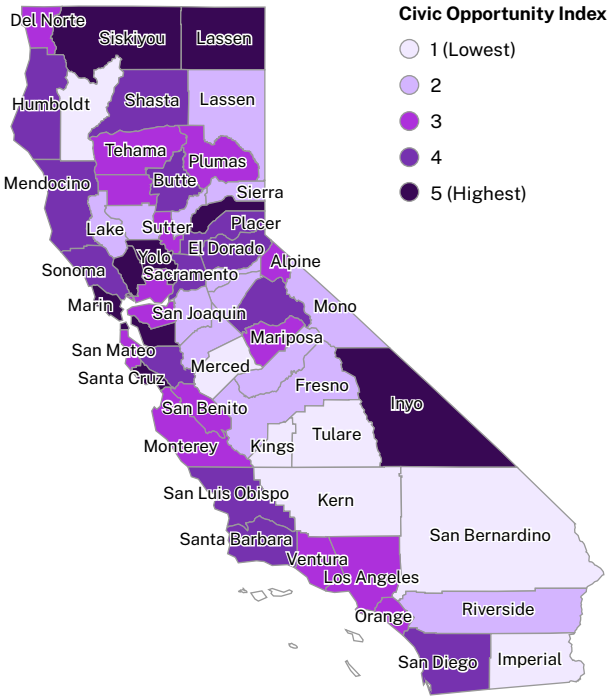
> “Levels of opportunity [to join civic groups], according to this data, vary widely across California.”

CIVIC ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

These more formal ways of participating require clear pathways and opportunities to do so. In an effort to quantify this in the U.S. the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University created a database of nonprofits by county and by the type of opportunities they provide. Included are service organizations, social clubs, professional associations, and many other groups that make civic participation possible. Levels of opportunity, according to this data, vary widely across California. Thirteen of California’s 58 counties, representing around 7 million people, are in the bottom 25% of civic opportunity nationally, while 11 counties are in the top 25% nationally. Each region of the state has counties that rank high and low on this Civic Opportunity Index, but five of the top 11 counties are in the Bay area, while five of the lowest are in the broader San Joaquin Valley, with another four in the far north. For the most part, the counties with higher levels of civic opportunity have median incomes above $79,000 and at least 38% of their population have a Bachelor’s degree, while all counties in the lower percentiles for civic opportunity nationally have a median income ranging from $47,000 to $85,000 and nine of the 13 counties are greater than 50% Latino.[34] But there are some outliers: Modoc, Siskiyou, and Inyo Counties are lower income but score highly on civic opportunity. And Mono County has a low civic opportunity score, but 32% of the population have a Bachelor’s degree or higher.[35, 36]

MapAgora Civic Opportunity Map by County: California

2024–2025



Data Source: SNF Agora Institute MapAgora Dashboard

Capturing civic opportunity is difficult, especially because many opportunities are informal. As a result, many questions remain including whether the available data misses civic activity happening in lower-income and Latino communities, and whether the opportunities that do exist are visible and accessible to a wide range of community members.

Clear opportunity and entry points to civic participation matter at any age, but particularly among young people who are building their civic identities that can influence a lifetime of participation. The earlier a young person is engaged in their community, the more likely they are to remain engaged throughout their life. Organizations and groups are also a way to build skills and a network. The 2024 California Health Interview Survey of teens found about 31% of 12-to-17 year olds in the state reported participating in clubs or organizations outside of school in 2024 and with the exception of 2021, this has largely remained the same. This rate made a significant jump in 2024 in the Far Northern and Sierra region, but dropped considerably in Central Coast Counties. Latino teens and teens on the Central Coast and in the San Joaquin Valley reported participating in clubs outside of school less than other teens. Overlaying this with the civic opportunity map shows lower civic opportunity among counties in the Valley and low percentages of nonprofits “focused on working with and supporting youth.” The Central Coast counties have a broader range of civic opportunities per capita and the percentage of their nonprofit sector that focuses on youth ranges from 3.2% (in San Luis Obispo County) to 14% (in San Benito County).



Photo: Stephanie Hernandez on Unsplash

Riverside, CA

LOCAL PROFILE

Civic Health in Riverside County, CA

Civic participation and opportunity in Riverside County has a long pathway for improvement. The fourth largest county in the state–tenth in the nation–scores low across several civic indices. It also sits beneath the national average on several civic participation indicators.

Part of the challenge is structural: residents simply have fewer civic opportunities and less civic infrastructure to draw on. The Civic Information Index, which combines 21 publicly available county-level datasets into one measure, gives Riverside County a score of 35 out of 100—better than only about a third of counties nationally. A thin local press corps and low rates of organizational membership are among the factors dragging that score down.

The MapAgora Dashboard, which measures civic opportunities across the country, tells a similar story, rating the county at two out of five. Of the roughly 5,300 nonprofits in Riverside County, only about 1,800 offer civic opportunities to residents at all, and just 4% fall into the "take action" category that provides government or political engagement. The rest are largely membership- or events-based which are also important entry-points into community participation. On this measure of civic opportunity, Riverside County ranks 46th of California's 58 counties, and 2,367th out of the 3,234 in America.

Given how relatively little civic infrastructure is available in the county, the participation numbers are not surprising. Formal volunteering sits far below the national average—14.4% in Riverside County against 28.3% nationally—and it has yet to recover from the pandemic, which cut the rate from 17% in 2019 to 9% in 2021. Engagement with government and elections runs low as well: only a third of residents voted in local elections in 2023, compared to half nationally. The gaps extend into everyday civic life, with residents trailing national averages on news consumption, discussing issues with friends and family, talking with neighbors, and taking action with neighbors.

