

Civics for Adults

A Guide for Civics Content Providers

The CSIS Defending Democratic Institutions Team and the Annenberg Public Policy Center

SEPTEMBER 2022

THE ISSUE

This guide is focused on fostering greater understanding among adults of the nuts and bolts of our democratic republic and how individuals can and must hold institutions accountable and move us toward a more perfect union. Reinvigorating civics knowledge and civic skills has become a national and economic security imperative. The urgency requires reaching not just K-12 students but also adults. This guide is for civics experts and content providers developing or adapting civics resources to engage adults in their workplaces and their communities. The guide can also be used by businesses, government (including the military), and others seeking to provide civics knowledge and skills to employees, partners, and associates.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy depends upon informed and engaged citizens. The American people are responsible for the government and other democratic institutions, not the other way around, and for this duty, it is essential that Americans are civically informed. To ensure the long-term health and security of this democracy, Americans need to rediscover shared values, relearn the fundamentals of the U.S. constitutional republic, and re-form a sense of civic identity and commitment in communities across the nation.

Americans today live in one of the most polarized eras in our nation's history. Fundamental institutions of democracy—including elections, the presidency, the courts and the justice system, Congress, and state and local governments—have been challenged, and some individuals have been subjected to threats and even violent attack. Divisiveness has been accelerated by misinformation and disinformation from foreign and domestic actors that spread at lightning speed. Long-held, once-cherished norms have been endangered. Unsurprisingly, polls show that many Americans are losing faith in U.S. **institutions**

of governance, their fellow Americans, and perhaps in democracy itself. Too many citizens believe **violence against the government** may be the only solution.

To ensure the long-term health and security of this democracy, Americans need to rediscover shared values, relearn the fundamentals of the U.S. constitutional republic, and re-form a sense of civic identity and commitment in communities across the nation.

Democracy is not perfect. Since the founding of our republic, its implementation often has failed to live up to our aspirations. Yet, the promise of democracy is not current perfection but the capacity to change, to move toward a more perfect union—if we, the people, are informed and engaged agents of that change. The problem is that civics education has been undervalued and

under-resourced for decades, resulting in a **lack of civics knowledge and civic skills** that has left many Americans ill-equipped to fill this essential role. Too many Americans believe that the system is irrevocably broken and that the individual is powerless to bring about change.

Civics knowledge is “a fundamental understanding of the structure of government and the processes by which government passes laws and makes policies.”

Civic skills include “the abilities necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens in a democracy.”

Over the past few months, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) have been engaged in a project looking at how civic skills, competencies, and dispositions can be enhanced across the country. A series of roundtables and interviews with bipartisan experts from the national security, business, and the larger education and civics communities reinforced the urgent need to reach adults.¹ Furthermore, the research team confirmed that employers are a **particularly trusted source and are well positioned** to maximize involvement with and the reach and impact of workplace-based, community-focused civics conversations and initiatives.² Moreover, well-implemented activities can forge stronger bonds within a workforce and provide workers with a clearer sense of how they can impact the world around them through civil discourse and informed engagement.

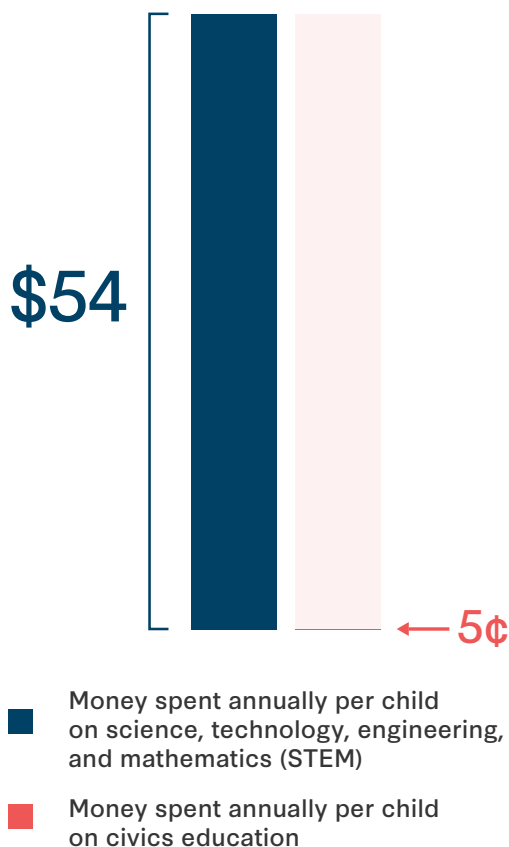
The primary objective of this guide is to help **civics experts** and **content providers** develop resources for business, government, and higher education leaders so that they can work within their communities to enhance understanding and improve the functioning of democratic institutions, particularly from the local level. Specifically, it presents some ideas on how to identify existing resources that can be used with adults and how to adapt civics materials originally conceived for use in schools.

WHY ADULTS?

For decades, civics education has been deprioritized in schools across the country. According to **one recent estimate**, the federal government spends \$54 annually

per school child on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and only 5 cents per student on civic education. The consequence is declining levels of civic knowledge and awareness among K-12 students. But while it is important to focus on growing civics programs for school-aged Americans, we cannot wait for the return on future investments in K-12 education. We have an urgent need today for adults to be better informed and constructively engaged.

