The Civic Index

Third Edition

All-America City
NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE

Table of Contents

Introduction

What makes some communities better able than others to solve the tough social, political, economic or physical challenges they face? This was a question the board and staff of the National Civic League (NCL) set out to answer in 1986. For more than 90 years, the NCL was the country's premier advocacy organization for municipal reform and "good government," but the landscape of American communities was changing. Manufacturing jobs were being lost and a new service and information economy was emerging, but with a very uneven community distribution pattern for jobs and resources. Older residents, the poor, and communities of color were being trapped in deteriorating urban neighborhoods as more affluent residents moved to the suburbs and exurbs to take the new professional and technical jobs. These conditions created a new generation of complex challenges.

The answer to the question about why some communities do better than others would come in the form of a "National Civic Index," a new tool communities could use to analyze their civic strengths and weaknesses in collective efforts to solve problems or envision a better future. Unveiled at the ninety-third annual National Conference on Governance in 1987 in Boston, Massachusetts, the Civic Index consisted of ten variables, or "components," that successful communities seemed to have in good working order: "citizen participation, community leadership, government performance, volunteerism and philanthropy, intergroup relations, civic education, community information sharing, capacity for cooperation and consensus building, strategic long-range planning, and intercommunity cooperation." Conference-goers considered the components and gave suggestions on how to improve them. One suggestion was the need to incorporate an ineffable feature of civic infrastructure—community pride and spirit. When the Civic Index was published in an issue of the National Civic Review (NCR), the list was mostly the same, with the exception that "long-range planning and vision" was replaced by a new component, "community vision and pride."

Since the index was first introduced, hundreds of towns, cities, countries, and regions have used it to apply for the All-America City Award or to begin a long-range visioning, strategic planning, or problem-solving effort facilitated by NCL staff. It was a way communities could begin discussions on how to improve themselves and how to develop action plans to make their visions of a better future come true. During those years, NCL's Community Services program was developed to provide technical assistance to communities that wanted to use the tool. The National Civic League began borrowing from other fields—private-sector organizational development and leadership theory, strategic planning, conflict resolution—to develop inclusive forms of strategic planning, visioning, and community problem solving. Communities such as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Phoenix, Arizona, contracted with the NCL for technical assistance to undertake ambitious, communitywide strategic planning efforts.

At the heart of NCL's Community Services program is the notion that all stakeholders within a community should be actively engaged in decision making and problem solving, something that didn't always occur spontaneously in the formal process of politics and government—elections, council meetings, public hearings, committees, and commissions. Often communities that consulted with NCL had gotten stuck playing by the old rules of community government. They needed an outside perspective to help them identify and remove the sticking points. The National Civic League has a long list of successes, including helping Broomfield, Colorado, which undertook a strategic planning process that ended with a vote to consolidate the city and county structure. It was the first creation of a new Colorado county in ninety years. The Community Services program has been tweaked and adapted during the years to fit changing realities.

As the process evolved, so did the Civic Index. A second edition was published in 1999, complete with workbook and sample survey sheets, drawing on the experiences of NCL facilitators in working in communities across the country. The simple ten-point structure of the original index was expanded into a series of sections and questions that communities could ask. The dialogic nature of the tool corresponded to the way communities approach the challenge of building civic infrastructure, asking questions first, developing action plans later, building on their civic strengths, addressing their weak points in their civic infrastructures. In developing a third edition of the Civic Index, we are attempting to combine the simplicity and readability of the first edition with the usefulness and comprehensiveness of the 1999 version.

We streamlined, simplified and updated the text with new community examples and lessons learned from thirty years of community assistance. At the same time, we expanded the narratives for two components, "diversity and inclusiveness" and "media and information sharing." As always, we are revising the text to correspond to the new realities of community governance. Finally, it is our goal to develop an electronic version of the Civic Index questionnaire, so groups and individuals can use the tool more easily to catalyze discussions in their communities and analyze the way they address challenges and plan for the future.