Yet there are genuine bright spots to build on. Among residents who do volunteer, Riverside County outpaces the nation in commitment with roughly a quarter volunteering more than once a week, a sign of real civic dedication among those already engaged. Social connection with family, friends, and neighbors–though low–has trended upwards since the pandemic, while national trends have gone down. Riverside County residents are now back to frequently talking with friends and family (multiple times a week) at the national rate of 83%, recovering from a massive decline in 2019 (62%).

BRIGHT SPOT

The Riverside Unified School District places a priority on civic learning.[37] These efforts include a core focus on student voice, interactions with elected officials, voter pre-registration, civic media creation, and several key partnerships. The annual Civic Showcase can include hundreds of student projects.

Still, nearly 36% of residents of Riverside County experience loneliness, and 28% report lacking social and emotional support. This doesn't compare well–across the state just 10.9% lack social and emotional support, and across the country it's only 9%.[23]

Taken together, these numbers describe a county with major civic infrastructure gaps but also real assets with which to address those challenges—engaged volunteers and a recent, counter-national rebound in everyday social connection. But with more than a third of residents reporting loneliness and civic opportunity ranking among the lowest in the state, the gaps are too consequential to leave unaddressed, and the county's underlying strengths too promising to waste.

Participation in decisions that impact communities is something many people do online and offline.

For most, this looks like voting in local, state and federal elections, but for some it also means contacting public officials about an issue impacting a community or attending a meeting. And for still others it may look like choices about what to buy or not buy. In general, this is an area where Californians' participation has been consistent and steady–rarely spiking or plunging–but maintained at low rates. Since 2017, California has never broken 20% on four of these measures, even as it largely tracks national rates.

TAKEAWAYS

While Californians' commitment to local communities is apparent in the previous sections, Californians are much less likely to participate in the decisions that governments make. There are many possible influences on this: busy work schedules, constrained resources, as well as low trust in federal and state government, and perceptions of access to public officials.



Photo: Stephen Leonardi on Pexels

TRENDS

In this category, California largely mirrors national trends, but there are some variations. Self-reported voting in local elections increased in 2021 more than nationally, but then decreased in 2023 more than nationally. Attending public meetings decreased nationally among those 65 and over, but in California rates continued downwards instead of rebounding after the pandemic like they did nationally. Between 2017 and 2023, no more than one in ten Californians reported attending public meetings and contacting public officials. Additionally, the California Health Interview Survey's adult survey shows 6% to 9% of Californians consistently reported being an active member of a community political group (any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party) in the past 12 months.

Government Engagement, 2023
All ages, Ages 16-29, National

ENGAGING WITH GOVERNMENT At least once in the prior 12 months	CALIFORNIA	NATIONAL	CALIFORNIA Ages 16-29	NATIONAL Ages 16-29
Voting in local elections	49.1%	53.2%	33.5%	33.7%
Attending public meetings	8.0%	9.4%	5.2%	4.6%
Contacting public officials	7.3%	8.7%	4.4%	3.9%
Donating to a political cause	7.7%	7.0%	2.7%	2.2%
Buycotting or boycotting	17.1%	17.5%	13.9%	13.5%



Photo: Israyosoy S. on Pexels

Los Angeles, CA

Californians' rates of self-reported voting in national elections shows a trendline exceeding national rates in nearly every year, according to the Census Voting and Registration Supplement.[38, 39] However, that trend shifted around the 2000 and 2022 elections when California's voter participation rate dipped below the national rate. In presidential elections since 2000, California voted under the national rate, but then recovered in 2024. Midterm elections saw a similar trendline with a dip for several election cycles and then rising in 2022 close to the national rate.

Nationally, self-reports of voting in local elections jumped, but even more so in California where local voting rate estimates jumped

nine points.

Voting in local elections among Californians has tracked the similar, flat trend as has been seen nationally with around half of people voting in local elections. One exception was 2021, during the pandemic. Nationally, self-reports of voting in local elections jumped, but even more so in California where local voting rate estimates jumped nine points. Young adults in the state also reported voting more than young adults nationally during the pandemic, however, both groups were back under the national rate by 2023.

A CLOSER LOOK

Reported voting in local elections appears consistently stratified over time by age group in California: the older a generation is, the more likely they are to say they vote locally. Among Black Californians, rates of four of these five indicators appear to have gone down since 2019, including a large drop in self-reported voting in local elections (but more detailed study is needed to confirm and contextualize these important demographic signals). College graduates are most likely to contact public officials but since 2017 this rate has dropped five points while other education sub-groups have stayed flat. The percentage of those ages 16 to 29 attending public meetings remains relatively stagnant in the state, and sits at a rate lower than other age groups.

...while young adult voting rates in 2016 were similar to the national rate, by the 2020 presidential election it has jumped

17 points to 54%,

above the national estimate for that age group.

Among younger voters (ages 18 to 29) in California, voter participation in national elections has seen large shifts in recent years. A study out of Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) focusing on youth voting and civic engagement in America found that while young adult voting rates in 2016 were similar to the national rate, by the 2020 presidential election it had jumped 17 points to 54%, above the national estimate for that age group.[40] The 2024 election saw young adult voting rates move to 45% — in the middle of the previous two cycles (compared to 47% nationally).[41] Voting generally decreases among all age groups during midterms, including youth, yet the 2018 midterm election saw a massive increase in youth voter participation across the country and California saw 30% youth voting. But by the 2022 election, only 21.5% of young adults said they voted.[40] During a year when many youth voted in the midterm in response to ongoing gun violence (including in schools), this represents an example of issues connecting youth to the decision-making process and an opportunity to learn more about youth-driven engagement.[42, 43]

In the 2024 election, there was a

20 point difference

between the voter participation of those 18 to 24 years old and those 65 and older.

