



## 2 Getting Started

### Overview

It can feel overwhelming to know where to start with civic health work. There are so many things you could explore, and so many conversations you can have to identify ways to strengthen and sustain your community's civic health. A good first step is to assemble a “working group” of about five people, ideally from different perspectives in the community, to simply chat about why you might want to gather information about local civic health, and how you could use that information.

We suggest this working group represents people from different political perspectives, professional and community roles, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, ages, genders, and other factors to ensure a diverse team. Consider including people in the working group who are “bridge builders,” who regularly connect across groups in your community. That being said, if you're uncertain about who to approach, the Community Mapping exercise included in this section is intended to help you identify other people in your community who might join your group.

The first tool in this section—**HOW TO CREATE A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH STRATEGY**—is intended to help your group think through the big picture of why a closer look at local civic health can be valuable. It includes questions about what you might want to learn, who you should involve in the process, what methods you want to use to collect information, and how you will share the information with the broader community. This strategy document will help you clarify your direction. For instance, you may want to focus on youth engagement specifically or you may want to start with a broad understanding of local civic health. Since plans evolve, we expect this will be a living document you will revisit and update during your civic health work.

The second tool in this section—**COMMUNITY MAPPING AND CIVIC TOUR ACTIVITIES**—includes a community mapping exercise, so your working group can identify all the populations in your community you want to reach. The Civic Tour allows you to assess local community spaces to see how much they discourage or encourage connection and healthy civic life.



### HOW TO CREATE A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH STRATEGY

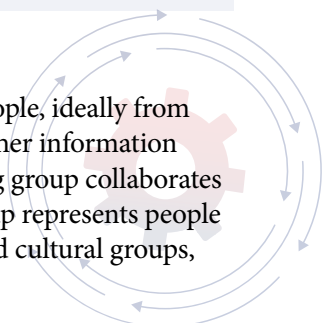
*Goal: To create a strategy for your civic health work that includes why you are doing this work, how you will do it, and how you plan to share the results.<sup>1</sup>*

*Instructions: This document is intended to help your local working group to create a plan of action for collecting civic health, and can be a guiding charter for your work to continually refer back to. Some of the categories below require deeper conversation, and when they do we have marked this with some tools to help you have those conversations.*

### What is a Working Group?

A good first step in your civic health work is to assemble a “working group” of 5 to 10 people, ideally from different perspectives in the community, to simply chat about why you might want to gather information about local civic health, and how you could use that information. We suggest the working group collaborates together to answer the questions in the sections below. We also suggest this working group represents people from different political perspectives, professional and community roles, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, ages, genders, and other factors to ensure a diverse team.

<sup>1</sup> The strategy template is adapted from Modus, a planning, design, and public engagement firm in British Columbia, Canada, <https://www.thinkmodus.ca/>.



## What's the Point?

Why do we want to collect information about civic health? How will learning about our community's civic health be useful? Write a paragraph below summarizing “what the point is” behind embarking on this work.



For help exploring this issue, [check out our informative video on what civic health is.](#)

## What Exactly Do We Want to Learn?

Consider some common goals for local civic health work below. Of these, what align most closely with what you hope to do? If none of these align, create your own learning goal.

- ▶ Do a comparison of how the local community compares with the state of New Hampshire civic health index. For reference, see the tool, [HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY COMPARE TO STATE CIVIC HEALTH TRENDS](#), on page 65.
- ▶ Gather data about the civic experiences of particular populations (e.g. people of color, youth, or low-income people).
- ▶ Gather data about particular aspects of civic health, such as voting, connecting with others, feeling like you matter, barriers to engagement, etc. (For a full list of these indicators, see page 46 or [go to this webpage.](#))
- ▶ Get people in the community talking about civic health and exploring this concept further.