We hope the third edition of the Civic Index will prove to be a useful tool for communities that wish to undertake public planning, problem-solving, and decision-making projects or for individuals who wish to better understand their communities and the qualities that make them successful.

The Importance of Civic Infrastructure

Every community has a "civic infrastructure," the formal and informal processes and networks through which communities make decisions and attempt to solve problems. The quality of a community's civic infrastructure influences its civic, economic and social health. It is the base upon which a healthy community is constructed. In newer communities civic infrastructure may have to be developed for the community to succeed in dealing with its challenges and planning for the future. If a city or region's physical infrastructure—its roads, bridges, school buildings and water systems—is crumbling, an effort must be made to rebuild it. The same could be said about a city or region's civic infrastructure.

Civic infrastructures are built on relationships, capacities and inter-sectorial initiatives. No one group or institution stands on its own. Government can serve as an important catalyst for positive change, but successful communities leverage their often limited public sector resources by engaging business, nonprofit groups and associations in partnerships. One sign of a healthy civic infrastructure is when governments recognize their collaborative role, and when business and nonprofits routinely think more broadly and creatively about the needs of their communities and establish the habit of breaking down silos and working together. "Successful communities honor and nurture their civic infrastructures," noted former National Civic League President John Parr in a *National Civic Review* article. "A common thread in successful communities is the ongoing struggle through formal and informal processes to identify common goals and meet individual and community needs and aspirations. Successful communities are blurring the boundaries between government, business and the nonprofit sectors."

In his work on community assets, John McKnight has emphasized the importance of local "associations," typically small, community based groups of unpaid volunteers who join together for a variety of purposes. It could by anything from a sports league to a self-help group for recovering alcoholics. Associations have a number of important features that distinguish them from institutions such as nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies. As McKnight and Carol A. Pandak write in a publication on engaging associations to improve pediatric health:

> …while most associations are focused upon one particular goal or interest, they consistently take on additional functions that reach beyond the members' primary purpose. For example, a baseball league may take on the maintenance of a local ball park, a women's social organization may raise money for cancer research, a veterans' organization may "Adopt a Highway" and clean the right of way, a youth group may visit homebound seniors, and a church group may create a fitness club. In many neighborhoods, a great deal of community improvement is the result of the primary and secondary activities of the local associations. Thus, associations represent a vital local vehicle for achieving community change or improvement.

Nonprofits, businesses, governments and community members (whether working individually or through associations) are the most important elements of any neighborhood, city or region's civic infrastructure. The National Civic League developed the Civic Index to help communities think about ways of building, maintain or refurbishing their civic infrastructures. The Civic Index provides a framework within which communities can increase their problem solving capacity. It provides a method and a process for first identifying strengths and weaknesses, so communities can openly analyze and discuss their capacities (or lack thereof) at the beginning of a community process or dialog. Creating civic infrastructure is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a community's first step toward building its capacity to deal with critical issues.

Using the Civic Index

The seven components of the Civic Index measure the skills and processes that have been identified in communities with healthy civic infrastructures. The Civic Index can be used in the following ways to analyze and discuss those skills and processes.

Long-term Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Projects

Bringing together a broad array of interests and perspectives from the community to create a shared plan for the future provides a great opportunity to examine that community's capacity to work together and solve its problems. The Civic Index points out areas of strength and weakness in a community's ability to collaborate and address challenges.

Healthy Communities Initiatives

Many healthcare and public health quality of life projects have focused on a broad array of indicators to address a community's health. Economy, education, healthcare, safety and the environment are all considered in these broad-based efforts. What is often overlooked, however, is the community's capacity to come together to address those issues. A Civic Index assessment can provide the foundation for future collaborative work in all of the above-mentioned areas.

Community Assets/Needs Assessments

Many service providers conduct assets/needs assessments in communities. This helps to paint a picture of the community's current situation and identifies pressing issues and the strengths to utilize to address them. What

it doesn't do is give the community a sense of how to collaboratively address those pressing issues. The assets/needs assessment helps to identify what the problem is; the Civic Index helps to identify how to solve it. Thus, the Civic Index can be a great complement to a community assets/needs assessment.

