4 Collecting Information About Local Civic Health

Overview

This section provides different methods of how to collect information about local civic health. These methods can help you can understand where the strengths, assets, and challenges are in your community. In addition to information about how to host community dialogues, interviews, focus groups, and arts engagement techniques, you'll find tools to assist you. When gathering data, we suggest you have an end goal in mind. Data can easily become cumbersome. You can start small or use an approach that divides the work or is tiered and grows over time.

What Are Options for Collecting Data About Local Civic Health?

In every community there is an opportunity to collect quantitative data, which is usually easy to count numerically or display in a graph. There is also an opportunity to collect qualitative data, which includes stories, written feedback, and information on a person's experiences. Both of these sources are valuable in different ways. We suggest collecting data about local civic health by selecting one or more strategies from the list below:

- ▶ **Surveys**
- ▶ **Interviews**
- ▶ **Focus groups** with select populations who share a common experience (like youth or mothers or Ukrainian refugees)
- ▶ **Community dialogues**
- ▶ **Citizen photographers** who take picture of civic strengths or weaknesses
- ▶ Drawing on **existing community data** (like voting records by age)
- ▶ Using **existing civic assessments** with a group of community members to try to evaluate how your community is doing civically

Surveys

A common strategy to gather information about local civic health is a survey. We were able to write the statewide *2020 NH Civic Health Index* from survey data from the U.S. Census. However, the Census is not able to draw enough information about civic health at the very local community level, so if communities want survey data, they would have to run their own survey. Please see the HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY tool on page 37.
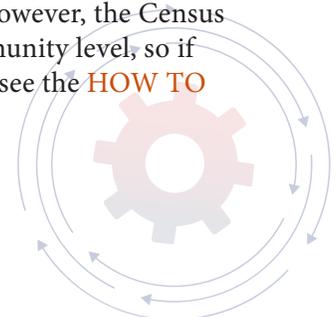
Interviews and Focus Groups

If you are interested in the experiences of certain people or groups in the community, you may want to conduct interviews or focus groups. Interviews are usually conducted with one or two people who are asked questions about their personal experience. Focus groups are usually conducted with a small group of people (4 to 10) who share a common experience, such as being under 30 or from a similar cultural group or work sector. Here are some sample interview and focus questions below you could draw upon:

▸ In what ways do you think people connect with others and participate in your community?

▸ In what ways do you see people being civically engaged—attending public meetings, voting, and paying attention to news?

▸ What factors do you think impact why people do not participate in community life?

▸ What do you think are some of the largest strengths in the community?

▸ What do you think are some of the largest weaknesses in the community?

▸ Have you participated in a community event where you were asked to share your point of view? What motivated you to attend? What was your experience like?

▸ What organizations or groups in the community do you think are doing the best job of encouraging people to participate and connect? Why?

▸ Do you feel like you matter to your community?

▸ Do you trust others in your community?

▸ Do you trust your local government?

Community Dialogues

By putting people in your community in dialogue about civic health, you may be able to explore how different people experience the community, where there are common themes, and where there is divergence. There is a lot of value in bringing people who are different and people who are alike in the community to talk about their civic experiences together. By listening to the experiences of others, this may help people to identify a common challenge or positive experience, or to share how their experience or thoughts differ from others.

We feel that the process of talking together about civic health can help build collective understanding about the issues. When planned thoughtfully, it is also an exercise in itself that builds local community across differences. We have provided several tools to help you lead a local conversation about civic health. You may even want to consider doing a series of conversations about civic health that build upon each other over the course of a few months. For instance, the Goffstown Public Library led a "civic series" in 2022 to help community members to explore civic health from many different angles. We have included two tools for community dialogues, including a tip sheet that outlines how to design a community dialogue process and agenda (page 28) and a sample guide for discussing civic health (page 32). The community dialogue process and agenda includes a list of sample "group agreements" for a dialogue conversation.

Or, if you want to keep it very simple, you could take the *2020 NH Civic Health Index* and use it to have a broad based conversation about how local people feel the statewide trends compare to their experience at the local level. In *Appendix A*, we provide some data points from the *2020 NH Civic Health Index* that may make for good local conversations. For instance, an organization in Georgia who wrote the *Georgia Civic Health Index*, called Georgia Family Connection Partners, took the statewide data findings to different counties to engage local people in dialogues about how their experiences locally compared with the state results.

Civic Photographers

Sometimes, pictures speak louder than words. There is a strategy called Photovoice that leads community members through taking photographs about a local community issue to help people think and talk about it. We all have different ways of making sense of big challenges and developing opportunities for change. We think using photography and other mediums helps people document strengths and challenges they see in local civic life. Interactive discussions with a local exhibit in a library, gallery, or school could also help generate engaging dialogue among a diverse group of community members. If you would like to explore these strategies, we recommend the following resources:

▸ The University of Kansas Community Toolbox, "Implementing Photovoice in your Community"
   https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/photovoice/main

▸ The Rutgers Organization, "Photovoice Factsheet"
   https://rutgers.international/resources/photovoice-factsheet/

Tapping Existing Community Data

There is already data collected that may be helpful to you in understanding civic health at the local level. This could include datasets like local voting records and maps, public meeting minutes, the number of food pantries in town, arrest maps, and the proportion of seasonal residential/vacant homes. We have assembled a guide for you that shares many common datasets available at the state or local level in New Hampshire. Consider what information you may already have right at your fingertips! Please see the tool, YOU'VE ALREADY GOT INFORMATION! HOW TO EXPLORE EXISTING DATA ABOUT CIVIC HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY, on page 46.