Our learning goal(s) is:



## Who Do You Want to Involve in the Process?

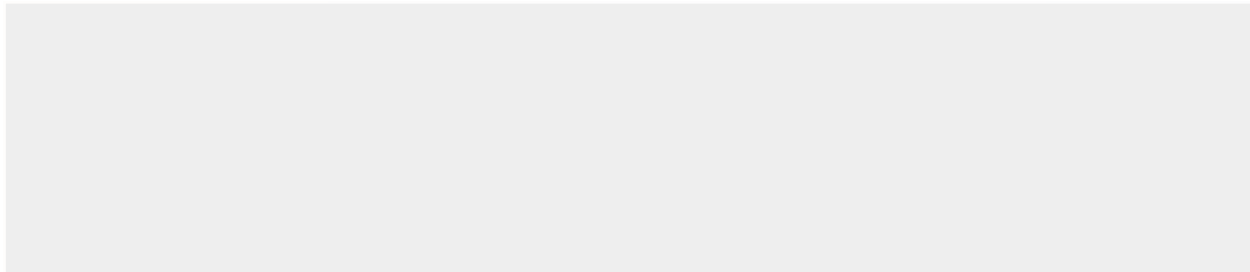
It's important to think through all the populations in your local community that affect or are affected by civic life—which is, generally, all of us! We have prepared a community mapping exercise on page 13 to help you think through who is in your community and who you want to engage in this process.



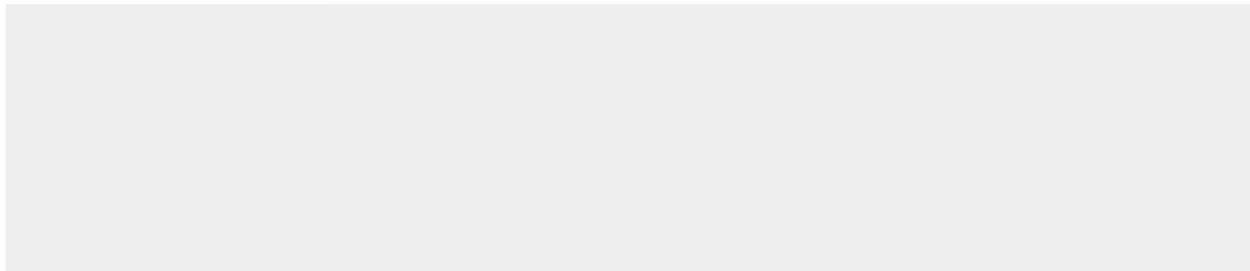
Everyone in your community is affected by civic health. People particularly interested and impacted by civic health might include school, government, and police leaders, New Americans, long-time local residents, youth, and many more populations.

There are two “whos” in civic health work. The first is “who” will be leading the work—a.k.a your working group who is likely leading the charge and reading this document. The second is “who” you want to collect data about and from, and who you want to engage in the process. After completing the stakeholder mapping exercise, please list below your “whos”:

- ▶ Who is the working group that will lead this project? What perspectives and background does each group member represent in the community? Consider role (e.g., town manager or mother of school-age children) as well as background (e.g., 70 year old hispanic conservative male or 25 year old white queer youth). You may decide to add members to your initial working group after conducting this exercise.



- ▶ Who are the communities that you most hope to learn about in this project? Consider roles as well as backgrounds, and list them here:



## What Are Our Civic Health Methods?

We have provided several tools that you could use to collect information and have community conversations about local civic health, which are located in *Section 4: Collecting Information*. Please browse those tools and select one or more of those methods for your civic health strategy. You can also make your own methods if the ones we’ve created aren’t the right match, or if you want to do more.

Consider the list of tools below and identify which ones you would like to use in your project:

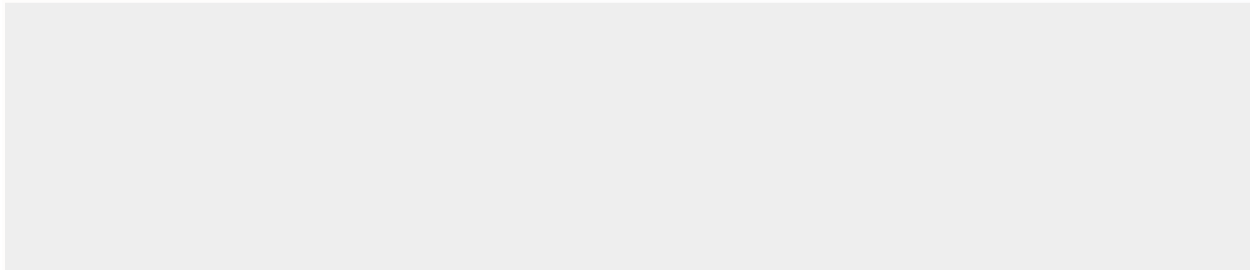
- ▶ Conducting a local survey to gather data, drawing off the [HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY](#) tool on page 37.
- ▶ Hosting a local dialogue using the [HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE](#) tool on page 28.
- ▶ Conducting one-on-one interviews with different community leaders
- ▶ Hosting focus groups with specific populations to learn about their experiences (e.g. youth or refugees or people with disabilities)
- ▶ Gathering data from existing resources
- ▶ Conduct a civic assessment, like those from the National Civic League’s Civic Index or the Healthier Democracies Participatory Governance Index
- ▶ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## What Are the Key Values that We Want to Guide Our Civic Health Work?

