Sustaining our democratic republic requires an informed and engaged public. But this fundamental prerequisite is threatened by the decades-long decline in civic education that has left Americans lacking the skills and the knowledge of the nuts and bolts of our system to fulfill their essential role in moving our nation toward a more perfect union.

Reinvigorating civics knowledge and skills is a national and economic security imperative, and business leaders are optimally positioned to support this mission.

Business leaders who join CSIS’s “Civics at Work” initiative commit to:

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

Business leaders should first communicate to their workforce why they decided to join the “Civics at Work” initiative. What is at stake? Why is their organization promoting civics activities? Civics activities will only be successful if there is a demonstrated commitment from the highest levels of an organization, and having business leaders explain their rationale is a good starting point to set the tone for follow-on activities.

Businesses are often trusted voices within the communities where they have a presence. “Civics at Work” businesses should identify opportunities to advocate for civics education at all levels. It is well documented that support and resources for civics programs, and the public’s civic knowledge by extension, is declining. By one recent estimate, the federal government spends roughly $54 annually per school child on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education, compared to just 5 cents for civic education. Moreover, very few states today actually have a civics requirement for graduating students. One measure of the consequence is the National Assessments of Educational Progress exam—in the most recent civics test administered to eighth graders, only 24 percent performed at or above the level of proficiency. The number has hovered at around 25 percent since the civics test was first administered in 1998. This is unfortunately also demonstrated by other nationwide surveys that underscore a general lack of civics knowledge and civic skills among the American public.

A good resource for more information on how to support advocacy work at the state, local, or community levels is the organization that Justice Sandra Day O’Connor helped to establish, iCivics, and its project, the CivXNow Coalition.
Once you have identified the value of civics to your organization, it is important to consider the civics knowledge and skills most important to cultivate within your workforce and plan effective ways to expand them. The following are some key points that should be considered when planning for civic activities in the workplace (Suggested resources, along with additional activities and recommendations, can be found in the “Civics for Adults” Guide, coauthored by the CSIS Defending Democratic Institutions Project and the Annenberg Public Policy Center.):

- **Start with an activity focusing on the importance of civil discourse**—how to disagree without being disagreeable. Businesses succeed when individuals can explore competing ideas and, in the process, disagree while retaining mutual respect and protecting the quality of work.

- **Promote experiential learning activities.** To grow societal resilience against today’s threats, it is essential that adults are not only exposed to civics discussions but also develop the skills to put that knowledge to work to help address issues in their communities.

- **Manage the quality of the discussions.** Sometimes even the best-intentioned discussions can be counterproductive if facilitators are not given the tools to effectively lead civics conversations. Corporate trainers and civics experts should be actively involved in helping to plan for these workplace discussions.

- **Be clear and transparent about next steps.** Organization leaders should communicate plans for ongoing activities, follow-on discussions, and new opportunities.

The third element of “Civics at Work” is encouraging workforces to participate in activities around their communities.

**Examples of Internal Activities for Workforces**

- Civics competitions (e.g., naturalization test trivia or a civics bee)
- Community leaders speaker series
- Civics week (e.g., similar to an employee appreciation week but focused on civics and community engagement activities)
- Civics issue scenarios (e.g., identify how government and community leaders would address a certain issue in the local community)
- Civic engagement hub (e.g., internal website for employees to learn about civic engagement opportunities)
- Internal civic engagement volunteer team

For the full list of recommendations, activities, and resources, please see the “Civics for Adults” Guide.

**Examples of External Community Activities for Workforces**

- Career day activities (e.g., present on the role of your job/organization in a democracy)
- Service activities in the community
- Civics in a box (e.g., teach basic civics to students at local schools)
- Sponsor civics competitions for local youth

For more examples of internal workforce activities, please see Appendix C in the “Civics for Adults” Guide.

If you are interested in learning more about “Civics at Work,” please email civics@csis.org.