Using Civic Assessments as a Group Exercise

There are organizations who have created civic assessments for community leaders. These assessments include ways to evaluate how well people think their community is doing on a range of different indicators. We have identified two of these that we think are particularly useful. If you want to use these tools, we suggest you assemble your civic health working group and take a couple of hours to move through each assessment together. The first assessment we recommend is the *National Civic League's Civic Index*. This tool is not to be confused with the Civic Health Index, although it has a similar name. The Civic Index examines how much "civic capital" communities have, meaning formal or informal relationships, networks, and capacities that communities have to make decisions and solve problems. Examples include assessing if leaders are transparent and collaborative, and if there is a culture where people work together on community problems instead of being confrontational. You can download the tool here.

The second tool we recommend is the *Participatory Governance Index*, created by Public Agenda. The Participatory Governance Index examines how much of a commitment local governments have to community engagement practices, like funding, policies, and staff. It also examines how many programs and meaningful engagement opportunities your local government is offering. You can download the tool here.

HOW TO DESIGN A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Over the years we have learned a couple key components that are helpful in designing an opportunity for community dialogue. These include considering how to frame the dialogue questions and prepare for a dialogue event, facilitation tips, and how to structure the dialogue process flow.

Framing and Preparation

In community dialogues, one of our key goals is to broaden our understanding of community issues and experiences. We are helping people generate their own new understandings of a situation through exchanges with each other. We are listening to understand. Here are a few starting questions to consider during framing meetings and preparation:

▶ What issues are important for your community's civic health? What is a question or topic that will bring people together across differences?

▶ What is needed to allow for an open and respectful dialogue for all group members? Remember, you can't control everything, but community-building is essential to a strong and meaningful dialogue.

▶ Who is the invitation to participate in dialogue coming from?

▶ Are there accessibility considerations to take into account so everyone can participate? Can differently abled people access the meeting space? Do you need to provide language translations or larger font print guides?

▶ Where will the dialogue take place? (community center, faith-based center, school, town hall, coffee shop, library, online etc.)

▶ How large do you want participant groups to be for the discussion? We generally find groups of 8–10 people work best if you want to provide lots of space for different voices to be heard.

▶ Will you provide facilitators for the groups, or will participants facilitate themselves using the discussion guide?

Agenda

Creating an agenda that people can follow along with can help to create transparency in the process. You could display an agenda on large paper or a projected slide, or provide participants with a paper agenda for the conversation.

Group Agreements

State some agreements for a dialogue before the group begins a conversation. These include guidelines such as respecting each other, listening, sharing talking time, etc. We have provided a sample "Group Agreements" list at the end of this document.

Creating a Dialogue Process (What Goes in the Agenda?)

Note: Below are some components we think create a good dialogue process. We have also created a sample dialogue guide that you can adapt or use, on page 32.

Meaningful Introductions

Beginning with meaningful introductions is another essential component of a community dialogue. By designing time for participants to meet and get to know one another we preserve our humanity and build a space for openness and opportunity for trust building. As a facilitator of a dialogue event, how will you

welcome everyone to the dialogue space and/or circle? This can be related to the reason for convening or a more human-personal icebreaker question (ex. What song are you listening to on repeat lately? What community hats do you wear?). We suggest outlining one or two introduction prompts in your dialogue guide.

Goals For Today

Stating a clear goal for the dialogue is useful to participants so that they know where to focus the conversation. You may want to include this goal at the top of a dialogue agenda for participants and facilitators to refer to.

Facilitators may also want to ask participants about their personal goals for the dialogue. Is there something the group would like to accomplish by the end of the meeting? Somewhere you'd like to end up?

Providing Background Information

Will participants need any background to be able to engage in the dialogue? Any clarification of language, history, context? You can provide some common information, like charts, a glossary of terms, or short articles, for participants to refer to during the conversation.

Exploring the Topic

Provide a range of questions and prompts to lead participants through a good discussion. You may want to have some key questions that you hope participants will discuss in the conversation. For meaty questions, you should allow ten to thirty minutes for participants to talk, especially if you want to make room for multiple voices.

When using big questions, provide smaller sub questions to help break down a big question. For instance, a big question might be something like:

▸ *What do you think the strengths and challenges are in your community when it comes to local civic life?*

Sub questions that help break this down might include:

▸ What would you identify as strengths of how people in the community connect with each other?

▸ What would you identify as strengths in terms of how local government interacts and collaborates with the public?

▸ What would you identify as challenges related to how people in the community connect with each other?

▸ What would you identify as challenges in terms of how the local government interacts and collaborates with the public?

Going Broad and Going Deep

You may want to include both broad and deep questions in your dialogue guide. We often recommend starting with brainstorming—where you lay out many issues related to a topic, and then later on selecting two or three of the brainstormed issues to focus a conversation in depth. For example, you may start with a breadth prompt like—what do you think are all the civic issues you face as a community?

A list of civic issues might include factors like voting, volunteering, public service, charitable donations, keeping people informed, trust, festivals and fun events, etc.