The following values will guide how we plan, communicate, and implement our civic health project. Here are some sample values below to get your juices flowing.

- ▶ **Accessibility**, ensuring that multiple people in the community from different backgrounds can participate in the civic health data collection and meaning making.
- ▶ **Transparency** in how civic health data will be collected and used.
- ▶ **Accountability** in transparently reporting back to the community on the process and what we heard.
- ▶ **Equity** in hearing from groups who have not typically been represented in local civic life, potentially due to barriers or systems of discrimination.
- ▶ **Fun** in creating processes that people enjoy and find interesting and relevant.

Our key values are:



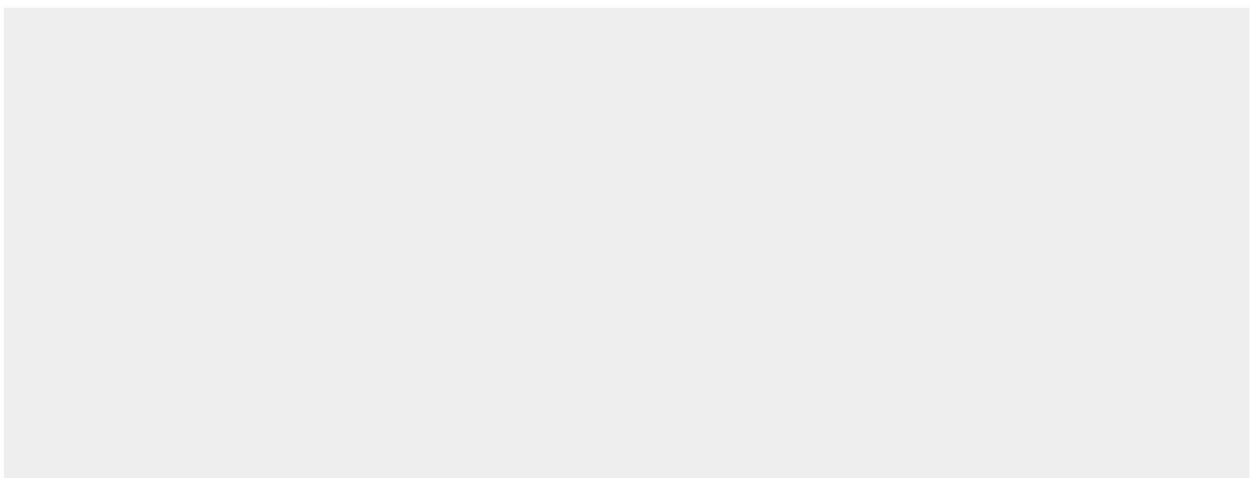
## How Will We Make Sense of the Data?

What are the various streams of data you will have from this project? For instance, survey data could be one stream, whereas notes from a community conversation would be another.

Once you have collected civic health data, how will you make sense of it?

Do you have a team of people who will interpret the data, or will you hire a volunteer or consultant to assist you with data analysis?

How will you ensure that there is no bias in how the data is interpreted?



## How Will We Share Information?

Once information about local civic health is collected and analyzed, how do you plan to share it with the community? For instance, you could:

- ▶ Post the results on your website
- ▶ Host a forum to share the results with the community
- ▶ Host a community dialogue to digest the results in small groups
- ▶ Create a report that you share with the community
- ▶ Work with local journalists to share information with the community



## How Do We Plan to Use Civic Health Information?

It's also important to consider how you plan to use the civic health information, and to share this goal throughout the project. Here are some examples of how you could use civic health information:

- ▶ Inform a grant proposal or other funding to improve an aspect of local civic health
- ▶ Support changes in local policy to support an aspect of civic health (e.g. changing what time and where you hold public meeting, or changing policy to offer public meeting both online and in person)
- ▶ Support changes in programs and practice (e.g. shifting after school programming in schools to focus on civic education, or creating mobile voting booths near major employers)
- ▶ Simply learn and share information with the community, and encourage thought and conversation
- ▶ Catalyze a community-wide civic action plan that multiple institutions, organizations, and businesses contribute to

## Key Issues, Risks, and Mitigation Strategies

Consider any issues or risks that may come up during your civic health work, and how you might address these challenges. See below for two examples and then make your own!