Community Services and Interagency Projects

The principles and components of the Civic Index may be applied to community service agencies and interagency projects when evaluating their internal and external effectiveness. How well do they work together? What's their vision? How are they learning from mistakes? What do they need to start doing to become more effective?

Town Hall Meetings

Town Hall meetings can be a good way to share information and discuss specific issues. Community leaders may choose to hold a discussion on different sections of the Civic Index when convening community members at these meetings.

Individual Use

We have also designed the new Civic Index so groups and individuals can use it to do a simple assessment of their community's strength or weaknesses. Communities, groups and individuals are encouraged to take this tool and customize it to suit their particular needs. A sample survey with a list of statements linked to the seven components of the Civic Index is included in this publication. Feel free to customize this survey for your community and used it to analyze local civic strengths and weaknesses.

Whether the issue is a struggling school system, an environmental hazard, a natural disaster, or a lack of affordable housing, the necessary leadership and problem-solving skills are the same. A community must have strong leaders from all sectors who can work together with residents to reach consensus on strategic issues that face the community and its region. Committed individuals help develop a community's capacity to solve problems, and communities must resolve to increase their problem-solving capacity. Outside consultants can make recommendations, but sustained action is unlikely without local ownership of a strategy and an implementation plan. The seven capacities we have identified as most important for communities to focus on are:

1. Community leadership
2. Public participation and civic engagement
3. Diversity and inclusiveness
4. Networking, information, and communication
5. Decision making and consensus building
6. Partnerships and collaboration
7. Community vision and pride

Community Leadership

It's an old cliché to say that young people represent the future of the country. These days the new slogan is "Young people aren't the future, they're the present." Most cities have some sort of leadership program to encourage young people and help them develop the skills and contacts they need to become effective community leaders. But what about trying to develop the less obvious potential leaders who may have been passed over by the usual leadership development entities? That's what Salisbury, Maryland, had in mind when it developed its Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) to focus on engaging nontraditional young leaders, those with untapped leadership potential and limited opportunities.

A little background: Salisbury was named one of the "100 Best Communities for Young People" by the group America's Promise in 2006 and awarded $20,000. The local chapter of the organization met to figure out how to use the money, and the planning group unanimously agreed to create an academy focused on developing the community's nontraditional leaders—that is, the kids with untapped leadership potential and limited opportunities.

The Salisbury program is available to any young person between eighth grade and junior year in high school at no cost. It reaches out to local secondary schools and youth organizations. But word of mouth is the most effective recruitment method, the organizers of the academy have found. The academy works like this: Students come together for three days in the summer at Salisbury University to learn new skills and ideas about leadership. From those participants, a Youth Action Team (YAT) is created to plan the next summer's academy. Any interested graduate of the academy is accepted for YAT.

Youth Leadership Academy graduates have made an impression. Two young people won positions in the student government association. Another became senior class president. Other students have served on boards of organizations and attended a Search Institute Conference. One graduate was the student representative to the Maryland State Board of Education. That graduate was also a 2010 Olympic torchbearer for Coca-Cola. Several graduates received scholarships to attend colleges, such as Davidson, Morgan State University, Princeton, and Shaw University.

Others received the President's Service Award.

From the 1940s until the mid-1970s, communities looked to their elected official and the business community (from which many of these officials came) to make the decisions that affected their futures. People assumed that governmental and business leaders had expertise, experience, and access to information unavailable to the rank-and-file members of the community. Moreover, residents assumed that the public and private sector leadership had the community's interest at heart and that, therefore, there was no need for direct public engagement.

Although the old model of politics may have been acceptable forty years ago, this approach has in fact proved to be counterproductive. As community populations have become increasingly diverse, more and more individuals from previously excluded populations are demanding to be part of the decision-making process. Today's complex times have revealed that in order for communities to work at effective levels, quality leadership must come from all parts of the community, often from unlikely places.