In a depth phase, you might decide to focus on a couple of key topics from the brainstormed list, like voting or trust. We generally suggest that the group decides what issues they want to focus the conversation on, but you may have questions that help lead the group to certain priorities you want to make sure they discuss.

Moving Toward a Goal or Shared Understanding

Toward the end of the dialogue, you likely want the group to focus on some takeaways, next steps, or priorities that they want to share with others. We generally don't aim for groups to have consensus, but you may ask groups to talk together about what the key issues they named in the conversation were, even if there wasn't agreement about those issues. For instance, if a group talked about voting and some people felt that they didn't want to use electronic voting and others felt they did, you could just report out that part of your conversation explored the pros and cons of electronic voting. If groups had differences of opinion, they might ask for next steps like further conversations about the issue, more information, or talking with experts about the subject.

Summary and Closing

At the end of the conversation, we recommend some kind of activity to give the dialogue closure. This could be as simple as asking each group member to share one word that summarizes how they are feeling, or you may ask each group member to identify a takeaway or next step. If there is a facilitator, they should thank the group for their participation. You may ask people to sign a contact list or complete an evaluation at this time.

Facilitation Tips

At the beginning of the conversation, facilitators may want to acknowledge the types of relationships that are in the room (Is someone another person's boss? Do participants know each other? What is the spectrum of political views? What is the obvious or seen (and not so obvious or unseen) diversity of the space?)

If the group conversation gets tense or some group members are talking much more than others, the facilitator may want to refer to the group agreements shared at the beginning of the conversation, take a quick break, or move on to a different question.

Sometimes structure is helpful for groups to enable multiple group members to share their thoughts. For instance, a Round Robin requires each group member to go around and share an idea. Popcorn allows for each group to self-select when they want to speak (or pop) but requires each participant to share before opening up the conversation to general group discussion. Free flowing discussion can have great benefits, but if the conversation is tense, going off topic, or favoring some voices more than others, structure can help.

Sample Group Agreements

▸ Share air time so everyone gets a chance to be heard.

▸ Be respectful and use respectful language.

▸ If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.

▸ It's okay to disagree, but don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.

▸ Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.

▸ Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them.

▸ If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.

▸ Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."

▸ It's okay to put issues like race and class on the table.

▸ We all share responsibility for making the group productive.

▸ Listen to each other.

Tips for Hosting a Dialogue Event

1. Always greet people when they arrive.

2. Take time for meaningful introductions.

3. Point out bathrooms and all logistics that help make folks comfortable.

4. Always review group agreements.

5. Let participants know they are part of something bigger; be clear about how their voices will make a difference.

6. Support your facilitators—it is hard work to remain attentive and fair-minded. A moderator should be available to check in with facilitators.

7. Always prepare for differences that make a difference (political, racial, social class, education, etc.). All voices are equal.

8. Be prepared for direct questions and assume transparency is the best approach when answering questions about your project.

9. Ask participants to complete an evaluation, and always debrief with facilitators and the planning group.

10. Have fun and maintain a sense of humor!

SAMPLE CIVIC HEALTH DIALOGUE GUIDE

Sample Title: Taking a Pulse on Our Community's Civic Health

Partners List

Communities could add a list of who is involved in steering this effort or organizational logos. Make it clear who is hosting the event.

Sample Media Note

We are delighted to have this event covered by the press and local bloggers and want to balance that with our participants' ability to discuss this topic in a safe environment, share an incomplete thought, or convey a personal story as a part of this process. We respectfully request that all representatives of the media (formal and informal) please ask permission to tape, photograph, identify, or quote an individual participant directly. We are happy to answer any questions about this request.

Purpose Examples

(*The steering committee identifies together and adapts the conversation guide for the purpose and phase of their work.*)

▶ Gather information from the community related to civic health and community engagement.

▶ Learn about the history of engagement and civic life in the community.

▶ Share findings to inform actions we could take to strengthen civic health.

▶ Gather a specific group (such as stakeholders in the community who work with youth and youth themselves)

A general outline for the steering committees to consider:

▶ Time for people to sign in, grab some food, settle, and chat, etc.

▶ Welcome and Purpose (xx min)

▶ Reviewing Information (if needed)

▶ Small Group Conversations (or other engagement that includes people in dialogue with each other) (xx min)

▶ Large Group Sharing and Report Outs (xx min)

▶ Closing Remarks and Next Steps (xx min)

Sample Detailed Outline

Gathering in and refreshments—in person or virtual? (15 min)

▶ Welcome and sign in at registration table

▶ Enjoy some food at your tables.

▶ Please join your small group for the introduction and to start the dialogue immediately thereafter.

Welcome and Overview of "What is Civic Health? What do we know about New Hampshire?" (10–15 min)

Welcome and thank you for joining today's conversation that will help us begin our work to better understand our community's civic health and what we can do to improve opportunities for engagement among the people who live here.

What is Civic Health?