Issues and Risks	Mitigation Strategies
<p><b>Covid Considerations</b></p> <p>The risk is that Covid rates may rise again, or even if they don't, not everyone in the community will feel comfortable with in-person interactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Try to plan activities that allow for both in-person and online contributions.</li><li>▶ Host in-person engagement events during warm weather seasons so people can interact outside.</li><li>▶ Consider a pre-survey to gauge people's comfort with in-person engagement and follow up on the phone or video with people who are not comfortable engaging with others.</li></ul>
<p><b>Inappropriate Input</b></p> <p>Some people may provide disrespectful comments during activities that are not moderated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Ensure that all activities are moderated, or facilitated.</li><li>▶ Share "group agreements" across all activities to be clear about expectations of respect.</li></ul>



Issues and Risks	Mitigation Strategies
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## COMMUNITY MAPPING AND CIVIC TOUR ACTIVITIES

**Goal:** This activity is intended to help a group of community leaders who are interested in civic health to learn more about who lives in the community and what places there are for people to come together. Civic health includes outcomes related to the quality of civic life in a community—things like voting, volunteering, talking to your neighbors, trusting local government, etc. Communities that have strong civic health exhibit lots of connection, participation, and positive activity, whereas communities with weaker civic health often experience isolation, distrust, and low participation. There are two activities in this exercise that are related:

The first is “community mapping,” where you can identify who the various populations are that you need to engage in your outreach and engagement. The second is a “civic tour” that will help you consider how local community spaces either encourage or discourage healthy civic life. Please assemble a group of at least 5 people, preferably from a range of perspectives and demographics in the community, to complete the tasks below.

**Prep Work:** Before doing this activity, you may want to find some information about who lives in your community. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau’s *Quick Facts* shows information about towns with populations of over 5,000. If your town is smaller than 5,000, you may want to ask the town hall if they have data about the different ages, races, genders, and other characteristics of people who live in the community.

### PART 1 – COMMUNITY MAPPING

#### Step 1: Creating a Primary Flower Map

Please try to think of categories of people in your community who affect or are affected by civic life. At this point, do not identify specific organizations (like the Boys and Girls Club) but keep it to broader categories (like youth). You want to think of “categories of people” such as groups or sections of the community that share a similar characteristic, personal background, or career (e.g. business owners, low-income people, the Muslim community, the people who work in the trades).

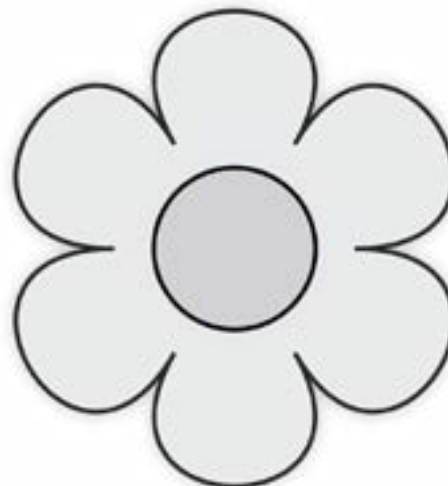
See the sample flower, then create your own flower petals using the template on page 20.

Sample Flower



*\*Such as people whose voices aren’t often heard including BIPOC populations, low-income people, LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities*

Create Your Primary Flower



## Step 2: Making Secondary Flowers

Now take each petal from the Primary Flower and make it the center of a Secondary Flower. Within each Secondary Flower, brainstorm all of the groups that are connected to the theme of the Secondary Flower, and make these brainstormed groups the petals. For instance, see the Secondary Flower example—the theme is “town leaders,” and the petals describe groups connected to town leaders.

You will likely create 5 to 12 Secondary Flowers depending on how many petals you had on your Primary Flower. You should have a Secondary Flower for each petal on your Primary Flower. Sometimes, you may be able to combine two petals from the Primary Flower into one Secondary Flower.