Figure 1: Annual Spending on STEM vs. Civics



Source: “Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education: Actions Needed to Better Assess the Federal Investment,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, March 23, 2018, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-290>.

President Ronald Reagan once **noted**, “The primary objective of U.S. foreign and security policy is to protect the integrity of our democratic institutions . . . embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.” The backdrop for President Reagan’s admonition included seven major wars in a little more than a century, the prolonged tension of the Cold War, the specter of nuclear holocaust, and the rise of transnational terrorism at home and abroad. To many citizens today, it might appear that threats to U.S. institutions have occurred only rarely. Yet history shows that, beyond the national security threats

¹ See Appendix A.

² Report authors from the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

just mentioned, the republic and its institutions have been tested often, such as through the cauldron of slavery and a bloody civil war, labor disputes that sometimes led to violence, attacks on state and local governments, and an ongoing struggle for civil rights. Today, deep divisions, particularly around the legitimacy of elections, are fueled by disinformation and misinformation that exacerbate the growing mistrust of government and democracy.

Civics education is one of the most effective and comprehensive ways to **build public resilience** against these threats.

The undermining of democratic institutions also presents problems for long-term economic security. Allan Zaremborg, former president and CEO of CalChamber, a human resources and business advocacy group, **said it best**: “Our form of democracy—which far too many people take for granted—is essential to an economy built on innovation and entrepreneurship. Democracy promotes innovation because it promotes freedom to succeed, freedom to fail and freedom to realize one’s dreams.”

Encouragingly, research today suggests that civics lessons or the promotion of civic activities can positively impact a company’s bottom line. **Civic Alliance**—a coalition of over 1,250 leading companies that are committed to civic engagement—has outlined some of

these findings in its recently published **Corporate Civic Playbook**. It identifies four primary ways that civics directly helps a company’s bottom line:

1. Supporting company culture;
2. Deepening engagement (including employee morale and sense of purpose);
3. Increasing consumer loyalty; and
4. Building equitable communities.

The national security community has a vested interest in making sure its employees are civically knowledgeable and disposed to constructive engagement. This project convened national security experts who currently or formerly served in the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Justice as well as the U.S. intelligence community. While there were varied ideas about what *type* of activities might be most applicable to their constituencies, the experts agreed that individuals who take the oath to protect the country are given extraordinary authorities and capabilities to defend the nation and uphold the Constitution and have a special obligation to maintain the public’s trust. Ensuring that they fully understand the constitutional basis for these powers and the norms that have developed to maintain the public’s trust is critical.

Although not as robust as it might be, K-12 civics in America has an infrastructure to involve students in civic skill

Figure 2: How Civics Education Can Address the Threat of Disinformation



Source: Authors’ own research and analysis.

building, supported by an even larger network of civics organizations. At present, there is not a similarly robust infrastructure to support adults who want to engage in civic skill building and activities in a meaningful way within their communities. The APPC and CSIS are hopeful that this guide will help the civics community develop and adapt materials specifically for adult audiences.

CULTIVATING CIVIC SKILLS

Civics knowledge alone is insufficient; it must be tied to civic skills that can yield some sort of positive outcome for institutions and communities. For example, in addition to individuals naming the three branches of government, they also need to know how they can hold institutions at the local, state, and federal levels accountable and bring about desired change. As highlighted by one of the participating experts, adults are more receptive and willing to internalize new material if there is a “skills focus” as opposed to just a “content focus.” The convened experts noted several primary skills that should be cultivated through civic activities for adults.

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CIVIL DISCOURSE

During these polarized times, there is a need for resources that can help promote civil discourse in the workplace. In a 2019 report, [*The Business Case for Civic Education*](#), produced for the *Harvard Business Review*, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation highlighted the value of promoting civility in the workplace as essential for serving diverse customer bases effectively. Civil discourse skills can also contribute to a more cohesive and effective workforce. It is important to identify

ways that individuals can explore competing ideas and have disagreements while retaining mutual respect and protecting the quality of their work. Conversations about shared values or shared aspirations for government (e.g., government should treat everyone fairly regardless of wealth or power) can help establish some common ground upon which to build through civil discourse. As one expert pointed out, “democracy is not just about wanting to win but wanting to solve”; providing opportunities to nurture civil discourse is essential to accomplish that mission.

Examples of Potential Resources

- [How to Teach Controversial Topics and Civil Debate](#) – Civics Renewal Network Partners
- [Civil Discourse Resources](#) – University of California
- [The Better Arguments Project](#) – Aspen Institute
- [Emotional Intelligence & Active Listening Skill Building Workshops](#) – Citizen Discourse
- [Story Recordings](#) – StoryCorps

MEDIA LITERACY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Many Civics Renewal Network partners, media organizations, and other civically minded groups understand the importance of [connecting civics education with some form of media literacy](#) and critical-thinking training. Engaging with traditional and social media is part of everyday life. The more civics providers can build these concepts into their content, the greater the likelihood that the United States can grow societal resilience against a number of threats intended to divide and antagonize the general public (see [CRAAP Test](#)).

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Individuals need to feel ownership of their work and concern for the future successes of their institutions and communities. It is largely from this inherent sense of duty that individuals can consistently act with integrity to make decisions that benefit the long-term health of democracy. We as Americans need to recommit to something larger than ourselves as a fundamental tenet of the self-governance that is at the heart of our democratic republic.