The public, private, nonprofit, and grassroots communities must jointly develop leadership. As demographics change in a community, current community leaders must work to ensure that the community's diversity is reflected in opportunities for future leaders. This training process also must develop leaders who are results oriented, willing to take risks, and able to work well together and communicate effectively. Above all, they must be willing to share the leadership mantle. These leaders must know when to collaboratively problem solve with the community, such as when: issues are complex; there are numerous interests involved; resources are limited and their use is highly contested; no single agency has jurisdiction over the problem or over implementation of the solutions; people are interested and willing to participate; or individual and community action are required.

Successful community leaders will throw off old traditions, realizing that no group will succeed unless the diverse needs of the entire community are met. In the old days, traditional leaders often hoarded power. Today's leaders must learn to share power and share the public agenda with their fellow community members. Leaders must realize that governmental leadership is only a part of what makes democracy work. Businesses, nonprofit organizations, and residents of all perspectives must participate to create change in social issues.

The new leaders must learn the skills of convening all points of view and of creating safe places for challenging dialogue. Once convened, these leaders must have the skills to ask the tough questions and let the group provide the answers. Old leaders talked; new leaders listen. Old leaders argued; new leaders look for common ground. Old leaders were closed and secretive; new leaders are open and share information and information resources. In short, whereas old leaders sought power to decide issues, new leaders work to encourage others to help decide issues.

Questions to Consider

1. How does our community actively encourage the development of emerging leaders?

2. Do our leadership programs seek to develop and encourage a diverse and inclusive group of leaders?

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

In 2009, during the trough of a severe national recession, IBM announced it was opening a technology center in Dubuque, Iowa, a move that would bring 1,300 jobs to the region. After word got out, an editorial by a TV commentator in Madison, Wisconsin, said: "IBM could have located here, and chose Dubuque. That's just not right." What seemed remarkable to this understandably proud Madisonian was that a small, farm-belt city would be selected instead of a more recognized technology "triangle" or "corridor." The editorialist obviously was unfamiliar with the "new Dubuque."

What the city lacked in glitz or cachet, it more than made up in pluck, public participation, organization, vision and civic spirit. "It all started in the 1980s when people decided we had reached the bottom and collectively wanted to make it a better community," said Mayor Roy Buol. "The new Dubuque, that's what I call it. People really bought into the idea. There was a common desire to better the community and make it a place where everybody has opportunities, a place people want to come to, and when they do come, to stay."

In 1985, Dubuque had one of the highest levels of unemployment in the country, upward of 23 percent. Focusing on bringing in new industry—insurance, technology, publishing, health care, education and tourism—Dubuque rose to number one among Iowa's metro centers for job growth. A revitalized waterfront with hiking trails, restaurants, a museum and an aquarium reconnected the city with one of its great resources, the Mississippi River. Vision 2000 was the first of several public engagement processes that took place in Dubuque during about a dozen years, the latest being Envision 2010 in 2005.

A grassroots effort by residents of Dubuque's tri-state (Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin) region, the Envision 2010 was kicked off at a community breakfast. Visioning tool kits were distributed and instructions on how to form a work group were provided. Community groups worked over the summer to discuss the questions: "Where to go from here?" and "What's next for Dubuque?" Each group was asked to submit their ten best ideas for making Dubuque a better place to live, work and play. Within the next six months, residents met in small and large groups to dis-

cuss ideas. More than 2000 ideas were submitted. A diverse, 20 member selection committee was empanelled to review the various ideas. Each idea was submitted to a selection committee, which reviewed the suggestions and edited the list down to 10 ideas.

In 2006, community groups volunteered to become owners of the various "ideas" and push forward projects to implement them. Although not all the goals were fully realized, significant progress was made on each of the ten projects. For example, the goal of having fully integrated bilingual programs in all area learning institutions proved elusive, but the local Catholic schools were leading the way in establishing a new curriculum. In the example of the performing arts center, the Envision discovered that the University of Dubuque was planning to build a new performing arts center. The group has worked with the university to complete the project by 2013. As Cynthia Gibson wrote of these implementation groups in a *National Civic Review* article, "Their commitment and energy to the process led to a striking achievement: In just two years, every one of the ten ideas had come to fruition in one way or another—often, very close to what was envisioned."