Example of Secondary Flower



In the example above, the “town leaders” show a flower of people who affect civic life in the community. You want to make sure you also have flowers of people who are affected by civic life such as youth, seniors, people with disabilities, families, immigrants, people of color, republicans, democrats, women, etc. You might want to think about which populations you feel very connected to and which populations you feel disconnected from, as well as which populations are most vulnerable in the community and which wield the most power. Hopefully you can have a mix of all these factors!

## Step 3: Bring in the Bees

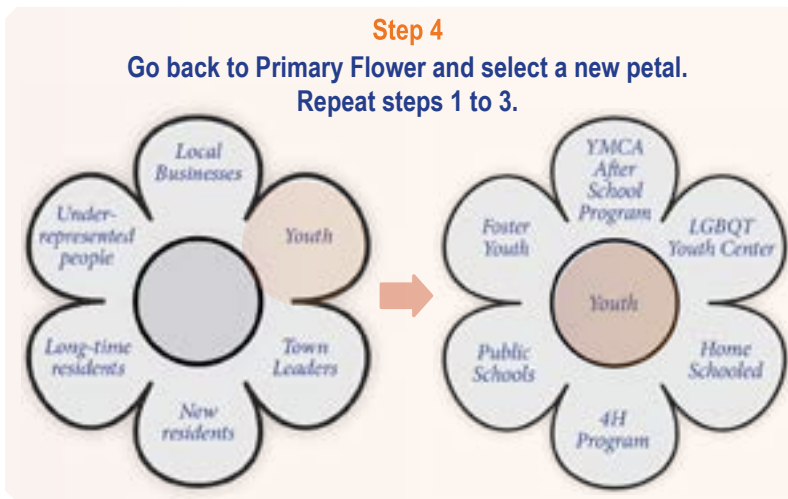
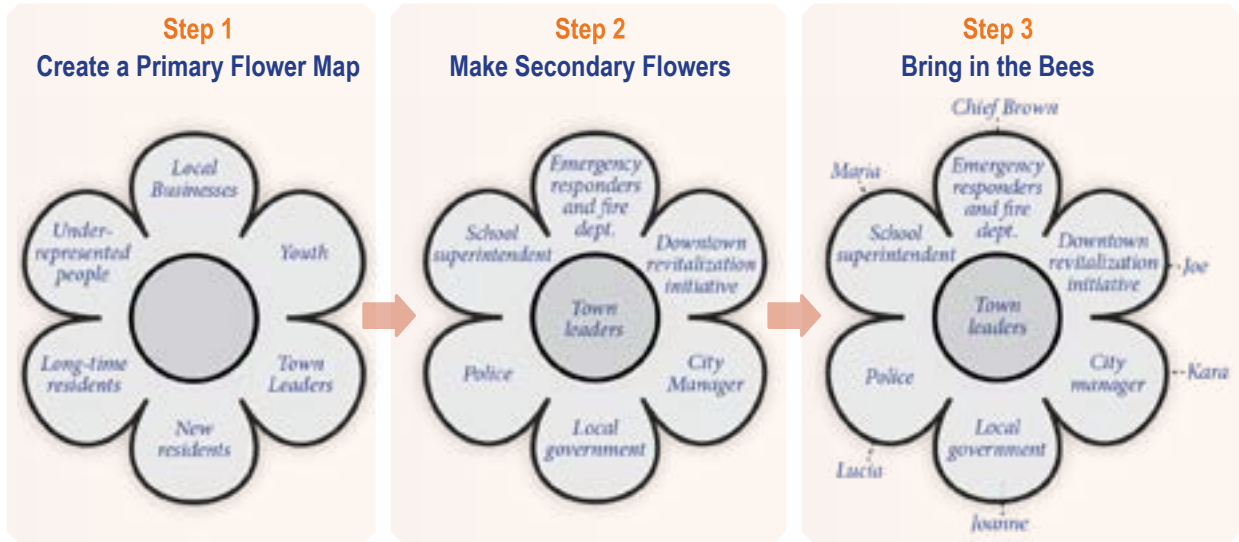
Don’t worry, these are friendly bees! Now that you have created each of your Secondary Flowers, you should surround each petal of the Secondary Flower with names of people who represent those groups in your community. For instance, if one of your Primary Flower Petals was “Town Leaders” and one of your Secondary Flower Petals from your Town Leaders theme was “fire department,” then at this point you might start to brainstorm actual names—like Chief Brown and Assistant Chief Hernandez, who serve as the Secondary Flower’s “bees.” Repeat the “bees” exercise for each petal of each Secondary Flowers until you have lots of bees buzzing around your Secondary Flowers.