While voter participation among Californians generally mirrors the nation, a closer examination shows concerning differences among regions and demographics of people living in the state. In 2024, voter registration (72.9%) and voter participation (64.7%) mirrored the nation overall.[44] Differences by race and ethnicity mirrored national trends as well, though with slightly smaller differences. White Californians were more likely to be registered to vote and cast a ballot than the state overall, Black Californians participated around the state average, while Asian and Latino Californians were below the state average.[45] In 2024, voting rates saw age stratification among Californians, too. The older the age group, the more likely people were to cast ballots. In the 2024 election, there was a 20 point difference between the voter participation of those 18 to 24 years old and those 65 and older, which puts California in a group of 11 states with a difference of 20 points or less.[44]

Previous research and data show regional differences in civic participation can exist.[46] This can especially be the case with voting as elections are implemented at the county level creating discrepancies in rules and experiences. The California Secretary of State's office allows for a more detailed understanding of county-level estimates of voter participation in the 2024 election. According to California Secretary of State reporting, county rates of voting in 2024 range from 48% to 79%.[47]

> Previous research and data show regional differences in civic participation can exist.



Pasadena, CA

Photo: RDNE Stock project on Pexels



Photo: Jacob Padilla on Unsplash

Visalia, CA

CIVIC ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

Research has investigated ways that our perceptions of our community and our leaders may influence our likelihood to participate. For example, looking again at the CHIS adult survey, when asked whether they could contact a local official in their community, 54% of Californians said they "probably or definitely" could in 2019, but that number is down to 44% in 2024. Those in the Far Northern and Sierra areas, and the Central Coast counties are more confident they could take these actions, while those in Los Angeles County and in the San Joaquin Valley are less so. Among young adults 18 to 29 years old in the state, 32% say they "probably or definitely" could contact a public official, down from 42% in 2019. This mirrors the 10 point drop among all Californians during that time period. All regions of the state saw a drop on this indicator, except for the Central Coast region, which had the highest rate alongside the Far Northern and Sierra region.

> "Trust is a factor that impacts our civic perceptions as well as our civic participation."

Trust is a factor that impacts our civic perceptions as well as our civic participation. In 2024, only 36% of Californians said they have 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of trust in the federal government in Washington when it comes to handling the nation's problems. Californians' trust in their state government solving problems in the state was not dramatically higher: 45% reported they trust "the government of the state where [they] live when it comes to handling the state's problems".[48]

Additionally, sometimes life gets in the way or people don't feel they have enough information. When asked the main reason why they did not vote in the California Health Interview Survey, episodic voters in the state were most likely to say that they were too busy or forgot (28%), that they don't like or care about politics (25%), or that they didn't know enough about candidates or issues (19%). Those in the San Joaquin Valley were less likely than residents in other counties to say they did not vote because they didn't know enough, and were more likely to say they don't like or care about politics. The possible relationship between these two dynamics is one to look into more.[2]

Younger voters were more likely than Californians overall to say that they were too busy or forgot to vote. Data analysis by CIRCLE shows that rates of voting among those 18 to 19 years old trails that of their age group as a whole (Medina & Hilton, 2025). One way some states have tried to mitigate this difference is through optional preregistration policies and high school voter registration initiatives. California has long had a policy that allows 16-and 17-year-olds to "pre-register" to vote (including online). As the Secretary of State website says, "California youth who pre-register to vote will have their registration become active once they turn 18 years old."[49] The state also encourages participation through a high school voter registration week, competitions among colleges, and other initiatives.[50] In addition, some municipalities in California have lowered the voting age to 16 in local elections to give youth a voice in their community.[24]

In 2025, the Civics Center found that **only 12%** of 16- and 17-year olds are preregistered to vote in the state.

Despite these efforts, in 2025, the Civics Center found that only 12% of 16-and 17-year olds are preregistered to vote in the state. Among the most populous counties in the state, the highest rate of pre-registration, they find, is 16%. This suggests areas for improvement in implementation and communication with young people.[51]


Photo: Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

Avila Beach, CA

Young People's Engagement in California: Areas for Further Study

Across the state of California, we see communities with varied civic strengths and challenges when it comes to teen and young adult participation. We hope this report can help to identify the opportunities to leverage relative strengths for addressing challenges alongside young people.

In addition, the statewide data raise some specific opportunities for future investigation with youth:

Why is civic discussion with those close to us decreasing?

What happens in a household and among our friend-circles sends powerful messages about what's important. Young people discuss issues with family and friends at the same rate as all Californians. But rates of discussing issues with friends and family more than once a week among young adults was 26.5% in 2023, down 5 points since 2017, and less than California overall. Is this a result of political polarization, technology, decreasing friend circles, or other dynamics? What might parents, guardians, school and other community leaders need to encourage and be more supportive of conversations about community and societal issues?

How can civic learning initiatives in California intervene early in the civic stratification of communities?

Civic discussion is one area where participation is largely stratified by income and education, as are other forms of civic participation, including, organizational membership, and voting. Since civic habits start early, how can statewide initiatives—like Community Schools, the Civic Seal, and Seal for Climate Literacy—help to address these differences? What shifts can ensure that teens and young adults from low- to mid-income households have civic role models and opportunities to learn about ways to participate? What can shift in Kindergarten through 12 schooling and outside of it?

What can we learn from higher levels of "buycotting" and boycotting than participation in governing?

While teen attitudes about making a difference were high, young adults showed low levels of government engagement, but doubled their rate of buy- and boycotting.

How might we provide more inclusive invitations beyond voting and formal volunteering?