The city's success has not gone unheralded. Dubuque won the All-America City Award in 2007, 2012 and 2013. The Equal Opportunity Project named it first among 58 cities of similar population when it comes to upward mobility. Forbes magazine ranked the city 14th in the nation in its list of "Best Small Places for Business and Careers" in August, 2013. Harvard's Kennedy school gave the city one of its 25 Innovations in Government Awards in 2013.

Communities are more likely to thrive when residents are encouraged by leaders to participate and play a substantive role in planning, decision making and problem solving. Participation includes voting in local elections; serving on boards, commissions, and coalitions; attending public hearings; and being active in volunteer, neighborhood, school, church, and civic organizations. Especially challenging and complex issues will require multifaceted approaches and solutions. For example, various activities may fold into a communitywide effort to define the challenges and move forward to collaboratively solve them.

Thirty years ago, the primary vehicle for citizen participation—other than voting—was the public hearing, a superficial form of expression that was often as frustrating for residents as for public officials. In fact, the very term "public hearing" is considered by many civic experts to be something of a misnomer. "Out of everything that happens at a public hearing," Dan Kemmis, a former mayor of Missoula, Montana, wrote in his book, *Community and the Politics of Place,* "the emoting, the attempts to persuade the decision-maker, the presentation of facts, the one element that is almost totally lacking is anything that might be characterized as public hearing." Too often the decision has already been made, or its outcome is a foregone conclusion, and the "hearing," if you could call it that, is little more than a public ritual, with, to paraphrase one former assistant town manager, "plenty of engagement, and plenty of enragement."

"Public hearings don't really contribute a great deal to problem solving," says John Nalbandian, a public administration professor and a former city council member. "They tend to be expressions of opinion, expressions of passion, expressions of preferences, but with no dialogue. Concerned about the negative and unfocused nature of discussions about a controversial bridge project, local governments and area foundations in Sarasota County, Florida, formed a nonprofit organization to handle the county's public participation and dialogue strategies: SCOPE, Sarasota County Plans for Civic Excellence. SCOPE has convened dialogues on such issues as traffic and congestion,

aging, affordable housing, school dropout rates, mental health, family violence, and community change. Last year, the group convened a summit on environmental action. Sometimes the organization produces short documentaries on topic areas as part of its Stories Project.

SCOPE studies and summits have led to the creation of nearly a dozen nonprofit spin-off groups to work in different issue areas, including a community housing trust to buy housing that can be preserved as affordable. A conversation–study on school attendance got the local school district to change the way it handles its dropout policies, and a group of mental health organizations launched a $9 million initiative focusing on children. Additionally, the organization undertakes what it calls community report cards, looking at a number of indicators that reflect different facets of community life. In 2008, the report card led to the convening of a summit for environmental action.

How community members participate is a key to building a strong civic infrastructure. Effective residents participate in a constructive manner, spending their energy focusing on issues rather than who is to blame. They must be willing to focus on the welfare of the broader community instead of promoting a community showdown and recognize the importance of coming together for challenging dialogue and deliberation, problem solving, and solution building with individuals holding different viewpoints and interests.

A community with low levels of civic engagement and participation is incomplete and subject to infighting and gridlock on important issues. For public participation to work at its optimal level, groups and individuals must take responsibility for their communities by stepping forward to share the burden of difficult decision making and challenging problem solving. Residents must recognize that they have a proactive role to play in creating the community they desire rather than waiting for or expecting others to do the work for them.

Questions to Consider

1. Do residents in our community feel participation matters in solving local challenges?

2. What are the ways our community gives residents opportunities to engage in public planning, decision-making or problem-solving?

3. Are public spaces (schools, libraries or local government buildings) readily made available to community residents as welcoming spaces to meet?