Examples of Potential Resources

- **Civics Advocacy Tool Kit** – Civics Renewal Network Partners
- **Civic Engagement Resources** – Civics Renewal Network Partners
- **Civic Responsibility Resources** – Civics Renewal Network Partners

PRIORITY CIVICS CONCEPT

Dictionaries say that civics involves not only the study of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship but also the study of how government works. But citizens tend to know about their rights (or at least think they do) and the basics of participation in a democracy (e.g., voting in elections, serving on juries). Knowing *how* the government works is far more challenging.

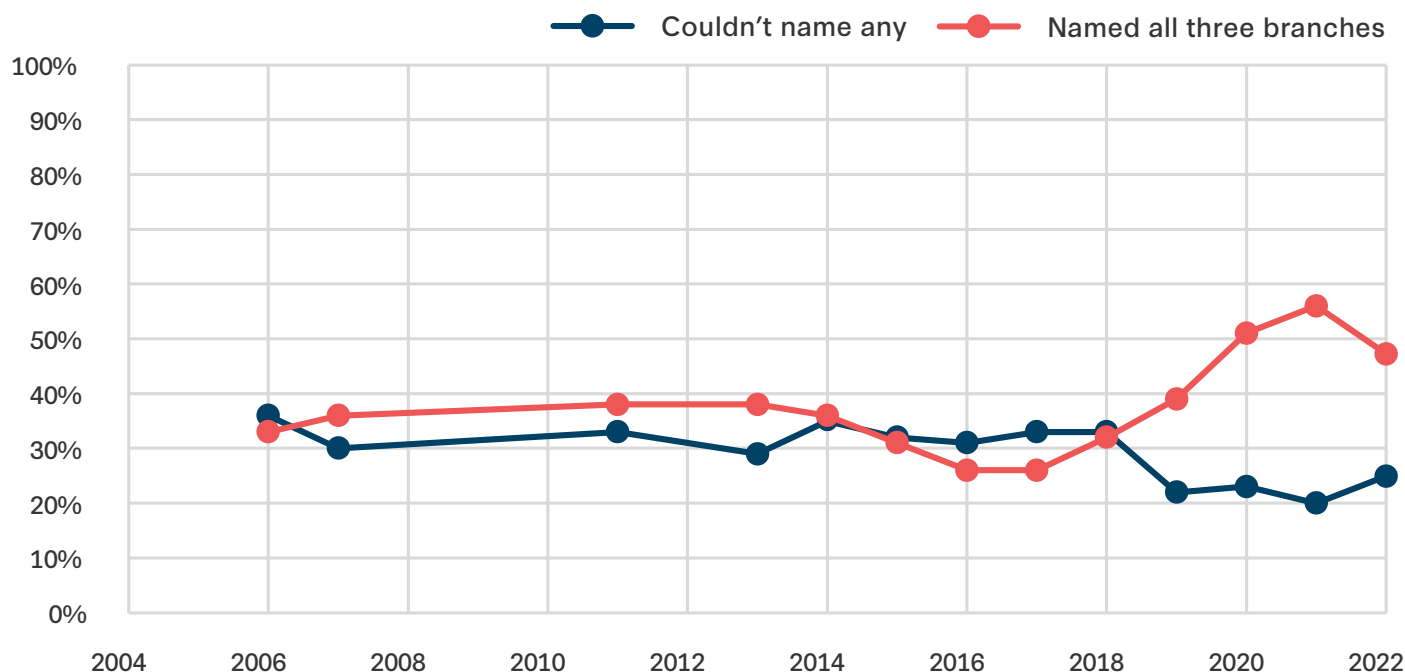
Given the limited amount of time that most adults can devote to civic skill building and activities, the research team and consulted experts believe the following topics should be prioritized when adapting materials.

SEPARATION OF POWERS AND FEDERALISM

Derived from English common law and influenced heavily by Continental European systems and their architects, the U.S. Constitution is at once refreshingly brief and simple in its design but also complex and at times contentious in its implementation. The framers, fresh from the experiences of the Continental Congress and Articles of Confederation, designed a national government with three main component parts:

- **The legislature:** This includes the U.S. Congress, composed of a Senate, with equal representation for each state, and a House of Representatives, where representation is based on population.
- **The executive:** This includes a powerful and independent president elected by the people to protect national security interests and to ensure the laws are faithfully executed.
- **The judiciary:** This includes the Supreme Court as well as lower federal courts created later by Congress. In *The Federalist* No. 78, Alexander Hamilton famously regarded the courts as “the least dangerous” branch because judges have “no influence over either the sword or the

Figure 3: Percentage of People Who Can Name the Three Branches of Government, 2004–2022



"Higher proportions of the public have a foundational awareness of the three branches and the protections in the First Amendment . . . but this knowledge appears to have been purchased at a real cost. It was a contentious year in which the branches of government were stress-tested."