Voting and formal volunteering are higher among youth than other ways of participating such as organizational membership, collaborating with neighbors, and attending public meetings. This raises a question about whether there are truly welcoming invitations for young people to these other types of participation and why that is the case. Nonprofits supporting youth do not exist in all California counties and Latino teens report less group/club participation outside of school. As a result, it's a reasonable question how broader groups seek to include young people. How can teens and young adults be exposed to a wider range of entry points to engagement? What support might older adult leaders need to facilitate intergenerational participation?

What else can we learn about the civic information ecosystems in California that teens and young adults experience across the state?

Less than half of young adults in California reported following the news more than once a week in 2023 (41.7%, 19 points less than the state overall). What can civic information providers learn from young people and the civic cultures they create?

Addressing these areas above, and specific local influences, can go a long way towards ensuring civic opportunities for a wider diversity of teens and young adults in California, add critical perspectives from more community members now, and ensure a more robust civic life in the future.

FINDINGS CONCLUSION

These findings tell a story about where California's civic life is strong and where it may need buttressing. The foundation of participation is relational and local: Californians know, trust, and help their neighbors, and they do so at rates that have held steady even as the pandemic may have tested them.

But that strength does not reliably carry into the more formal participation arenas where residents can shape the decisions that govern their lives. Across the four categories of participation there is a pattern—warmth at the neighborly level (Neighboring), narrowing as the demand grows either in terms of time or dollars (Joining), and thinnest of all in the civic acts that most directly touch governance (Government Engagement).

Two threads give these findings some urgency. The first is that California's gaps are not evenly felt—they diverge along lines of region, income, education, and age. The second is that young people, so often assumed to be disengaged, emerge here as an encouraging bright spot: they keep pace with older adults on most measures and, during the pandemic, stepped up to help their neighbors at rates sometimes exceeding their peers nationally.

The picture that results is of a state with deep civic reserves that can be converted into participation, and a rising generation whose evident willingness to contribute is a signal of what California's civic future could become, if supported properly.

Section 4: Recommendations

INTRODUCTION TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Closing gaps and creating more opportunity by region, income, age, and other demographics, is the main theme of California's civic health roadmap.



Santa Monica, CA

Photo: Park Ingyeom on Unsplash

In many cases, California already has promising policies in place, and these may be working to hold many of the state's civic health indicators steady. But to pull ahead and serve as a national leader will require enhancing commitments the state has already made.

Given California's regional diversity and variation across language, geography, income, and much else, seeking a one-size-fits-all solution to improving civic life in the state will hit a wall. Effective approaches must have customization and flexibility built in. The recommendations in this section are therefore framed less as fixed programs than as adaptable approaches, each grounded in efforts already showing promise in the state.

One of the key ways to do so will be to ensure promising practices and programs are reaching the areas and groups that need them most. Because these data show that California's overall engagement has held so steady over the years, the question of who participates, and where, is where attention is most needed. For example, civic-opportunity data from the SNF Agora Institute track almost exactly to income and education: top-opportunity counties cluster in the Bay Area, where median incomes exceed $80K and bachelor's attainment tops 35%, while the lowest-civic-opportunity counties cluster in the San Joaquin Valley and the far north. Economic stress, language and transportation barriers, along with time constraints, compound to make participation harder in exactly the places and groups already furthest from it.

The two sets of recommendations that follow approach this goal in different ways. Recommendation 1 builds on the places where Californians already connect — their neighborhoods, while Recommendation 2 turns to the young people whose civic identities are still taking shape. Both build on investments the state is already making to deepen their impact and widen opportunities where they are unevenly distributed. Because the surest way to raise the state's overall civic health is to engage the regions and the groups where gaps persist.


Photo: Olena Kholina on Unsplash

San Francisco, CA

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Work hyper-locally to convert neighborly connection into fuller civic participation

Findings from the data in this report show a real strength. Since 2013 nearly 80% of Californians have found neighbors helpful and trustworthy, at least 85% feel safe in their neighborhoods all or most of the time, half do favors for their neighbors, including sizable shares of the youth population. But that neighborly connection does not always translate into the formal participation through which residents' perspectives shape governance. For example, much smaller numbers of Californians say they attend public meetings or contact officials. And confidence that one *could* contact an official fell 10 points from around 54% to 44% between 2019 and 2024.

Local and hyper-local investment in things like third spaces, gathering places, trusted messengers, and neighborhood-level programming offers a pathway for bridging the gap between neighborhood interaction and formal participation suited to California's variation. Such an approach would allow for a roadmap to community-tailored responses rather than a one-size-fits all statewide template. These types of local investments also build individual skills, capacities and experience (such as those gained in groups doing community organizing and leadership development) as well as what researchers call "community attachment:" the trust and pride in local identity that make people more likely to stay, participate, and invest in where they live.

These dynamics are especially important when considering California's young populations and the future of the state. Young people, like all of us, take cues from their environments and family, neighbors, and community models of positive civic participation and experiences shape their perspectives and behaviors.[52, 53, 54] When children grow up engaging with neighbors and communities — such as through organizing, service, and other groups — they are more likely to participate across the lifespan.[55, 56]

California's civic strengths and its gaps both point toward the value of connecting generations at a hyper-local level. Older adults hold the relationships, institutional knowledge, and time that sustain neighborhood civic life; young people bring energy and fresh perspective, and as this report's data show, a strong desire to contribute that too often lacks an outlet or the proper support. Bringing them together builds connection across a divide that neither neighborly ties nor formal institutions reliably bridge, and it does double duty: young people who come of age engaging alongside trusted adults are more likely to participate across their lifespans, while older residents stay connected and civically active longer.

To enhance neighborhood participation and bridge it to more formal engagement, California begins from a solid foundation and already has strong models to draw from. These three existing programs should be expanded and emulated for their hyper-local approaches that turn everyday neighborliness into more formal participation.