(*Provide some shared learning and grounding where everyone at the conversation. For instance, everyone watches the "What is Civic Health in NH video." It is important to provide an inclusive time that supports everyone's shared understanding.*)

Civic health includes the behaviors, beliefs, and actions related to civic and political engagement, at the local, state, and national levels. It refers specifically to the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in civic activities that strengthen the networks of relationships among people who live, learn, and work in a community. The National Conference on Citizenship defines civic health as, "the way that communities are organized to define and address public problems." Often public problems or needs are addressed through civic activities like:

▶ Voting

▶ Volunteering and community service

▶ Connecting with others

▶ Attending public meetings

▶ Staying informed and talking about issues

▶ People believing they matter and can make an impact

▶ Feeling trust in institutions and community

Participation in civic activities encourages people to:

▶ 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

▶ participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges

(*2020 NH Civic Health Index* and NCoC webpage on Civic Health)

Today's Conversation (10 min)

During our time today, we look forward to your questions, concerns, ideas, and hopes for our work together to help make YOUR COMMUNITY NAME a welcoming and inclusive community and we welcome all perspectives. Some of the key questions at the heart of our conversation today are:

▸ What do you care about related to civic health?

▸ What's most important to our community?

▸ What do we know and what do we want to learn to strengthen civic health?

Additional Sample Questions: Broad Framing for an Initial Gathering

The working group can think about what is an essential or inclusive question that is at the heart of your conversation goals.

▸ How do we make sure our community can be a place where everyone feels:

» They belong?

» Their voices are heard?

» Opportunities to live, learn, work, pray, and play are available to everyone?

» They can build trust with others?

▸ How do we define healthy civic life and engagement in our community?

▸ How do we ensure our community fosters belonging? What are our priorities for improving civic life among the people who live here?

Sample Goals (10 min)

▸ Take a pulse check of our civic health here in COMMUNITY NAME.

▸ Identify gaps or missing information that could support plans for strengthening civic life and community.

▸ Explore different indicators of civic health (e.g. voting, trust) to better understand challenges in civic life.

▸ To share personal stories about your community and identify assets and barriers to participation in civic life.

About the process: This conversation is…

▸ Designed to focus on what is important to you.

▸ Organized to allow everyone to both speak and listen in small, facilitated groups where ideas can be explored, differences understood, and preferences for action expressed.

▸ Respectful of your time. We will keep time and respect yours by ending on time.

Sample Group Agreements

▸ Share air time so everyone gets a chance to be heard.

▸ Be respectful and use respectful language.

▸ If you disagree, consider asking a question rather than arguing to prove your point.

▸ It's okay to disagree, but don't personalize it. Focus on the idea, not the person.

▸ Speak up if the process doesn't seem fair.

▸ Personal stories stay in the group unless we all agree we can share them.

▸ If you talk about people who are not here, don't use their names.

▸ Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."

▸ It's okay to put issues like race and class on the table.

▸ We all share responsibility for making the group productive.

▸ Listen to each other.

Introductions in Small Groups (15 min)

▸ Please share your

» Name

» A few community (formal and informal) hats you wear

What Are Our Experiences? Understanding Ourselves and Each Other? (15 min)

The facilitator can select from the prompts below:

▸ Describe an event that has shaped your experience living in [community name]. (Something that made you feel like [community name] is your community/home.)

▸ From your experience, in what ways has civic health, community engagement, or a sense of community changed in the past 10 years or so?

▸ Turn to your neighbor and talk for a few minutes about where and how you prefer to engage in civic life —formal and informal institutions.

▸ Are there areas where you'd like to have a voice but do not feel it is accessible? It's okay if you don't want to be involved in "civic life" at all—all perspectives are welcome!

▸ What does a thriving community mean to you? Describe to your partner what this looks like.

Small Group Conversation/Dialogue Questions (55 min)

The facilitator can select from the prompts below:

▸ What does community feel like to you? Do you feel connected to your community? What about other communities?

▸ What barriers do you experience to feeling a sense of community?

▸ What kind of environment do you live in? (Neighborhood; urban setting; apartment building / housing complex; house on a remote piece of land). Does this environment impact your sense of community?

▸ What matters to you most about the future of your community? What feel like the most pressing concerns?

▸ Do you feel aware of when community decisions are being made? How do you find this information?

▸ Do you feel that you are able to participate or have a say in these community decisions, if you'd like to?

- What are some spaces that facilitate community connections and community engagement? Do these spaces exist in your community? What are they like for you?

- Where is an easy place to engage in community-decision making and where are more challenging places to access? Why is that?

- Do you feel connected to your community leaders (elected and volunteer leaders)? Do you feel represented by your community leaders?

- Have you engaged in community decision-making (school board; town hall; focus group; etc.) before and felt like your opinion mattered there? Have you felt not seen in that space?

Large Group Report Out (20 min)

Each group will be asked to provide a few *very brief* comments for the large group. If you are asked to speak for your group, please be brief and share what has been compiled by your group, including common ground and divergent views. (You will have two minutes!)

Closing Remarks and Thanks

Sample: Our goal with these conversations is to give people an opportunity to address concerns and fears, to increase understanding, and to consider constructive ways to solve problems in your community.

Thank you for participating!

