

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Illinois Civic Health Index 2009* shows that Illinoisans are hurt by both economic recession and loss of trust in their state government. One in ten Illinoisans in the workforce are currently unemployed, and according to our survey, 26% of Illinoisans had trouble affording essentials such as food and medication, 12% experienced lay-offs, and 7% went through a foreclosure at one point during the past year. Reacting to the string of political scandals surrounding major players, Illinoisans showed significantly lower levels of trust toward their state government compared to national average.

These factors, an economic crisis and state-wide political scandals, have grave implications for Illinois' civic health. Our survey showed that 76% of Illinoisans, compared to 72% nationwide, cut back on time spent on volunteering, participating in groups and doing other civic activities in the past year. While cutting back on civic engagement is consistent with the national trend this year, our findings show that **Illinoisans have been cutting back on civic engagement for the past several years, and at a faster pace than others in the U.S.** Just a couple of years ago in 2006, Illinoisans were more likely to volunteer (29.9%) than national average (26.7%). But the latest findings show that they were significantly less likely to volunteer (24.9%) than national average (26.5). While the nation as a whole has been volunteering at a higher rate in the past three years, Illinoisans decreased their volunteering sharply.

Illinois has been astutely described as "leaderless" because of the major political scandals that plague Illinoisans at both state and community levels. Only 15% of Illinoisans said they believed the state government did the right thing most of the time, compared to 27% of nation as a whole. Furthermore, **Illinoisans' confidence in the state's civic traditions was among the lowest of all states.** The lack of trust in the state government seems to have a pervasive impact on their view of formal institutions. Many Illinoisans are reluctant to get involved in formal civic institutions such as local policy making or volunteering through organizations.

But not all is lost. **Illinoisans still maintain high levels of trust toward others' good intention and honesty on a personal level.** In fact, they may be looking for an outlet of their goodwill and desire to engage through less formal channels. Alternative forms of engagement, such as working with neighbors on a community problem, are on the rise.

Our survey also highlighted a lack of engagement and trust among Millennials in Illinois. They were less likely to volunteer, work with neighbors to solve problems, or attend public meetings where community issues are discussed than their peers nationwide. **While Millennials led older generations in volunteering rate nationwide, Millennials were the least likely to volunteer in Illinois.** Almost half of Illinois Millennials said that they had hardly any confidence that their state government will spend the federal stimulus money wisely. Illinois Millennials see a state government that has abused the public trust and may not feel compelled to contribute to a seemingly broken system. This is a major concern, as today's young people are the elected officials of tomorrow.

Although our findings from Illinois generally indicate that Illinoisans have been disappointed, frustrated and even disillusioned by the economic crisis and political scandals, **Illinoisans showed strong support for federal legislations that propel our nation's civic agenda forward.** They were particularly likely to support legislations that integrate civic engagement with education, such as providing tuition for service, requiring a new Civics test, and incorporating service learning as part of school curriculum. The enthusiasm toward educating the youth in civics may indeed reflect citizens' disappointment in their government and realization that they must educate students about the critical role of active citizenship in building an honest, ethical government. The McCormick Freedom Project and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition have coproduced *Civic Blueprint for Illinois High Schools* to provide useful guidelines for teaching active citizenship to their students.