> "California's civic strengths and its gaps both point toward the value of connecting generations at a hyper-local level."

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE



Santa Cruz, CA

Photo: Clement Proust on Pexels

Recommendation 1.1

Scale resident-led neighborhood civic infrastructure.

Expand the Central Valley Community Foundation's successful neighborhood hub model, in which resident-led, hyper-local nonprofits are resourced specifically to build relationships, belonging, and trust — currently operating in 13 of 26 low-income neighborhoods. Because the hubs are resident-led, they adapt naturally to local context, and the relationships they build lower the friction of the eventual step into formal participation. The state should fund the expansion of this model into additional high-need neighborhoods, prioritizing regions where civic opportunity is thinnest. Libraries, cultural institutions, and philanthropy can support this work, such as through youth-focused opportunities like the ones created by Power California across the broader Central Valley.

Recommendation 1.2

Bridge neighbor-to-neighbor connection to more formal participation.

Continue and build on California Volunteers' Neighbor-to-Neighbor program, which brings together governments, community organizations, and Californians to bridge everyday helping into an ongoing civic habit. It does this through setting cultural norms (as with its Meet 6 Neighbors effort) and through strengthening civic infrastructure. Pairing this with clear next civic steps such as a first public meeting, a local advisory board, or a volunteer leadership role, all at the hyper-local level, turns episodic connection into sustained engagement. The program's existing statewide reach makes it a natural vehicle for embedding pathways into neighborly action already underway. Leaders in the state should continue, and scale up this promising program.

Recommendation 1.3

Build hyper-local youth-led civic-opportunity.

Build the capacity and commitment of local community leaders and municipal staff to integrate a diversity of teen and young-adult voices into local civic life — including real opportunities for young people to inform and co-lead the decisions that affect them. This can be done by resourcing intergenerational models already showing promise. Examples include youth roles on local boards and commissions; mentorship and service programs that pair generations around a shared civic project; and neighborhood institutions like libraries, parks, community centers as gathering places where Californians of all ages meet. Voting, too, provides a key moment for intergenerational engagement. Some studies have found that the voting habits of a family member or older adult influences civic habits and some evidence suggests the influence can go in the other direction as well.[57, 58, 59, 60]

Some important context for these recommendations comes from the California Health Interview Survey. Those data show the state faring relatively well at neighbor-to-neighbor ties, but there remain challenges with connection across difference. This is a concern in a state where economic situations vary greatly. Raj Chetty's research underscores the cost of that dynamic: without connection across economic differences, even neighborhood connection is not associated with economic mobility.[61] The three least economically connected counties in the state are all in the Central Valley. Even within a single city divides persist. Bridging wealthier north Fresno and less-well-off west Fresno, for example, remains a longtime work-in-progress.[62, 63] Closing these gaps calls for intentional cross-class, cross-neighborhood bridging work. Efforts like shared civic projects, mixed-neighborhood councils, and regional volunteering initiatives can connect Californians in ways that everyday neighborliness may not.



Photo: Zetong Li on Unsplash

Stanford, CA

2

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Implement civic learning into schools and workforce-readiness opportunities

A strong and resilient civic future demands paying attention to California's young people today. They will carry that future forward as the next generation of voters, volunteers, organizers, and local leaders. A state is only as civically healthy as its capacity to pass that role to those who follow, and meeting that responsibility means equipping young people with the tools, experiences, and habits they will need to steward civic life well.

Attending to young people is also the most strategic path to a healthier civic future for the state as a whole. Because participation rates across the state have remained largely flat in recent years, the greatest gains will come from widening engagement among the groups and in the places with the most room to grow. Young people are central to that because they mirror the gaps in the wider population. Stemming those differences among young Californians now, can prevent them from hardening into lasting divides that could depress the state's overall participation levels. This approach benefits young people individually today and California's communities over the long-term.

The highest-leverage strategy for doing this is implementing high-quality, impactful civic learning and doing so in ways that reach most young Californians rather than only those in well-resourced districts. It also means designing for flexibility: given California's enormous regional variation, the initiatives that succeed will be those adaptable enough to let communities meet young people where they are, in the languages they speak and through the people and institutions they already trust.

Here again, California doesn't need to start from scratch. California already has many of the right *policies*, but lacks the *implementation*. Across education and youth service, the state has already made real policy commitments and real investments such as the State Seal of Civic Engagement, a civic-readiness commitment in the Portrait of a Learner, and a major Community Schools initiative, as well as voter preregistration. The task is less about inventing new programs than about prioritizing high-quality, impactful civic learning within the state's overall vision and implementation initiatives, so that these existing tools reach the young people they were designed to serve.

> "The task is less about inventing new programs than about prioritizing high-quality, impactful civic learning within the state's overall vision and implementation initiatives."