We will…
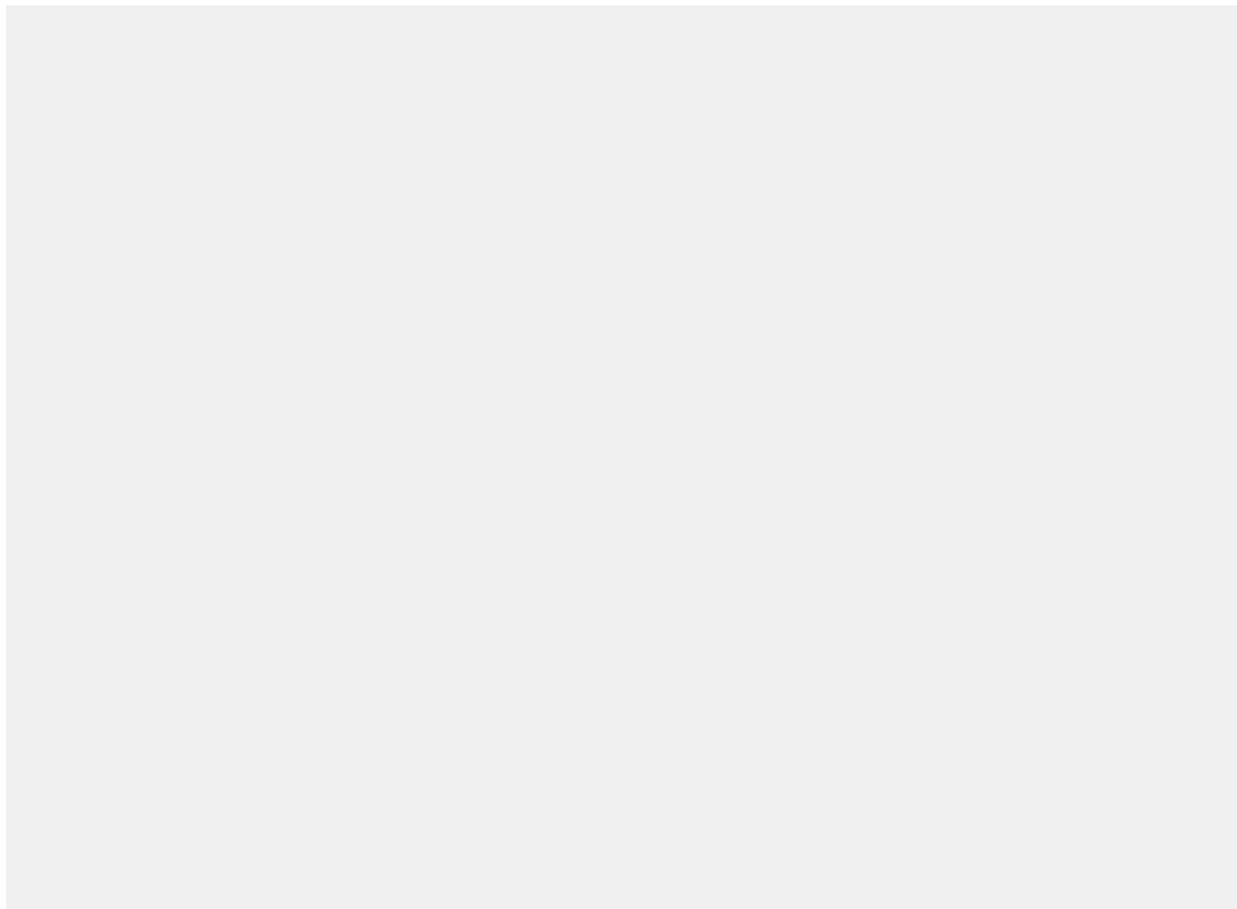
HOW TO CONDUCT A LOCAL CIVIC HEALTH SURVEY

Goal: This tool provides communities with guidance on how to design a local civic health survey, including how to design the survey, questions to ask, and tips around data collection and analysis.

Planning a Survey

Ask: When is a community survey a good choice?

A survey can be a good choice when you want to learn some straightforward information from a mix of people. Although carefully designed large-scale surveys can be very accurate with predicting results of elections or tracking public opinion, that kind of survey takes a lot of technical knowledge and money to implement. Most communities aren't prepared to take that on.

Instead, communities might treat a survey as offering a "floor," or a minimum number of residents affected by specific issues. For instance, if 20 people report not voting, and 15 say it was because polling place hours were inconvenient, it's not necessarily important that the 20 people represent the entire community (which, of course, they likely do not). Rather, that 15 residents cited a common issue provides a place for potential investigation and follow-up. We wouldn't know how many the issue truly affects, but we would know it is "at least" 15.

Ask: When is a community survey not a good choice?

A survey is not a good choice if you need to hear from everyone in your community, to get detailed perspectives, or if you think that internet access, reading comprehension, or other community features might make a survey difficult for residents.

Designing a Survey

Ask: What do I really want to know?

When doing a survey, it can be tempting to include a big mix of questions to learn about a lot of different topics, or just because some questions are interesting! However, choosing only questions directly and clearly linked to your main question keeps a survey short and yields the best response rates. In addition, if you avoid collecting personal information that isn't strictly necessary, it can make respondents more comfortable.

Ask: Do I need this question?

The longer the survey, the less likely people are to start it or finish it. However, there is no "right" cutoff for survey length: it depends on the questions you ask and the method you use (e.g., phone versus paper). In general, people can click an online survey question more quickly than they can write a response on paper or speak a thought aloud on the phone.

As a rule of thumb, most people can answer four online survey questions per minute. You might try to keep an online survey to **fewer than 20 questions**, which is often answerable in **five minutes**.