Diversity and Inclusiveness

In 2001, a visioning process in Statesville, North Carolina, identified one of the community's biggest challenges. A highway built in the 1970s to stimulate industrial development had divided the city into a north side and a south side. The south side had become isolated and neglected. It was the part of town where you were likely to find more dilapidated buildings, higher crime rates, weed-strewn lots, unoccupied businesses, and unemployed workers. Community leaders revisited their vision six years later, developing a new vision statement with the participation of a dozen "strategic partners" representing a diverse group of stakeholders in the community. Partnerships were formed with nonprofit groups to address the problems on the south side—a "weed and seed" program to fight crime, a new Boys and Girls Club to address the needs of young people, and a new police substation and dozens of moderately priced homes for first-time home buyers. A local church served as home to a new volunteer group to provide English courses and other needed services to integrate the area's growing Latino population. Even a plan to develop the city's downtown business corridor was changed to be more inclusive by extending into the south side. As Mayor Costi Kutteh noted in the city's successful application for a 2009 All-America City Award, "We are only as strong as our willingness to work together."

Communities are stronger and better able to address local challenges when people work together across the divides of race, ethnicity, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, or income levels to acknowledge differences as they pursue common goals. The diversity of our communities will only grow in the coming decades when groups once referred to as minorities may well comprise a majority of the population. The 2010 Census reflects the rapidly increasing diversity of our nation. More and more Americans are identifying themselves as mixed-race individuals. Populations are geographically shifting. Greater numbers of Latinos are living in and building the economic bases of cities and states outside of parts of the country that traditionally had large Latino populations. Our elderly population is growing in greater proportion to other demographic groups. With new technology and an ambitious drive to solve problems locally and globally, the civic and community engagement outlook of millennials—those born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s—are reshaping intergroup interactions, community building, and service. Demographic changes mean we must pay attention to changes and

shift our diversity and inclusiveness strategies and practices to leverage and create civic energy and enthusiasm to strengthen our relationships with each other.

Local government, business, and nonprofit leaders demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusiveness in a variety of ways. Signs welcoming visitors to the Denver-area community of Lakewood, Colorado, for instance, say: "Welcome to Lakewood. We are building an inclusive community." The city council passed a proclamation in 2007 committing the city to join the National League of Cities Partnership for Working toward Inclusive Communities. Lakewood's forty-three-member Advisory Commission for an Inclusive Community advises the council on diversity issues and hosts an annual diversity seminar. Local services include key city documents translated into Spanish, a Spanish-language translation phone line, recreation and therapeutic programs integrating people with disabilities with others, and tickets to cultural performances for children from underserved populations. The city provides partner benefits to employees who are part of same-gender couples, among others. Lakewood was the first community to win the NCL's All-America Cities Diversity Award in 2011.

Not long ago, the sole focus was on diversity, but these days communities also need to think about the idea of inclusion. The difference may not be obvious to everyone, but leaders in the private sector began to recognize the distinction when, despite their best efforts to promote diversity through minority recruitment programs, their organizations continued to experience difficulties retaining and promoting members of these underrepresented groups. Savvy leaders began to ask whether their organizational cultures were such that people were not just representative but also inclusive. In other words, did people feel included? As one former corporate human relations director put it, "Inclusion requires change at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels [to sustain] a culture that is intentionally created." Most communities have some sort of commission to discuss human relations or diversity, but their efforts are more effective when linked to a broader and more comprehensive process of community building. The Levi Strauss Foundation, for instance, initiated a program called Project Change that seeks to dismantle discriminatory institutional policies and practices by developing locally driven, community-based strategies. The citizen-based committees assess local conditions and create a three-year action plan to address those issues. Healthy intergroup relations result in greater cohesiveness, understanding, unity, and empathy among residents. Cross-cultural initiatives leverage power when groups and individuals mobilize around such issues as justice, education, socioeconomic development, health, and job development. Yet working with other people, no matter if they are like you or different from you, continues to be one of our greatest challenges.