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

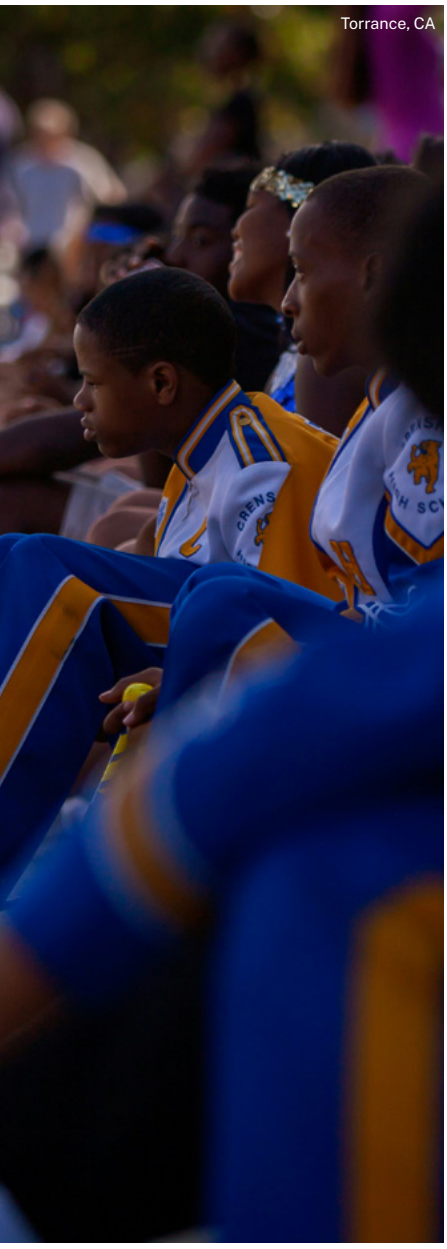

Torrance, CA

Photo: Daniel Gregoire on Unsplash

Recommendation 2.1

Implement high-quality civic education in the state's core education vision, and build the capacity to deliver it.

California has a major, well-funded vehicle for youth civic development already in motion, and civic learning is named as an explicit priority within it. The California Community Schools Partnership Program — established in 2021 and set to expand through 2031 — invests heavily in a "whole child" model in which schools become community hubs, with implementation grants of up to $500,000 annually per school.[64, 65] Civic engagement is integral to this model. The state's Community Schools framework names schools as spaces for civic engagement, identifies local capacity for collaborative problem-solving as one of four core impact areas, and tracks outcomes such as students' sense of agency in their school and community, participation in student-led projects, and growth in civic connectedness.

With the emphasis on civic engagement in place, the opportunity lies in implementation. Schools and districts have little concrete incentive or support to act on the civic elements of the program, so the potential of Community Schools too often goes unrealized. California has already laid the policy foundation. The need is investment in the capacity building such as professional development, dedicated implementation support, and incentives for schools and districts that meaningfully embed civic learning and student voice. Making these civic outcomes intentional and visible would weave high-quality civic education into California's core educational vision rather than leaving it to compete for attention.

Recommendation 2.2

Expand and strengthen the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

The State Seal of Civic Engagement has a strong track record of growth, but its reach is uneven: only 29% of districts currently award it. Because the seal institutionalizes civic learning, giving students a recognized credential for demonstrated civic knowledge, skills, and participation, extending its reach is one of the most direct ways to close the civic-opportunity gaps described above. The state should broaden the number of districts awarding the seal through targeted incentives, and increase dedicated funding for implementation support at the district level, such as for professional development, with priority for rural areas and under-resourced districts that may lack the capacity to stand it up on their own.

Pairing seal expansion with increased definition of civic-readiness would give districts both the mandate and the model to make the seal a genuine statewide standard rather than a marker of the districts that already had the capacity to offer it.

California's School Dashboard 's Measures of Readiness shares an assessment of the public education system's success in key performance areas. The State Board's decision to include civic readiness in addition to college and career readiness is a meaningful signal. But a signal only becomes a standard once it is defined: the state should specify what civic readiness looks like in practice — the knowledge, skills, and experiences it entails — and connect it directly to competencies, standards and the seal, so districts have a clear, shared target to build toward.


San Francisco, CA

Photo: Kitera Dent on Unsplash

Recommendation 2.3

Scale service opportunity tied to education and workforce pathways.

A state service corps provides paid opportunities for participants to contribute to their community for a set period of time, often including career training and skill development. California currently operates California Service Corps, the largest state service corps in the nation, investing hundreds of millions of dollars a year in offering young people opportunities to serve. These positions are not only beneficial for the residents of the communities but they can be life-changing for the young people who are there to help, offering work-ready skills and networks that can jumpstart careers. In a Pasadena pilot, high school students earn a building-trades certificate through Pasadena City College while rebuilding homes with Habitat for Humanity after the 2025 wildfires.

California could take this successful program further by expanding it and closing gaps in opportunity. That would mean resourcing and scaling toward near-universal participation for high school through college age youth both in and out of school.. Doing so would give young people, especially in under-resourced regions, a route that runs from civic service straight into education or employment. These efforts should establish clear civic outcomes, alongside their workforce-ready outcomes, and design and iterate on their program elements in order to ensure they are achieving both sets.



The Role of Philanthropy

Government policy and resources are needed to enhance civic health at scale in any state, but even more so in a state as large and diverse as California. However, many of the approaches in this roadmap were pioneered—and are still sustained—by philanthropy. Foundations and funders play a pivotal role that public levers often cannot, and California's civic future will depend on them.

Risk capital

Philanthropy can make early investments that governments cannot yet justify: promising emerging models, early-stage pilots, and community-led experiments. Several of the efforts highlighted here—from the Central Valley's neighborhood hubs to the Pasadena service-to-workforce pilot—began with philanthropic backing before demonstrating results worth scaling.

Bridge and sustaining funding

Civic infrastructure rarely fits neatly into annual public budgets. Flexible, patient philanthropic dollars can carry promising programs across gaps in public funding and help support the long time horizons that relationship—and trust-building require.

Knowledge and research

Foundations can fund the data, evaluation, and research that reveal what works and for whom—including some of the civic-opportunity and connectedness data cited throughout this report—helping to build the evidence base that strong public investment can act on.