Implementing a Survey

Ask: How will people take the survey?

There are lots of ways to collect data, including an online tool, a paper questionnaire (mailed or in person), or by phone. Often online surveys are cheapest, although they can be hard for people without internet

access or technology skills to access. A paper survey can be expensive to implement if mailing to all households in a community but reaches those without internet access. A phone survey takes a long time but can offer respondents a chance to ask questions. Your team could canvass an area and knock on doors to do verbal surveys, but it will require volunteer time and some people may not welcome canvassers at their home. Using a mixture of survey methods, like an online survey with a paper option, may be a good fit.

Since online surveys are often one of the most efficient data collection methods, the below table overviews three of the most popular online tools and compares their pros and cons.

	Pro	Con	Link
Google Forms	Free; easy to use	Need Google account; limited customization; not secure	https://docs.google.com/forms
Survey Monkey	Allows some complex questions; free version (up to 10 questions & 100 respondents); includes template questions	Not much visual customization	https://www.surveymonkey.com/
Qualtrics	Very customizable	Expensive; harder to use	https://www.qualtrics.com/free-account/

Ask: Who is important to hear from, and how will I reach them?

When conducting a survey, some people will enthusiastically participate, and others won't even know the survey is happening. The latter are especially important to hear from since they are more likely to be left out of other opportunities to weigh in too. Leveraging local knowledge about where people congregate, who might be missing, and how to reach them through existing networks is an approach with established successes. You may also want to partner with local organizations to disseminate your survey, especially ones that reach certain populations. For instance, if you wanted to reach youth, partnering with a school or a youth organization might help you to get more youth responses.

Analyzing Data

Ask: What will I do with the data I gather?

This question should shape the data collection process, so that you only collect items you plan to use. When analysis begins, think carefully about who the data came from. Without a careful random sample, the findings will not be representative of the community. This means that differences between groups or over time can be a result of missing respondents, and not necessarily reflective of the real world. As described above, it can be helpful to ask questions that can provide a meaningful "floor," or a minimum number of residents affected by specific issues. For instance, if 20 people report not voting, and 15 say it was because polling place hours were inconvenient, it's not necessarily important that the 20 people represent the entire community (which, of course, they likely do not). Rather, that 15 cited a common issue provides a place for potential investigation and follow-up. We wouldn't know how many the issue truly affects, but we would know it is "at least" 15.

Although we would discourage calculating specific percentages, which can give a false impression of precision, if they're necessary, also consider who the percentage is calculated among – all respondents? Registered voters? People with children? Using the right denominator will change the calculation in important ways. It's also important to make sure the denominator you choose is clear when you share your findings. For example, rather than saying that among survey respondents "70% reported voting", specify that "70% of registered voters reported voting."

Ask: How do I share my findings?

The most important goal for sharing any results is to focus on answering specific questions for identified groups in short and tailored ways. Long reports don't catch attention, and while they might include a little something for everyone, that means that any one reader will find a lot that's *not* for them. Instead, thinking about who wants the answers you're putting forth and how to deliver that in a short, focused way is key. A one-page flier or a single graphic for social media often goes a lot further than a long report.

Example Community Questions and Related Items

After all the technical consideration of a survey, you may now be wondering what a survey could tell you. To illustrate how you might use a survey, we provide some example questions that a community might have and identify a few tested survey questions that could help answer each one.

Example question	Why aren't more people showing up to vote?
Survey questions	1. Were you registered to vote in the [specify which—2020 presidential; 2022 town, etc.] election? » Yes (skip to Question 3) » No (move to Question 2)
	2. *If not registered:* What was the *main* reason you were not registered to vote? » Did not meet registration deadlines » Did not know where or how to register » Did not meet residency requirements/did not live here long enough » Permanent illness or disability » Concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic » Difficulty with English » Not interested in the election or not involved in politics » My vote would not make a difference » Not eligible to vote » Other reason

	3. *If registered:* In any election, some people are not able to vote because they are sick or busy or have some other reason, and others do not want to vote. Did you vote in the election held on [date of specified election]? » Yes (end here) » No (move to Question 4)
	4. *If registered, did not vote:* What was the main reason you did not vote? » Out of town or away from home » Forgot to vote (or send in absentee ballot) » Concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic » Illness or disability (own or family's) » Not interested, felt my vote wouldn't make a difference » Too busy, conflicting work or school schedule » Transportation problems » Didn't like candidates or campaign issues » Registration problems (i.e., didn't receive absentee ballot, not registered in current location) » Bad weather conditions » Inconvenient hours, polling place or hours or lines too long » Other
Pair with data from other sources like:	» Voter turnout to identify percent of registered voters casting a ballot (request from municipality) » Location and hours of polling places to identify potential barriers to voting (available from the NH Secretary of State at https://app.sos.nh.gov/Public/Reports.aspx) » Number of public meeting attendees to identify engagement beyond voting (request from town planner)
Example question	**How are people engaging with the community?**
Survey questions	5. Have you ever worked on a community project, such as a one-day litter cleanup or [include one or more relevant examples]? » Yes » No

6. Have you ever worked with people in your community to fix or improve something in your neighborhood?

   » Yes

   » No

7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I know how to become involved and participate in problem solving in my community.