– DIRECTOR, ANNENBERG PUBLIC POLICY CENTER

Source: Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey (August 2–13, 2022, and prior years) available at “Americans’ Civics Knowledge Drops on First Amendment and Branches of Government,” Annenberg Public Policy Center, September 13, 2022, <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-drops-on-first-amendment-and-branches-of-government/>.

purse.” Yet, court decisions can have a significant impact on people’s lives, whether resolving individual factual disputes or interpreting the Constitution for the entire nation. Of course, the courts can provide individuals with a remedy against overreach or wrongdoing by the other branches of government and can play an important role in protecting minorities.

The U.S. federal system—the division of governmental powers and responsibilities between the federal government and the states—was achieved as a political compromise and, for the most part, is not spelled out. Instead, the compromise arrangement allowed for the U.S. federal system to take shape and be tested over time. Throughout U.S. history, balance of power and federalism issues have found their way to the Supreme Court, resulting in decisions that have, for extended periods of time, resolved issues grounded in the uncertainties left unaddressed by the founding documents. In the process, the court has been forced to apply constitutionally outlined principles to a government that is vastly different in character and size from that envisioned by the Constitution’s framers.

The Constitution was drafted as a **document** intended to address pragmatic problems relating to the size and scope of the American government and has been adapted over time to address current contexts. However, polls that show a decline in basic civics literacy demonstrate that a concerning number of Americans do not know the basics of the Constitution and, by extension, its practical use in everyday interactions. Civics materials for adults should include historical and contemporary context to the following questions:

- What is the relevance of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence today? What are their practical implications?
- Why are there three branches of the federal government, how do they differ, and how do they relate to each other? How is the power of each branch limited?
- Did the founders give modern Americans enough tools to deal with today’s problems?
- What is the source of the powers of state and local governments? What are their powers, and what is their relationship with the federal government?

Examples of Potential Resources

- **Constitution Day Toolkit** – Civics Renewal Network Partners
- **U.S. Government & Civics** – Khan Academy

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

In keeping with the theme of balanced and separated powers, experts consulted for this project noted the need for more resources explaining the rationale for the separation between federal and local governments *and* between the various government entities at the state and local levels. Individuals feel frustrated when they believe their voices are not being heard, but a large part of being heard involves people raising concerns to the appropriate offices and levels of government.

Civics content providers should consider prioritizing materials that answer the following:

- Why does the United States have a federal system, and what values does a federal system further?
- Why and how do state and local governments keep powers “close to the people?”
- What principles should guide determinations about which issues should be addressed at the federal or national level versus the state or local ones?

Additionally, regional civics groups should adapt materials that convey relevant concepts about a specific state or district’s government structure:

- How is the state or local government structured?
- Which positions are appointed by state leadership and which are elected? How does this differ from other states’ models?
- What is the role of political parties in the state? How do political parties influence dynamics and processes in different states?
- How can an individual or organization contact the appropriate levels of government to address a specific issue?

In addition to creating materials for adults that specifically focus on the role of state and local governments, larger civics organizations might consider partnering with local governments or smaller civics groups to create a database of region-specific resources that can be easily accessed by interested employers (see, for example, the National Center for State Courts’ “**Civics Education Resource Guide**”).³

3 Voluntary association of individuals committed to improving conditions in their community; or for a specific sector of society (e.g., veterans, youth, elders, minority populations).

FIDELITY TO THE RULE OF LAW

The U.S. system was carefully and intentionally created to be governed by the “**rule of law**”: a system in which all citizens and institutions are “accountable to laws that are: Publicly promulgated[,], Equally enforced[,], Independently adjudicated[,], And consistent with international human rights principles.” This stands in contrast to a “**rule by law**” society, in which the law is a tool employed by the elite to enhance political or economic power. The former requires an active commitment by all members and institutions in a society to abide by agreed-upon laws and ensure that no one is above the law. Protecting the balance requires that individuals not only understand what a “rule of law” society is but also exercise responsible ways to create constructive change within the society.

Examples of Potential Resources

- **Rule of Law** – American Bar Association
- **Rule of Law Index** – World Justice Project
- **The Engine Room of Democracy (podcast)** – CSIS
- **Rule of Law Resources** – Civics Renewal Network Partners

THE ROLE OF “YOUR” ORGANIZATION IN A DEMOCRACY

How does someone’s work contribute to a democracy, and why is it important that individuals (and the organizations they affiliate with) operate with high levels of integrity and civic responsibility? This area of activity likely will require greater time and resources since different industries may require different types of civics materials and engagement.

For instance, the CSIS team has **previously argued** that civics instruction can be used to develop more purposeful science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) curricula that provide “students with critical thinking tools and frameworks that will enable them to be civically conscious individuals leading science or tech-related organizations.” Similar arguments can be made for nearly all other sectors (see, for example, the Policy Circle’s “**Business Guide to Civic Engagement**” and Brad Smith’s *Tools and Weapons: The Promise and the Peril of the Digital Age*).

The national security community in particular needs more resources that go beyond basic civics and workplace discussions about what it means to take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution.

PEDAGOGY: WHAT ARE WE ALLOWED TO SAY?

Unfortunately, there are a number of people who do not know what “civics” or “civics education” actually means, or operate with vastly different understandings and assumptions about what “civics” entails supported by data collected by the **Civic Language Perceptions Project** at the Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement. The project found that certain common civics terms and phrases poll better with some groups more than others. For example, 74 percent of polled Democrats view the word “democracy” positively, compared to 58 percent of Republicans. These positive and negative associations are also distinguishable by religion, socioeconomic status, race, age, and gender.