Example of Secondary Flower with Bees



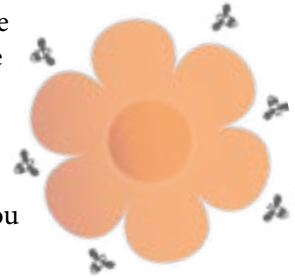


# Growing Your Garden



## Step 4: Looking at the Garden

- ▶ Out of the groups (Primary and Secondary Flowers) and individuals (bees) that you have listed, where do you feel like your group has strong connections already established that you can leverage to get people involved in local civic health work?
- ▶ Out of the groups and individuals listed, where do you lack connections? What relationships could you build, and who could you strategically build them with to bring those populations into your process?
- ▶ For instance, if you have identified that you want to bring underrepresented people into the process, and one of the populations you want to prioritize is lower income people, could you work with the local affordable housing agency leaders to figure out how to best engage these populations?
- ▶ What does this “garden” tell you about civic life in your local community? Where do you think some of your flowers experience strong civic health, and where do you think some flowers struggle and experience weak civic health?



## PART 2: CIVIC TOUR

*Purpose: The goal of the Civic Tour is to assemble a diverse group of people from your community to walk through public spaces together and evaluate how they help facilitate or may pose barriers to healthy civic life.*

### Step 1: Reflecting on Community Places

Ask your group to look at the garden exercise and consider the spaces and places that people from your garden have to connect. Consider the following questions:

Where in your community do people physically have an opportunity to come together? For instance, this could be a park, school, library, or community center. List out all the places.

### Step 2: Identify Tour Places

Of the places you listed, now select 3 to 6 locations to conduct a Tour. Before you do this, your group that has been working on the flowers may want to take a look at that exercise to see if there are other people in the community who represent other aspects of the “flowers” that you want to bring into your group for the Tour. These individuals may have different perspectives and add helpful insight to your group.

To begin the Tour, ask individuals who work in the places you have selected to give you a tour. So for instance, if you listed out the town green, a grange hall, the police station, and the library during Step 1, now determine if you want to visit some or all of those places during the tour. Plan the Civic Tour for a date in advance that your group can all attend.

### Step 3: Collecting Information

Reconvene your group, perhaps with some new individuals joining the local civic health efforts, and do a walk through of these places, preferably all on the same day, but it could span a couple of days within a week. The group should take notes about how the place connects to local civic health, and draw on the following questions. A notetaking template is also provided below for your convenience that corresponds to these questions.

- ▶ How does this place encourage connection in our community?
- ▶ How does this place discourage connection in our community?
- ▶ Does the place encourage people from different backgrounds to come together?
- ▶ Does the place feel like it attracts some kinds of people more than others?
- ▶ When you think back to all the flowers in your garden (or people in your community), are there groups that are missing from this space? If yes, why do you think they are missing?
- ▶ Is the place welcoming or unwelcoming? In what ways?
- ▶ How could it be more welcoming?
- ▶ Is the place accessible to all people in the community? Are there barriers to access for some groups?

#### Step 4: Digesting the Findings

Bring your group together to talk about each of your findings through the Civic Tour. What did you learn about the places in your community? Overall, do you have places that facilitate strong civic health, or do your places lack what they need to support healthy civic life? How could you work to build upon or change your places to make them stronger points of connection for all people in your community? What did this exercise tell you about civic health overall in your community?

#### Note-taking Form for the Walk About

If you like, feel free to use the note taking form below as you conduct your Civic Tour.

