



CONNECTING PEOPLE. STRENGTHENING AMERICA.

A Civic Renewal Initiative of the National Conference on Citizenship

Civic life in America, constantly evolving, is poised for a new wave of growth. For decades, evidence has shown troubling disengagement from many spheres of civic life. Yet, civic engagement is bubbling to the surface of the front pages and front-lines of cities across the nation. Whether in the form of powerful protests, increased public dialogue about pressing social issues, a pointed dissatisfaction with the political process from all sides, battles over the privilege and definition of citizenship, or increases in new forms of online engagement, the rumbling nationwide is evident: now is the time for Americans to think deeply, act meaningfully, and talk openly with their fellow citizens about the future and health of our country. This is a time for civic renewal—a renewal that’s not just about politics, but about the heart and soul of our communities on issues like education, health care, public safety, and technology.

So how do we in the civic engagement community respond? How can we meet this moment in ways that inspire deep, diverse, sustainable civic participation in all its forms and from all segments of society—one that recognizes that different people and different communities have different concerns and different strengths? How can we ensure that new leaders are developed and best practices are shared? How do we ensure connections are formed between those who have long been committed to civic health and a wider coalition of energized citizens, representing diverse sectors and seeking creative methods and effective tools for community problem-solving?

Civic health is an essential component of vibrant communities, a strong democracy, and individual well-being. In order to disrupt trends of disengagement and meet this current moment in American society, an immediate and robust effort is needed that can renew our sense of shared values and responsibilities as American citizens—a renewal that is partly about personal responsibility and partly about collective opportunity. That effort will require the involvement of a broad-based consortium of public and private agencies and organizations dedicated to the cause. Leaders who understand the value of civic engagement and civic life as necessary components of community problem-solving efforts must broaden their scope of influence.

Building upon a long history of strengthening civic life in America, the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is launching a Civic Renewal Initiative. This effort builds upon a network of Civic Health Index (CHI) partners comprised of universities, nonprofits, foundations, and public officials who are leading civic renewal efforts at the community level. It expands NCoC’s reach to incorporate a range of partners focused on issues of concern including community and economic development, democratic process, equity, workforce development, youth development, health and wellness, and community renewal. Together we will examine civic engagement strategies that can aid in addressing our communities’ most pressing challenges and spark a civic renewal movement across the country. The state of civic life in America has been well documented over the past ten years in 76 city, state and

national CHI reports published by NCoC in cooperation with the Corporation for National and Community Service and collaborative teams at the community level. These CHI partnerships have changed the way governments go about their work, reintroduced civics to our classrooms, redirected investments to civic infrastructure, influenced national and local conversations about the importance of civic engagement, and bolstered a network of civic leaders across the country. These community partnerships which have produced CHI reports, the data represented, and the actions taken in response represent a treasure trove of information—a foundation upon which civic renewal efforts can be expanded.

NCoC is a congressionally chartered organization celebrating its 70th birthday in 2016. It is charged with the responsibility of harnessing the civic spirit in this country that was present following World War II and ensuring that that spirit continue. Early efforts had the support of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. One wonders what these gentleman would think if they were around to assess the state of the civic spirit present today.

Under the leadership of a committed board of directors who have ensured the financial viability of the organization, NCoC has hosted conferences since 1946 bringing together leaders in the civic engagement field to share experiences and challenge participants to be increasingly engaged.

Respecting the strong history of NCoC and its daunting charge, our work in 2016 is focused on expanding NCoC's reach to incorporate a broad consortium of public and private agencies and organizations including faith communities, educational institutions, media, and corporations in partnership with local communities and caring citizens. Civic health data combined with the experience and impact resulting from the work of CHI partners serves as the foundation.

Broadening impact requires the inclusion of non-traditional partners focused on issues of concern including community and economic development, equity, workforce development, youth development, public safety, health care, mental health, substance abuse, and community renewal, among others. There is growing evidence that civic participation directly and indirectly affects the outcomes in these fields. Our own economic research has shown a strong link between civic health and economic resilience. Current research also demonstrates the links between civic health and personal health and wellness, access to opportunity, functional democracy, and community vitality. CHI partners across the country are using civic data to inform initiatives in public health, economic development, public policy, and education.

This Civic Renewal Initiative welcomes all who are interested in utilizing civic engagement principles and practices to enhance their work. Connecting people for this purpose - strengthening America - is the goal.

We invite you to bring your experience, ideas, and networks to the conversation. See here for more information on opportunities to engage and contact CivicRenewal@NCoC.net for additional details.