Some studies indicate that some individuals do not think it is good that the United States has an independent judiciary because the word “independent” conjures an image of a runaway court that does not have proper oversight. That project started referring to the courts as “fair and impartial” rather than “independent.”

For civics content providers, is it important to use traditional terms and ensure that people are given proper history and context to internalize what those words and phrases actually mean? Or, given today’s heightened political tensions, is it more important that ideas are conveyed, even if that means developing a new vocabulary to convey older concepts?

Despite the varying interpretations of words such as “civics” and “civic engagement,” recent polls show that a significant number of Americans—Republicans and Democrats—agree that civics education is important for growing a sense of national identity.

(See Figure 4: Bipartisan Support for Civics [Frank Lutz Poll, 2020])

Figure 4: Bipartisan Support for Civics (Frank Lutz Poll, 2020)

| What would have the MOST positive and meaningful impact on strengthening the American identity? | | DEMOCRATS | REPUBLICANS |
|--|--|-----------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Civic Education for Students in K-12 | | 56% | 56% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A Year of National Service <small>(e.g., Peace Corps, Teaching, Serving Needy Communities, Military Service)</small> | | 29% | 38% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less Money in Politics | | 38% | 30% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easier Access to Voting | | 40% | 9% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stricter Regulation of Social Media | | 11% | 25% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More Participation in Religious Activities | | 13% | 35% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ranked-Choice Voting | | 12% | 7% |

Note: For more information on the survey, please visit: <https://medium.com/civxnow/majority-of-americans-see-k-12-civic-education-as-the-best-solution-8e444a70352b>.
Source: Adapted from “Civic education has massive cross-partisan appeal as a solution to what ails our democracy,” CivXNow, <https://civxnow.org/sites/default/files/resources/CivXNow%20infographic%20-%20Luntz%20polling%20-%20FINAL.pdf>.

- What does it mean that the military should be an apolitical institution, both in perception and reality? And why is this so important?
- Why is there **civilian control of the military**?
- What is the domestic role of the military and other national security institutions? How does this role differ from their role(s) abroad?
- What are the checks in place to ensure national security institutions operate with high levels of integrity?

The civics community should consider working closely with partners that have studied issues such as the civil-military divide, domestic intelligence and military operations, and national security agencies’ coordination with state and local authorities—to develop resources and activities for workforce discussions and shorter modules for **individual employees**. The civics community might also consider more closely partnering with military service associations and active veterans organizations on such efforts.

CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVELY CONVEYING CIVICS CONCEPTS

There are a few reasons why educational engagement in the workplace, and civic skill building in particular, may be difficult for adult audiences. First, it may be difficult

to convince employers, let alone the larger workforce, that civics is something that needs to be prioritized as a workplace activity. Although there is a **growing bipartisan belief** that improving civics knowledge and skills is essential, few people think that they personally are in need of either. If an employer is agreeable to hosting a civics program for its workforce, it is highly unlikely that more than a few hours, if that, can be set aside for these types of activities, and employees will likely have a choice about whether or not to participate.

Second, effective engagement will require striking an appropriate balance between instruction, conversation, and engagement. It is **not reasonable to assume** that all individuals in the workplace are operating with the same levels of prior civics knowledge or skill. Additionally, individuals in a workplace setting might be coming from vastly different cultural or educational backgrounds. However, too much instruction and not enough time allocated for discussion and feedback, as well as hands-on activities focused on solving real problems, risks alienating individuals, decreasing employee engagement, and, by extension, reducing the efficacy of the training.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges facing such efforts is that civics, at all levels, can be construed as a “political”

activity, even when handled in a nonpartisan way. At the K-12 levels, teachers and administrators could benefit from more resources and training. At higher levels, companies may worry that certain discussions will lead to backlash from within the company and their client base. As one expert astutely pointed out, since communication is not about how a message is delivered but how that message is received, it is essential that civics programs are aware of factors driving perceptions and make adjustments as needed.

It is essential that the civics community develop materials that convey information in a time- and cost-effective manner that is scrupulously nonpartisan.

CONVEYING CIVICS AND CIVIC SKILLS TO ADULTS EFFECTIVELY

Malcolm Knowles, an educator who is considered the father of andragogy, or the art and science of teaching adults, notes that adult learners are a unique demographic characterized by the following qualities (summarized from Knowles et al., [The Adult Learner](#)):

- Adults are self-directed and want some control over their learning;
- Adults relate previous knowledge and life experience to new information;
- Adults are most interested in learning that has an immediate impact on their personal lives or careers;
- Adults are problem-oriented and prefer learning that will help them solve real-world problems;
- Adults are internally rather than externally motivated, meaning motivation comes from within (e.g., interests, goals, and values) instead of from external forces (e.g., deadlines, parents, and teachers); and
- Adults have a “need-to-know” mindset, meaning they want to know how specific learning is important to their organization and themselves before participating.

This school of thought closely tracks with opportunities for effective civics instruction identified by the convened experts. The following recommendations are key steps and considerations that these experts believed should be prioritized when teaching civics to adults.