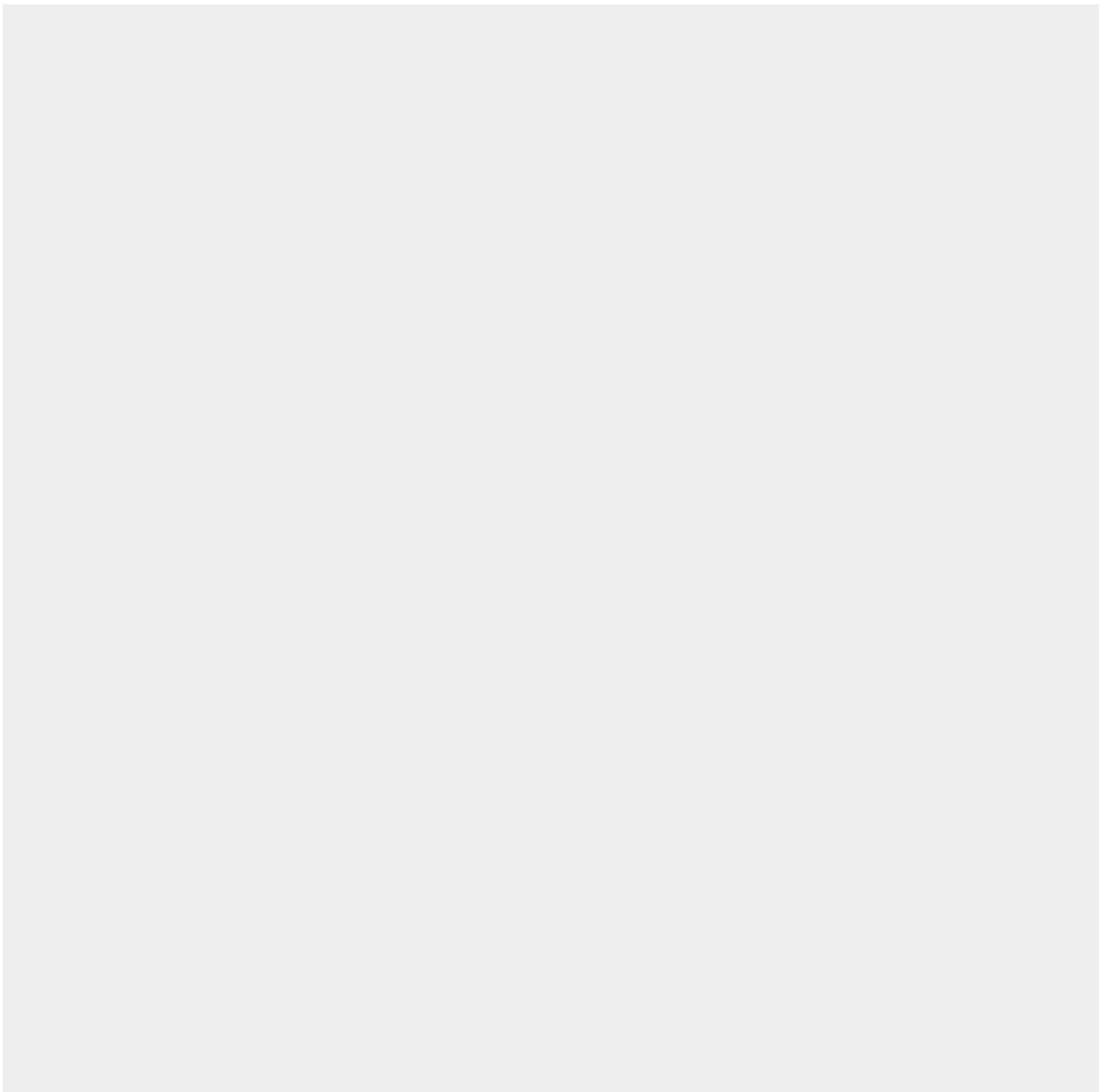
Question	Notes
Encourages connection?	Yes No Why?
Discourages connection?	Yes No Why?
Encourages connection across different backgrounds?	Yes No Why?
Attracts certain populations?	Yes No Why?
Populations missing from space?	Yes No Who is missing?
Welcoming or unwelcoming?	Wecoming Unwelcoming Why?
How could it be more welcoming?	Describe
Accessible to all people? Barriers to access?	Yes No Barriers:



## Taking Action

Here are some ways you can use the activities above to make an impact at the local level.