Realizing this roadmap will take government and philanthropy working in concert: philanthropy to seed, test, innovate, and accelerate progress; government to sustain and scale what proves effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCLUSION

California's civic health recommendations circle around two themes. First, closing gaps and creating civic opportunity across regions, income levels, ages, and other demographics. Because the state's overall engagement has held steady, the most pressing question is who participates and where. The data show civic opportunity tracks closely with income and education, leaving the San Joaquin Valley, rural areas, and lower-income communities furthest from it. Narrowing those gaps is a sure way to raise the state's civic health overall, and it means directing promising practices and programs to the places and groups that need them. It also means utilizing approaches with enough flexibility to meet communities where they are because one-size-fits-all approaches could exacerbate gaps.

Second, these recommendations are grounded in efforts already showing great promise in California. The state often has the right policies in place but lacks the implementation to make them real. To advance civic health in the state, California need not start from scratch. Instead, the road ahead requires prioritizing, resourcing, and implementing commitments already made. If the state can build in the capacity, incentives, and support that turn strong policy foundations into real practice, existing tools will be more likely to reach all young people and communities.

California's civic life resists a single narrative.



Santa Barbara, CA

Photo: Tim Mossholder on Pexels

The same data and information that reveal genuine strengths: deep reserves of neighborly trust, a young generation eager to contribute, communities pioneering new ways to bring people together, also reveal real and widening gaps: between those who feel connected to their communities and those who do not, between the regions and groups with abundant civic opportunity and those without enough, and between the warmth among neighbors and the distance they may keep from their institutions. Civic health in California today is a story of these variations and gaps. Its civic future is a story of whether the state chooses to close them.

Making that choice urgent is the direction of some important trend lines that warn of disconnection from civic life such as eroding civic confidence, fewer people closely following the news that connects them to public life, and young people's evident desire to contribute going unmet by opportunity. California has the rare advantage of acting from a position of strength rather than crisis–many of its civic participation rates are buffered from national declines. That advantage should not be taken for granted and it is precisely the reason to act now.

In many ways, California holds another advantage. Leaders have already taken steps to put in place many initiatives and programs that hold promise. Among those are the neighborhood hubs of the Central Valley, the service corps that turns helping into a career, the schools being built as centers of community life, the young people who show up to lead when someone makes room for them. What these efforts share is a recognition that civic health is not handed down from the top but grown from the ground up — in relationships, in trusted local institutions, and in the simple, repeated experience of people working together across their differences to shape the places they live. The task ahead is less discovery than commitment to properly resource what works, to reach the communities too often left out, and to prioritize civic participation as part of the infrastructure a functioning society depends on.

That commitment matters beyond the state's borders. Containing so much of the nation's diversity and complexity, California has long been a place where the country can catch a glimpse of its future. If California can show that a vast, varied, and sometimes divided population can still build connection and collaboration, and draw its young people into the shared work of self-governance, it will offer more than a healthier civic life for its own residents. It will offer the rest of the country a reason for hope — and a path worth following.

“The task ahead is less discovery than commitment to properly resource what works, to reach the communities too often left out, and to prioritize civic participation as part of the infrastructure a functioning society depends on.”

Appendix

Technical Notes

Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this report are based on the National Conference on Citizenship's analysis of the U.S. Census Current Population Survey data. Any and all errors are NCoC's own. Estimates are from CPS's September Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement from 2017 through 2023 and from the 2024 November Voting and Registration Supplement.

Using a probability-selected sample of about 47,000 households, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the 2023 California CPS sample size used for this report ranges from 1,020 to 4,068 residents from across California. 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 the population of U.S. citizens who are 18 and older (eligible voters). When examining 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 California 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 or district ranked first from the state or district ranked last.

Margin of error estimates are approximate, as the Current Population Survey sampling is highly complex, and accurate estimation of error rates involves parameters that are not publicly available.

Artificial Intelligence Use Disclaimer

Artificial Intelligence tools were used to assist the authors in revising and copy editing this report. The authors take full responsibility for the report's content.

The full Census Bureau technical documentation, including survey items, can be accessed here: https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpssep23.pdf.

AmeriCorps - U.S. Census Bureau Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement Questionnaire

The table below lists the measures, question type, question wording, and response options used in the September 2023 Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey conducted in partnership with AmeriCorps.

RESPONSE OPTIONS (UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE)

(1) Basically every day
(2) A few times a week
(3) A few times a month
(4) Once a month
(5) Less than once a month
(6) Not at all
(DK) Don't Know
(RF) Refused

MEASURE	QUESTION WORDING	RESPONSE OPTIONS
Talking with friends and family	In the past 12 months, how often did you talk to or spend time with friends or family?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Discussing issues with friends and family	In the past 12 months, how often did you discuss political, societal, or local issues with friends or family?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Talking with neighbors	In the past 12 months, how often did you have a conversation or spend time with your neighbors?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Discussing issues with neighbors	In the past 12 months, how often did you discuss political, societal, or local issues with your neighbors?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Informal helping	In the past 12 months, how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other such as house sitting, watching each other's children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Taking action with neighbors	In the past 12 months, did you get together with other people from your neighborhood to do something positive for your neighborhood or the community?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Posting views online	In the past 12 months, how often did you post your views about political, societal, or local issues on the internet or social media?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Learning about issues	In the past 12 months, how often did you read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)