   » Strongly agree

   » Somewhat agree

   » Neither agree nor disagree

   » Somewhat disagree

   » Strongly disagree

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I feel like I matter to other people in my community.

   » Strongly agree

   » Somewhat agree

   » Neither agree nor disawgree

   » Somewhat disagree

   » Strongly disagree

9. How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live? Would you say: a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact, or no impact at all?

   » A big impact

   » A moderate impact

   » A small impact

   » No impact at all

	10. During 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? » Basically every day » A few times a week » A few times a month » Once a month » Less than once a month » Not at all
Pair with data from other sources like:	» Number of library card holders as a measure of community involvement (request data from public library) » Number of public events per month as a measure of community participation opportunities (request list from town recreation department, library, chamber of commerce, town Facebook page)
Example question	**How are people engaging politically? (beyond voting)**
Survey questions	11. Have you ever signed a petition? » Yes » No
	12. Have you ever attended a political meeting or rally? » Yes » No
	13. Have you ever participated in any demonstrations, protests, boycotts, or marches? » Yes » No
	14. How interested are you in politics and national affairs? » Very interested » Somewhat interested » Only slightly interested » Not at all interested

	15. During the past 12 months, did you contact or visit a public official—at any level of government—to express your opinion? » Yes » No
Example question	**How do people feel about living here?**
Survey questions	16. Do you expect to be living in your community five years from now? » Yes » No
	17. Would you move away from this neighborhood if you could? » Yes » No
	18. Overall, how would you rate your community as a place to live? » Excellent » Good » Only fair » Poor
	19. Do you think that your community will get better or worse as a place to live in the next 12 months, or will it stay the same? » Better » Stay the same » Worse
	20. How likely do you think it is that you may be the victim of a crime in the next 12 months? » Very likely » Likely » Neither/depends » Unlikely » Very unlikely

	21. If public officials asked everyone to conserve water or electricity because of some emergency, how likely is it that people in your community would cooperate? » Very likely » Likely » Neither/depends » Unlikely » Very unlikely
	22. How many years have you lived in your community? » Less than one year » One to five years » Six to ten years » Eleven to twenty years » More than twenty years » All my life
Pair with data from other sources like:	» Town housing sales data (request from County Registry of Deeds, town clerk, and/or tax collector) to identify extent of resident turnover » Rank of municipal property tax rate in state (available from the Department of Revenue Administration (https://www.revenue.nh.gov/mun-prop/municipal/property-tax-rates.htm) to consider push/pull factors influencing community connectedness
Example question	**How do people feel about community leadership?**
Survey question	23. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the people running my community don't really care much what happens to me. » Agree strongly » Agree somewhat » Neither/depends » Disagree somewhat » Disagree strongly

Pair with data from other sources like:	» Public meeting comments to identify challenges/opportunities (request from town planner) » Posts/comments on municipal social media page to identify challenges/opportunities
Example question	**How much do people tend to trust government?**
Survey questions	24. How much of the time do you think you can trust the *national* government to do what is right? » Just about always » Most of the time » Some of the time » Hardly ever
	25. How much of the time do you think you can trust the LOCAL government to do what is right? » Just about always » Most of the time » Some of the time » Hardly ever
Example question	**How much do people tend to trust others in their neighborhood?**
Survey question	26. Think about people in your neighborhood. Generally speaking, would you say that you can trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all? » Trust them a lot » Trust them some » Trust them only a little » Trust them not at all

YOU'VE ALREADY GOT INFORMATION! HOW TO EXPLORE EXISTING DATA ABOUT CIVIC HEALTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Goal: *This tool offers communities a menu of potential existing data sources that you may already have present at the local level that may help identify and understand local challenges and opportunities.*

Existing Data Sources

There are many existing data sources that are useful in understanding civic health in your community. Given the expensive and time consuming nature of collecting original data with a survey, it may be worthwhile to focus on using data that already exists. An additional advantage of existing data is that they are often more comprehensive. For example, a list of registered voters in a municipality is a complete list, whereas a small-scale survey can only tell you about the people who responded to the survey. Even if your community is conducting a survey, integrating existing data sources alongside survey results can provide more detail and context than a survey alone.

In the menu below, potential indicators are listed with their source and are rated on how easy they would be to find and use. Note that some are a few clicks away, while others would require a more substantial time investment and/or data analysis skills to obtain and use.

Menu of Potential Indicators and Data Sources

Section 1. Civic Engagement & Infrastructure

Indicator 1. Percent of Adults Registered to Vote

Required items Municipal population by age; voter registration list

Source: Census Bureau; Municipality

Easy to find? Yes; Varies by municipal record keeping policy, staff availability

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 2. Voter Turnout in Most Recent Election

Data source: Municipality

Easy to find? Not sure, depends on what municipality can share

Easy to use?   Not sure, depends on what municipality can share

Indicator 3. Location & Hours of Polling Places

Data source: NH Secretary of State (here)

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 4. Number of Polling Places Per Capita

Required items: Number of polling places; total population

Data source: NH Secretary of State (polling places); Census Bureau

Easy to find? Yes

Easy to use?   Yes, although calculations required

Indicator 5. Public Meeting Comments & Agendas

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   No: Challenging to analyze data

Indicator 6. Accessibility of Public Meetings

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   No: Challenging to analyze data