IDENTIFY THE VALUE TO THE ORGANIZATION OR MISSION

Before adapting materials, it is important to think through the practical “so what” of each resource. For which industry

is it intended? What identified need will it directly address? Is it apparent from the proposed instructional materials that the resource will both instill civics principles and serve a business or mission-critical outcome? Defining and clearly articulating any [learning outcomes](#) will improve the effectiveness of proposed activities.

IDENTIFY THE VALUE TO THE INDIVIDUAL (CONCEPTS VS. SKILLS)

When teaching about democratic processes, specific attention should be given to not only teaching about how an individual can get involved but also why it is in their personal best interest to do so. This could mean a workplace discussion on why it is in the individual’s interest to work for the betterment of their community and all those within it. Unlike children who are accustomed to sitting through lessons as a part of their daily schooling, adults need to see a direct connection between instructional materials and their daily lives. As a result, the civics community needs to clearly communicate practical benefits to the individual.

Some of the national security experts interviewed for this report saw particular value in activities or discussions about what it means to work in an apolitical institution while simultaneously being politically active in one’s personal life.

WORK WITHIN EXISTING CONSTRUCTS

For some organizations, a civics conversation might be as short as a one-hour lunch discussion. To maximize the effectiveness of proposed programs, it would be helpful to develop activities around programs that already exist at the company. For instance, [in response to the Byrd amendment](#), most federal government departments and agencies provide civics materials to their workforces on Constitution Day. However, most of these generic materials do not engage the larger workforce. One thing the civics community can do is provide tailored civics materials to distribute on or around Constitution Day alongside the pre-existing materials.

It is important that the civics community works closely with companies and organizations to ensure that training materials build in opportunities for individual accountability (e.g., assign specific roles or duties and conduct individual assessments). If not, the materials can easily become a box-checking exercise, and individuals will not actually internalize lessons from them.

Content providers should also be prepared to meet employers where they are, recognizing that some business leaders will lean more fully into the importance of civics.

For example, a [recent study](#) conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that younger employers (under 40) across different metrics seem to place a significantly higher value on civics-related activities and experience than older employers (over 40).

DEVELOP NARRATIVES

It is important to build out case studies that can be used to convey key topics or launch a workplace conversation. As one of the interviewed experts noted, “If you have the story, then you have the disposition. If you have the disposition, you have the drive to create change.” But in developing narratives, it is important to ensure that the examples resonate well with the workforce and leave room for reasonable pushback. Civics education should speak to individuals’ lived experiences, and the selected narratives should facilitate conversations about both the benefits and shortcomings of current systems and processes.

TEACH ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

Just as it is useful to construct civics activities and instructional materials that invite discussions about lived experiences, convened participants noted that it is important for civics lessons to teach about alternatives to American systems and processes, including other forms of government, other ways of separating levels of power, and other ways of preserving and maintaining the rights and liberties of individuals. It is also important to contrast authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government with democracies to provide context for adults to assess and better appreciate the advantages of the carefully created U.S. system.

Civics education should speak to individuals’ lived experiences, and the selected narratives should facilitate conversations about both the benefits and shortcomings of current systems and processes.

CREATE MATERIALS FOR “DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS”

While materials [exist](#) in the high school context, it is worth exploring opportunities to build similar materials for adults and add topics suited to a more mature audience. It is worth noting that while debating and discussing

contentious issues might be of most interest and could yield strong engagement from the workforce, these are also the conversations that, if not implemented carefully and with the right type of civil debate training materials, could create conflict at the workplace. Starting with exercises related to civil discourse, as noted above, will be essential.

PROMOTE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Effective materials should include some sort of active and experiential component, such as addressing real problems in the community through case studies, simulations, or field trips. The convened experts were clear that in order to retain material, it is important that employees be active participants. This can also be done by gamifying civics content for adults.

PRIORITIZE REACHABLE BENCHMARKS

Businesses and organizations operate at different levels of political engagement. Some prioritize election-related “[get out the vote](#)” efforts; others encourage civic engagement by compensating employees for time spent on jury duty. It would be helpful if the civics community would provide materials to make these civic opportunities a teaching moment for both participants in the activity and their colleagues. They might also provide a list of other concrete benchmarks and activities employers can prioritize to help in their journeys toward growing a more civically conscious workforce (see “[The Democracy 76](#)” for ideas).

(See Figure 5: Reachable Benchmarks)