MEASURE	QUESTION WORDING	RESPONSE OPTIONS
Voting in local elections	In the past 12 months, did you vote in the last local elections, such as for mayor or school board?	(1) Yes (2) No (3) Not eligible to vote (DK) (RF)
Attending public meetings	In the past 12 months, did you attend a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Contacting public officials	In the past 12 months, did you contact or visit a public official at any level of government to express your opinion?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Buycotting or Boycotting	In the past 12 months, did you buy or boycott products or services based on the political values or business practices of that company?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Organizational membership	In the past 12 months, did you belong to any groups, organizations, or associations?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Number of organizational memberships	How many groups, organizations, or associations would you say you have belonged to over the past 12 months?	(1) One (2) Two (3) Three (4) Four (5) Five (6) Six (7) Seven or more (DK) (RF)
Formally volunteering through organizations	In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Formally volunteering through organizations	Some people don't think of activities they do infrequently or for children's schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. In the past 12 months, have you done any of these types of activities?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Frequency of formal volunteering	How often did you volunteer?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (DK) (RF)
Total hours formally volunteered	In the past 12 months, approximately how many hours did you volunteer?	____ Hours (DK) (RF)
Virtual volunteering	Thinking about the organization or association with which you most actively volunteer, which best describes the proportion of your in-person volunteering to online volunteering?	(1) All volunteering is in person (2) Volunteering is more in-person than online (3) Volunteering is evenly split between in-person and online (4) Volunteering is more online than in-person (5) All volunteering is online (DK) (RF)
Donating to a political cause	In the past 12 months, did you give money or possessions with a combined value of more than $25 to a political organization, party, or campaign?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Charitable giving	In the past 12 months, did you give money or possessions with a combined value of more than $25 to a non-political group or organization, such as a charity, school, or religious organization?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)
Workplace Pride	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. … I am proud to be working for my employer.	(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Disagree (4) Strongly disagree
Believe in contribution to the community through work	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. … My workplace contributes to the community.	(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Disagree (4) Strongly disagree
Main satisfaction comes from work	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. … My main satisfaction in life comes from work.	(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Disagree (4) Strongly disagree
Believe workplace contributes to community	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. … I contribute to the community through my work.	(1) Strongly agree (2) Agree (3) Disagree (4) Strongly disagree
Employer Promotes Volunteering	In the past 12 months, has your workplace or employer asked or encouraged employees to volunteer or contribute to a specific cause, for example by participating in an employer-sponsored volunteering day, providing pro bono services, or donating to a charity?	(1) Yes (2) No (DK) (RF)

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Civic Health Partners

State and Local Partnerships

The National Conference on Citizenship (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 U.S. 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.

STATES

Alabama
University of Alabama
David Mathews Center for Civic Life
Auburn University

Arizona
Center for the Future of Arizona

Arkansas
University of Arkansas
Clinton School of Public Service
Winthrop Rockefeller Institute
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
School of Public Affairs

California
California Forward
Center for Civic Education
Center for Individual and Institutional Renewal
Davenport Institute

Colorado
Metropolitan State University of Denver
The Civic Canopy
Denver Metro Chamber Leadership
Campus Compact of Mountain West
History Colorado
Institute on Common Good

Connecticut
Everyday Democracy

District of Columbia
ServeDC

Florida
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
Bob Graham Center for Public Service
Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government

Georgia
Georgia Family Connection Partnership
Georgia Municipal Association

Illinois
McCormick Foundation

Indiana
Ball State University
Eli Lilly and Company
Indiana Bar Foundation
Indiana University Center on
Representative Government
The Indiana Citizen
Indiana Civics Coalition
Indiana University Northwest

Kansas
Kansas Health Foundation

Kentucky
Commonwealth of Kentucky,
Secretary of State's Office
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility,
Western Kentucky University
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education
McConnell Center, University of Louisville

Maryland
Mannakee Circle Group
Center for Civic Education
Common Cause-Maryland
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

Michigan
Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan Campus Compact
Volunteer Centers of Michigan
Council of Michigan Foundations
Center for Study of Citizenship at
Wayne State University

Minnesota
Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Missouri
Missouri State University
Park University
Saint Louis University
University of Missouri Kansas City
University of Missouri Saint Louis
Washington University

Nebraska
Civic Nebraska
Nebraska Community Foundation
Nebraska Extension
The Center for Public Affairs Research
at the University of Omaha Nebraska

New Hampshire
Carsey Institute
Campus Compact of New Hampshire
University System of New Hampshire
New Hampshire College & University Council

New York
Siena College Research Institute
New York State Commission on
National and Community Service

North Carolina
Institute for Emerging Issues

Ohio
Miami University Hamilton Center
for Civic Engagement

Oklahoma
University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania
Center for Democratic Deliberation
National Constitution Center

Rhode Island
Rhode Island Council for the Humanities

South Carolina
University of South Carolina Upstate

Texas
The University of Texas at Austin
The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life
RGK Center for Philanthropy & Community Service

Vermont
Vermont's Secretary of State
Vermont Humanities
The Center for Rural Studies
SerVermont
Up for Learning

Virginia
Center for the Constitution at
James Madison's Montpelier
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

ISSUE SPECIFIC

Latinos Civic Health Index
Carnegie Corporation

Veterans Civic Health Index
We The Veterans

Youth Civic Health
iCivics
CIRCLE

Millennials Civic Health Index
Mobilize.org
Harvard Institute of Politics
CIRCLE

Economic Health
Knight Foundation
Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS)
CIRCLE

CITIES

Atlanta
Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta

Greater Austin
The University of Texas at Austin
RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service
Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life
Leadership Austin
Austin Community Foundation
KLRU-TV, Austin PBS
KUT News

Chicago
McCormick Foundation
Kansas City & Saint Louis
Missouri State University
Park University
Washington University

Miami
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Miami Foundation

Pittsburgh
University of Pittsburgh
Carnegie Mellon University

Seattle
Seattle City Club
Twin Cities
Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Citizens League
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

CIVIC HEALTH ADVISORY GROUP

The National Conference on Citizenship extends its deepest gratitude to the Civic Health Advisory Group who contributed their invaluable expertise and support over the years.

In Memoriam

We mourn the passing of two Civic Health Index advisors, both of whom were champions of civic engagement, helping to advance the field over their decades of service. They have also been pillars of the NCoC community and will be deeply missed.

Lattie F. Coor Jr.
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