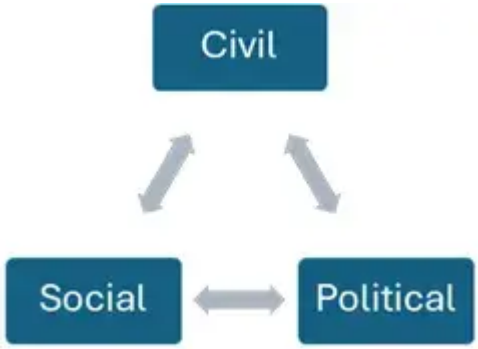
The Colorado Health Foundation™

Civic Engagement is for Everyone

If I asked you to define civic engagement, you'd probably respond with things like voting in elections or calling an elected official. Yes, those are two of the many ways you can be civically engaged. So, what does civic engagement mean anyway? Simply put, civic engagement is the action a community member takes to improve or benefit their community. There are many ways we can civically engage with elected officials, community and faith leaders, and our neighbors. Fostering civically engaged communities is the bedrock of democracy. And because civic engagement shapes the policies, systems and resources that impact daily life, it is directly tied to health and health equity—helping ensure that health and wellbeing are in reach for everyone.

There are three types of rights and responsibilities we all have as community members in a democratic society.



Civil Rights and Responsibilities

Our civil rights are those granted to us that provide liberty and freedom. Things like freedom of thought, speech, press, due process and religion. Our civil responsibilities are utilizing, protecting and advancing civil rights, for ourselves and our neighbors.

Political Rights and Responsibilities

Our political rights are those that allow us to participate in the political process. Things like voting, engaging with elected officials, providing public comment and running for public office. Our political responsibilities include exercising this political power.

Social Rights and Responsibilities

Our social rights are those that provide us with socioeconomic wellbeing. Things like education, healthcare and social services. Our social responsibilities are investing in the infrastructure of our social rights, for ourselves and for our neighbors.

No one form of rights or responsibilities is more important than the other and they each reinforce one another. Our civil rights give credence to our political and social rights, our political rights influence our civil and social rights, and our social rights are informed by our civil and political rights. When we put actions and behaviors behind our civil, political and social responsibilities as citizens of a community, that is civic engagement.

Civic Engagement Actions

With such a broad definition of civic engagement – the action a community member takes to improve or benefit their community – it’s safe to assume that in some shape or form you have been civically engaged in the past year. Have you:

- Voted in an election
- Attended a rally or protest
- Contacted an elected official
- Provided public comments on a bill or government policy
- Shared your story about how a policy decision influences your life
- Reached out to your neighbors
- Volunteered your time with a non-profit organization or cause you care about
- Worked at or served on a board of a non-profit organization
- Provided a direct service to a community (this includes educators and health care providers)
- Helped a neighbor
- Belong to a club, association, or team
- Signed a petition
- Conducted participatory and/or community-engaged research
- Participated in research
- Donated money or goods to a non-profit organization, political campaign, or cause you care about
- Visibly displayed your support of a civil, political, or social right on a t-shirt, hat, pin, button, or sticker
- Shared social media post about a civil, political, or social right you care about
- Participated in a community garden
- Educated yourself and/or others about a civil, political, or social right you care about

The list goes on. There's a lot of big and little actions we can take to practice our civil, political and social responsibilities that improve our communities. Not all our civic engagement has to be big or large-scale like running for elected office. In fact, lots of small actions within our local communities, like having conversations with our neighbors, build over time to have long-term, sustainable positive impacts in our communities. Even better, a lot of people taking small

actions in their communities will have an even bigger impact.

The time is always right to be civically engaged. Maybe some things on the list are common practice to you. If so, we challenge you to take on a new action you haven't tried before in the next six months. Maybe none of the actions on this list resonate with you, we challenge you to find a civically engaged activity to do in your community in the next six months.

The Colorado Health Foundation practices civic engagement everyday by investing in Colorado communities to advance health equity and racial justice. This includes grant-making and donations as well as through our policy and public discourse agenda – and our staff do even more in their own local communities.

Learn More

- How to support your community and get civically engaged in Colorado
- Civics for Colorado
- The Civic Engagement Primer
- Join or Die: A film on why you should join a club and why the fate of American depends on it
- Civic Education's Role in Advancing Health Equity for LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

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Blog

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