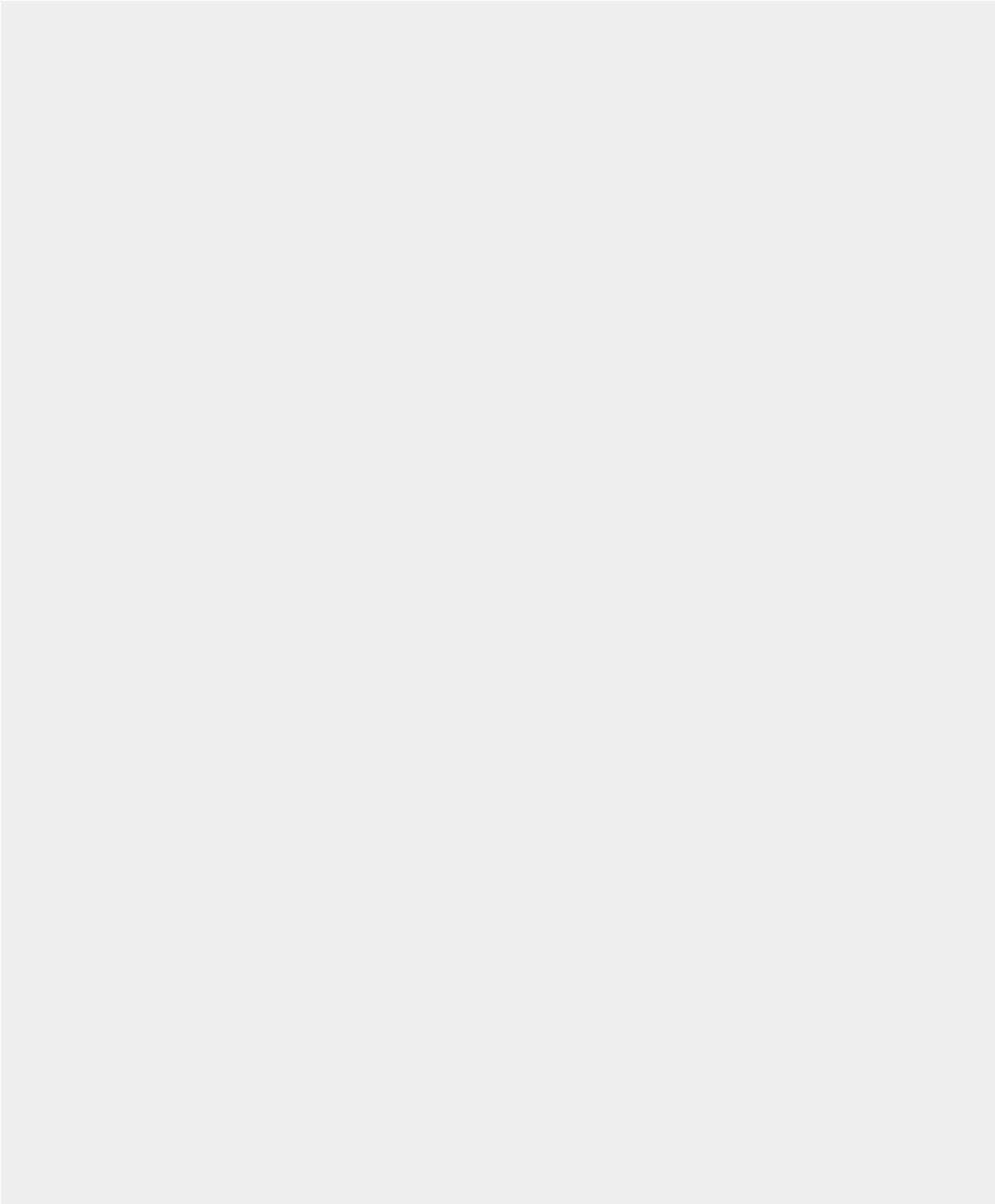
- ▶ If the Community Mapping reveals that certain populations are not involved enough in the community, could you approach some people in that community to talk about why this is? Doing so may help you to create partnerships, identify needed programs, or address barriers.
- ▶ As you tour different civic spaces, is there a way to reflect with the community about what you've learned? Could you host an open house or online meeting where people who did the Civic Tour share some of their observations for others in the community to comment on?
- ▶ The Civic Tour may identify needed renovations or new spaces so that the community can come together. Can you take these concerns to a city council or selectboard meeting to share what you've learned and continue the conversation?



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## Conclusion

We hope this section of the guide has helped you get started with your work. Hopefully upon completing this section, you have identified a group to lead the vision for local civic health work, and you have created a strategy for your work. You have also started to think about who is part of your community, and what local spaces exist to bring the community together.



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# Flower Template