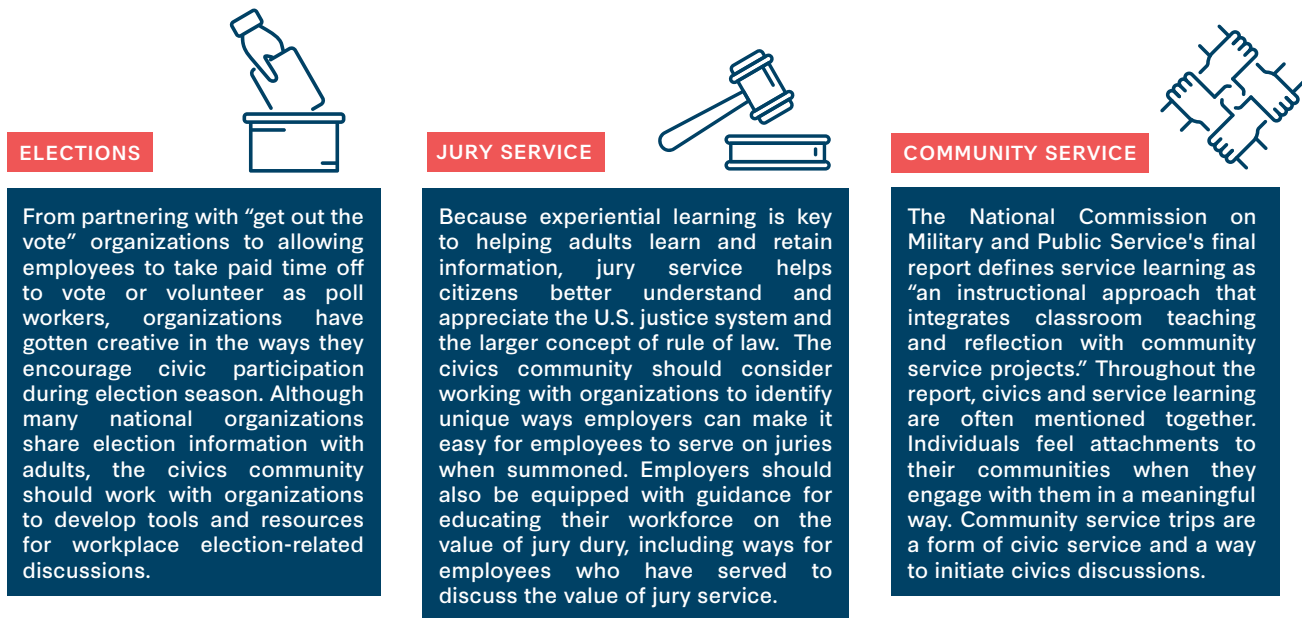
MANAGE QUALITY

Well-intentioned civics activities that are prematurely rolled out or led by inexperienced facilitators can backfire. For example, in 2021, when the Department of Defense quickly put together a [stand down and accompanying training](#) centered on the meaning of the oath of office. Reviews were mixed. Feedback indicated that the effort would have benefited from trained experts who could effectively lead difficult discussions. Providing training modules or “train the trainers” sessions for volunteer discussion facilitators will help organizations host meaningful discussions.

BE CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT ABOUT NEXT STEPS

It is one thing to mobilize a civically engaged workforce. It is another to manage an active and engaged workforce. First, employers should be clear with their workforce about what the intended objectives are coming out of any civics activities.

Figure 5: Reachable Benchmarks



Source: Authors' own research and analysis; U.S. National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve: The Final Report of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service* (U.S. National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, March 2020).

Employers also should communicate best practices for civic engagement.

For a list of examples on ways to engage your workforce, please see Appendix C. Please also see Appendix D to see how you can join the “Civics at Work” initiative.

MOVING FORWARD

In addition to adapting existing materials, there are long-term efforts that civics practitioners and researchers can engage in to encourage businesses, departments, agencies, and other adult education centers to prioritize civics programs.

- **Develop metrics and quantitative data.** Qualitative researchers have positively correlated civics literacy with beneficial outcomes for society. Many organizations are not convinced that their workforce is particularly deficient when it comes to civics knowledge and skills. Pre- and post- instruction surveys developed by civics experts would be helpful in assessing the proficiency of employees and the outcomes of civics education and engagement.
- **Reach the larger adult population.** While it is easier to reach adults in large corporations or government agencies, many Americans work for small- to medium-sized businesses. Those individuals may be able to be reached through local chambers, small business organizations, community colleges and trade schools,

the local court system, local bar associations, or local media outlets. There are a number of local touchpoints, but identifying opportunities to scale any of these efforts across the country should be a long-term priority.

- **Identify content gaps in civics instruction for adults.** Much like the military and national security content identified earlier in this guide, there might be fields in need of more specialized materials to address their workforce, such as the healthcare industry or state and local law enforcement.

“We the people” are the shareholders of democracy and, as such, its agents of self-renewal. When Benjamin Franklin left the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, a passerby asked, “Well, doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin replied: “A republic, if you can keep it.” Franklin understood from the founding of the nation that its survival would depend on the people. This government of, by, and for the people depends on informed and engaged citizens. That prerequisite can only be achieved if we take the time to understand how our government works—and sometimes does not work—and how we, as individuals and groups, can hold institutions accountable and peacefully bring about needed change. This is not just a task for students but for all of us. ■

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APPENDIX A: CONTRIBUTING EXPERTS

The authors would like to extend their gratitude for the insights and feedback provided by the experts who took part in the roundtable discussions or participated in expert interviews.

The listed experts participated in their individual capacities, and neither their comments, nor this report's findings and recommendations, necessarily reflect the positions of their respective organizations, departments, or agencies.