Indicator 7. Number of Public Meeting Attendees

Data source: Municipalities (town planner)

Easy to find?   Not sure, depends on if these data are collected

Easy to use?   Yes

Section 2. Community Resources

Indicator 8. Presence of Public Schools

Data source: NH Department of Education (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 9. Presence of Food Pantries

Data source: UNH Extension Food Access Map (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 10. Presence of Public Libraries

Data source: NH State Library (directory; map)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 11. Number of Library Card Holders

Data source: Local public library

Easy to find?   Not sure, depends on what data is available through the local library

Easy to use?   Not sure, depends on what data is available through the local library

Indicator 12. Presence of State Park(s)

Data source: NH State Parks (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 13. Presence of a State Park "Group-Use Area" or Pavilion

Data source: NH State Parks (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 14. Presence of Local Recreational Spaces

Data source: Municipality (recreation department)

Easy to find?   Depends

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 15. Offerings and Availability of Local Recreational Spaces (hours open, location, etc.)

Data source: Municipality (recreation department)

Easy to find?   Depends

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 16. Presence of Local Public Events

Data source: Municipality

Easy to find?   Depends

Easy to use?   Depends

Indicator 17. Presence of Town/Municipality Facebook Page

Data source: Facebook

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 18. Examining the Content of Town/Municipality Facebook Postings

Data source: Facebook

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   No: Challenging and time consuming to analyze data

Indicator 19. Presence of Town/Municipality Subreddit Page

Data source: Reddit

Easy to find?   Depends, may not exist

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 20. Examining the Content of Town/Municipality Reddit Postings

Data source: Reddit

Easy to find?   If subreddit exists, yes

Easy to use?   No: Challenging and time consuming to analyze data

Section 3. Community Needs

Indicator 21. Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility Rates

Data source: NH Dept of Education (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 22. Truancy

Data source: NH Dept of Education (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes, although not clear how they would be used

Indicator 23. Graduation Rates

Data source: NH Dept of Education (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 24. SNAP Enrollment

Data source: Through NH DHHS (likely not be available at municipal level)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 25. WIC Enrollment

Data source: Through NH DHHS (likely not available at municipal level)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 26. Identification of Unmet Need

Data source: Town welfare officer

Easy to find?   Varies

Easy to use?   Varies

Indicator 27. Presence of Homeless Shelter(s)

Data source: Town website (also searching Homeless Shelters Directory (here),
                 Shelterlist.com, etc.)

Easy to find?   Depends on what town website provides

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 28. Availability of Homeless Shelter(s)

Data source: Town website, shelter website (may need to call if details not available)

Easy to find?   Depends on what town website & shelter website provide

Easy to use?   No: Time consuming to analyze data

Indicator 29. Arrest Logs

Data source: NH State Police Justice Information Bureau, Criminal Records Unit;
                 individual municipalities

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes, although not clear how they would be used (perhaps could help
                 identify community challenges and track them over time)

Section 4. Other Community Characteristics & Regulations

Indicator 30. Property Tax Rates

Data source: NH Department of Revenue Administration (here)

Easy to find?   Yes

Easy to use?   Yes

Indicator 31. Proportion of Seasonal Residents/Vacant Homes

Data source: Maybe compare voter records (if available from town) with property tax records (if available from town or NH County Registers of Deeds)

Easy to find? No

Easy to use? No

Indicator 32. Estimated Resident Turnover

Data source: USPS change of address form data

Easy to find? Somewhat, data can be requested

Easy to use? No

Indicator 33. Minimum Lot Size [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities

Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 34. Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities

Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 35. Availability of Developer Incentives [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities

Easy to find? No: must sift through zoning documents

Easy to use? Yes

Indicator 36. Acres in Conservation Easements [zoning & planning]

Data source: Municipalities, National Conservation Easement Database (here)

Easy to find? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Easy to use? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Indicator 37. Landlords Who Accept Section 8

Data source: Municipalities (local housing authority)

Easy to find? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Easy to use? Depends on what municipalities have readily available

Indicator 38. Child Care Providers Who Accept Subsidies

Data source: NH Connections (here)

Easy to find? Somewhat—requires searching and reviewing each center's page

Easy to use? Yes

Taking Action

After collecting information about local civic health, you will likely have a lot of rich insights about how to improve things at the local level.

▸ If you conducted a survey, you may want to compare your findings to the *NH 2020 Civic Health Index* to identify similarities and differences with state trends.

▸ As you gather information, you are probably hearing a lot of good ideas of how to improve local civic health. Can you host a follow up event after collecting information to connect these good ideas to concrete actions? These actions might include changes in local policies, new programs, or experiments you want to try out to improve civic health.

▸ Do you want to establish a committee or staff person who is responsible for collecting civic health information over time, so you can track how your community is doing for the long-haul?

Conclusion

In this section, we have explored many ways you could collect information about local civic health to help you learn about your community and design interventions to improve civic life. These approaches include using existing data sources, running a community survey, facilitating community dialogues, interviewing local people, conducting a focus group for people with a shared experience or background, and Photovoice, where local people act as civic photojournalists. We don't expect you would use all of the above strategies to collect information, but we hope these are a useful list for you to choose from as you do your civic health work, or that these spark new ideas for you to learn more about your community!