**What is Civic Literacy?**

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Civic literacy is an understanding of our shared community environment. It gives us the ability to identify and comprehend what government and citizenship entail, and how they affect everyone. More broadly, it encompasses the knowledge, skills, and values that enable us to understand our civic surroundings and learn the fundamental rules and tools for participating in a political system like ours.

As an academic discipline, civics or political science is the primary vehicle for conveying civic literacy. It involves the study of government, politics (defined as who gets what, when, and how), and citizenship. It is the branch of education that addresses civic affairs, along with the duties, rights, and meanings of citizenship.

Civic literacy requires:

* A basic, objective understanding of the nation's civic history.
* A fundamental understanding of institutions and their evolving roles within the political system.
* An understanding of political thought and values, and their interaction.
* A perspective on the relative roles of the individual and the polity.
* An understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizen participation in a democracy.
* An understanding of American political institutions within a comparative framework.
* An understanding of political economy and its structures.
* An understanding of international geography, politics, and interdependence.
* An understanding of the tools and consequences of political change.
* Knowledge of basic logic, fact and bias recognition, and media savviness.
* Learning and practicing critical thinking skills.

**Why Civic Literacy Matters**

**Civic Literacy Matters for Democracy** American democracy, like all democracies, relies on informed and active citizens. Without a critical mass of public-minded citizens possessing the skills and knowledge to vote faithfully and thoughtfully and thereby influence public policy and hold governors accountable, democracy will weaken and fail.

**Civic Literacy Matters for Businesses and Entrepreneurs** As James Carville famously coined in 1992, "It's the economy, stupid." Knowledge of government policy and its impact on money, taxes, and credit is a core component of civic literacy. This knowledge influences who receives what, when, and how, as businesses, government policymakers, and consumers are all interconnected. Responsible corporate leadership can foster volunteerism and community engagement among employees and civic association members. This is an excellent way for businesses or civic associations to build relationships and increase brand awareness and visibility.

**Civic Literacy Matters for Flourishing Local Governments** Citizen engagement in local government is nurtured by civic literacy. It enables all community stakeholders to collaborate in addressing public needs for everyone's benefit. It encourages and empowers citizens to influence policy, local values and local government priorities. This, in turn, leads to higher levels of trust, stronger and more resilient communities, provides a reliable stream of volunteers for boards, commissions and local offices and empowers residents who are often overlooked and underheard.

**Civic Literacy Matters for Nonprofits and Philanthropy** Democracy requires communities to strengthen civic knowledge and participation. Nonprofit organizations offer a way for people to work together for the common good, translating shared beliefs and hopes into civic action. Everyone benefits from their civic work in some way. By feeding, healing, sheltering, educating, inspiring, enlightening and nurturing people of every age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, they create more equitable and thriving communities. Civically literate individuals represent a vast reservoir of support for nonprofits.

**Civic Literacy Matters for Schools, Colleges, and Universities** American democracy has always relied on citizens who understand its premises and promise, who seek out diverse perspectives and ideas, respect each other’s differences and believe in the common good. As some of the few social institutions present in virtually every community, public schools, colleges and universities serve as catalysts for increased civic literacy and engagement. They provide the framework and critical thinking skills to promote the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors necessary for civic life participation. From pre-K through advanced degrees and lifelong education, our educational institutions offer research, scholarship and forums for practical knowledge about civic engagement.

**Why Civic Literacy Matters for Citizens and Neighborhoods** After disasters and tragedies, Americans reach out to help restore damaged communities and support each other. This is just one example of civic literacy promoting civic advancement at the neighborhood and personal levels. When neighbors reach out to help each other, or volunteer their time, skills and enthusiasm, it demonstrates a recognition of a larger community context beyond the individual or family.

Make civic literacy your lifelong goal. Once you have finished your formal education, opportunities abound to maintain and even extend your civic literacy through the media, civic organizations and like-minded friends. As a good citizen in a democracy, it makes sense to support them and take advantage of them.