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APPENDIX B: IDENTIFIED CIVICS CONTENT PROVIDERS AND RESEARCHERS

BUSINESS COALITIONS

- **Business Forward**
- **Business Roundtable**
- **Civic Alliance**
- **U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

CIVICS COALITIONS

- **Civics Renewal Network** – content providers
- **CivXNow Coalition** – advocacy support

COURTS AND THE RULE OF LAW

In addition to those on the Civics Renewal Network partners list:

- **Federal Judicial Center**
- **National Center for State Courts**
- **Rule of Law Index** – World Justice Project

THINK TANKS AND UNIVERSITY CENTERS

In addition to those on the Civics Renewal Network partners list:

- **Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement** (CIRCLE) – Tufts University
- **Citizenship & American Identity** – Aspen Institute
- **Civic Engagement Research Group** (CERG) – University of California, Riverside
- **Democratic Knowledge Project** – Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, Harvard University
- **School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership** (SCETL) – Arizona State University
- **Center for Ethics and Rule of Law** – University of Pennsylvania

APPENDIX C: BEST PRACTICES AND IDEAS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The authors hope business, government, and higher education leaders will engage with their employees and students using activities such as the ones listed below. Civics content providers should think about which resources might best support these types of activities.

INTERNAL WORKFORCE ACTIVITIES

| Idea | Description |
|--|---|
| Monthly or Biweekly Discussion Lunches | Companies could hold regular lunches for employees to discuss how to work with government to address real needs in the community (perhaps with community leaders or other speakers, as noted below). The civics community might consider developing templates, resources, and discussion guides for these lunchtime conversations. |
| Tabletop Exercises | From Covid-19 regulations to Supreme Court decisions, there is a number of scenarios that would make excellent tabletop exercises for adults. How do you voice dissent? Where do you go to address the issue? What checks are in place to maintain a balance of power? |
| Internal Employee Civics Database | Create an internal employee portal with civics resources and discussion topics. |
| Civics Competitions | Competitions either within an organization or between organizations might be a fun way to incentivize employees to study up on civics concepts. The civics community can look to competitions for K-12 students and update them as needed to engage older audiences. Examples include naturalization test trivia or the U.S. Chamber Foundation's National Civics Bee . |
| CEO/Leadership Engagement | Fireside chats with organization leaders or small group meetings might be ways to both talk about the importance of civics while marrying those ideas with company missions and policy. The civics community can create sample questions that leaders can consider answering during their presentations so that they are personable and instructive. |
| Community Leaders Speaker Series | Local leaders such as judges and elected officials can be brought in to speak with the larger workforce. The civics community can help identify a list of local leaders who would be amenable to these conversations and be well versed in civics skills of interest to the workforce. |
| Field Trips | Field trips to local courts and statehouses might provide an opportunity for employees to bond outside of the office environment. |
| Civics Surveys | To help organizations assess where their employees currently stand with regard to civics literacy, civics groups should work with organization leaders to develop pre- and post- instruction surveys, such as the Annenberg Public Policy Center's Annual Constitution Day Surveys . |
| Civics Week | Similar to an employee appreciation week, companies can plan activities and discussions that incentivize employees to get involved in their communities. |

EXTERNAL WORKFORCE ACTIVITIES

| Idea | Description |
|--|--|
| Civics in a Box | Some individuals in the business community have asked if there are “civics in a box” activities that they can give to employees who can then teach civics outside of work, such as at local schools, community centers, and religious institutions. Basic training or “civics in a box” activities would be helpful for educating interested volunteers. |
| Career Day Activities | Employers can partner with local schools, youth groups, and other organizations and have employees give presentations about what their job is, why they think democracy is important, and how their work contributes to the larger community. |
| Sponsored Competitions for Local Youth | Organizations can host competitions in collaboration with civics groups. Employees can volunteer to serve in roles such as judges or reviewers. Some examples include the National Center for State Courts’ annual essay contest , the U.S. Chamber Foundation’s National Civics Bee , or Baylor University’s iEngage Shark Tank-style competition to address community problems. |
| Partner Agreements | An organization can require civics training for workforces from institutions that they partner with, as Apple has done. |
| Service Activities | Service learning and civics learning are distinct. However, engaging in service activities can help promote and instill a greater sense of civic awareness and responsibility. Building on insights from a recent report from the National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, the civics community might identify some examples of specific activities that directly correspond to a desired civic skill. |
| Content Creation | Some industry experts might be interested in developing content that can be used in support of civics materials. Others may be able to use their research and expertise to help inform civics curricula that are in development. Are there best practices for how businesses and organizations should go about creating content? Who should they work with to ensure the materials are properly designed? They might even help with building out case studies that other businesses can model, such as case studies from the Civic Alliance’s Corporate Civic Playbook . |
| Raise Awareness | Companies can use their platforms to raise awareness about or encourage participation in democracy-promotion activities. For example, the National Basketball Association will not schedule games on Election Day 2022, as a way to encourage fans to go vote. |
| Tackle a Community Issue | Encourage employees to come together to identify and work on a community issue that requires the local, state, or federal government to address (e.g., getting a local bridge fixed, improving a playground, providing transportation options for elderly, and improving voting access for elderly or physically challenged voters). |

APPENDIX D: CIVICS AT WORK

In the **Civics at Work** initiative, CSIS, in collaboration with civics groups, is working with business leaders to reinvigorate civics literacy as a **national and economic security imperative**, both through their respective workforces and in their larger communities.

TAKING THE PLEDGE

In joining **this initiative**, business leaders commit to:

1. Advocate for reinvigorating civic education;
2. Engage their workforce to expand civics knowledge and exercise civic skills; and
3. Support civic activities in their communities.

If your business or organization is interested in learning more about the Civics at Work **pledge**, please reach out to **civics@csis.org**.