



1 What is Civic Health?

Overview

This first section of the guide includes definitions and descriptions of civic health.

Defining Civic Health

In the *2020 NH Civic Health Index*, we define civic health as: “the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in activities that strengthen wellbeing, enhance interconnections, build trust, help each other, talk about public issues and challenges, volunteer in government and non-profit organizations, stay informed about their communities, and participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges.”

We have grouped civic health measures into three categories:

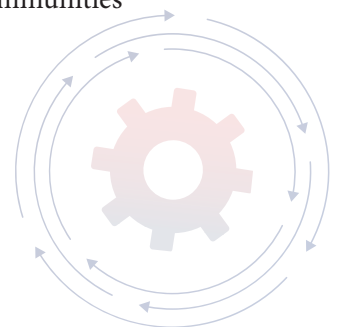
- ▶ Civic awareness and engagement
- ▶ Connecting in community
- ▶ Volunteering and giving

Below we elaborate on what measures make up each civic health category.

Civic Awareness and Engagement

Civic awareness and engagement refers to how people feel, learn about, and take actions related to political, societal, or local issues. Measures of civic awareness and engagement include:

- ▶ Receiving civics education
- ▶ Voting, including presidential, midterm, and local elections
- ▶ Engaging with public officials
- ▶ Attending public meetings
- ▶ Keeping up with the news
- ▶ Posting about the news online
- ▶ Trusting government and local media
- ▶ The degree to which people feel they matter and can make an impact in their communities
- ▶ Identifying obstacles and barriers to becoming engaged
- ▶ Media literacy and looking critically at news sources
- ▶ Transparency and accountability by local government and public institutions



Connecting in Community

Connecting in community includes how people interact and talk with others about important issues facing their community and the nation, and how much they trust and help out neighbors.

- ▶ Connecting with friends and family
- ▶ Connecting with neighbors
- ▶ Connecting with people of a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background
- ▶ Doing favors for neighbors
- ▶ Helping out friends or extended family by providing food, housing, or money
- ▶ Getting together with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community
- ▶ Discussing political, societal, or local issues with friends or family
- ▶ Discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors
- ▶ Trusting the people in your neighborhood

Volunteering and Giving

The category “volunteering and giving” includes how much people are donating their time or money to serve their community or contribute to causes they care about. Measures of volunteering and giving include:

- ▶ Volunteering individually or as a group for an initiative or organization
- ▶ Charitable giving—donations of \$25 or more to non-political groups or organizations, such as a charity, school, or religious organization
- ▶ Political giving—donations of \$25 or more to political organizations, parties, or campaigns
- ▶ Group membership—participation in groups, including civic or service organizations, community groups, religious or spiritual communities, recreational groups, and political or advocacy groups

How to Strengthen Civic Health

Communities can improve their civic health by increasing opportunities to

- ▶ Connect with people different than themselves in ways that build trust and community
- ▶ Build skills to talk about public issues and productively address local challenges
- ▶ Remove barriers to engagement for groups participating less, such as youth or English language learners
- ▶ Access opportunities to volunteer or work with government and non-profit organizations
- ▶ Undergo civic education to learn how to participate and get local voices heard
- ▶ Offer training for people in public service about how to engage with the public
- ▶ Create programs that address disparities or threats in the community. For instance, if a community felt it was divided across politics, it might create a program to bring people on different sides of the political spectrum together to build a community garden or playground.