Even beginning a discussion on diversity and inclusiveness can be difficult. In Scott City, Kansas, the community took the first step with an NCL-facilitated gathering called the Diversity/Multicultural Roundtable Discussions in November 2010. The first meeting had the full participation of city council, the mayor, and the diversity of the community. Hispanic residents attended in equal numbers to non-Hispanics. Residents felt that real issues were discussed, and a new diversity steering committee was formed that meets monthly. In their successful application for a 2011 All-America City Award application, Scott City community leaders described the atmosphere of "energy and hospitality" in the air during the first potluck dinner where individuals took the "first tentative steps across the silent divide to share their respective cultures, traditions, and offer friendship." Out of that first meeting, the city developed a strategy to focus on "immigration concerns, ward off misconceptions and prejudice, and promote the positive attributes of various cultures and lifestyles."

Cities across the country are looking for new ways to promote civic engagement and foster a more democratic approach to governance, but in doing so, they must avoid perpetuating existing power imbalances within the

community. They should avoid, in other words, what one former city planner and community organizer calls the "illusion of inclusion." Simply publicizing a community event or planning meetings may not be enough. Leaders often have to make special efforts to ensure a representative sample of our increasingly diverse communities. A dramatic example of this challenge arose in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina when a majority of the city's population had been displaced by the terrible flood. The group AmericaSpeaks had to send community organizers into Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, and other cities to recruit participants for a forum on the future of New Orleans; without these extraordinary efforts, the city's African American majority would have been grossly underrepresented, and the legitimacy of the meetings would have been questionable.

In 2005, the city of Portland, Oregon did a comprehensive audit of its impressive neighborhood participation program to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its system. A special effort was made to focus on how to involve groups that had traditionally not been involved, notably people of color and the city's growing immigrant and refugee population. Members of the Community Connect effort found that not everyone defines their community by geography or physical surroundings. Many people define community by having a common identity. The city found that neighborhood associations, the basic organizing unit of the system, weren't always the best vehicles for engaging these underserved groups, so they began to form new partnerships with nonprofits that had experience serving those particular populations. The city agreed to dedicate funding to community organizing and leadership training programs for these underserved groups.

A substantial body of social scientific literature identifies a lack of social connectedness as a major cause of poverty and other problems. Social isolation of particular groups can have an impact on other groups, leading to cultural misunderstandings and conflicts and making it more difficult for public and private agencies to provide services. Those who work in communities understand the importance of promoting social interaction and civic engagement. "[W]orking proactively to integrate newcomers can: help educate people about their rights and responsibilities; educate government about the needs, goals, and traditions of immigrant groups; help resolve tensions between different sets of people in the community; support newcomers to help solve public problems; and provide opportunities for new leaders to emerge," noted Matt Leighninger and Bonnie Mann in a publication released by the National League of Cities called "Planning for Stronger Local Democracy: A Field Guide for Local Officials".

Engaging lower-income and working-class community members means accommodating the schedules of hourly workers, who typically don't have as much flexibility in their daily schedules as professionals or businesspeople. Providing child care and food can make a meeting more inviting and accessible to working families, and holding meetings in decentralized locations, such as recreation centers, libraries, schools, senior housing, and community centers, can help overcome the hassle and costs of transportation. The challenges associated with recruiting working people and disfranchised groups are even more daunting when it comes to recent immigrants. Knowledge–power imbalances and time constraints are compounded with the fear of being identified and targeted by immigration authorities. In practical terms, it may be helpful for a government agency or forum planner to partner with an existing community-based organization to recruit hard-to-reach populations.

One of the key barriers to diversity and inclusiveness that NCL identified back in the 1990s when we held a series of meetings in the wake of the Rodney King beating was lack of trust. It takes time, sometimes years, to build trust. And, once it is built, it has to be rebuilt, according to recent NCL research. Some practices include keeping people informed of key issues through regular communication (using every means necessary and taking into account the different cultures and practices of the community's population), inviting unlikely partners and populations that

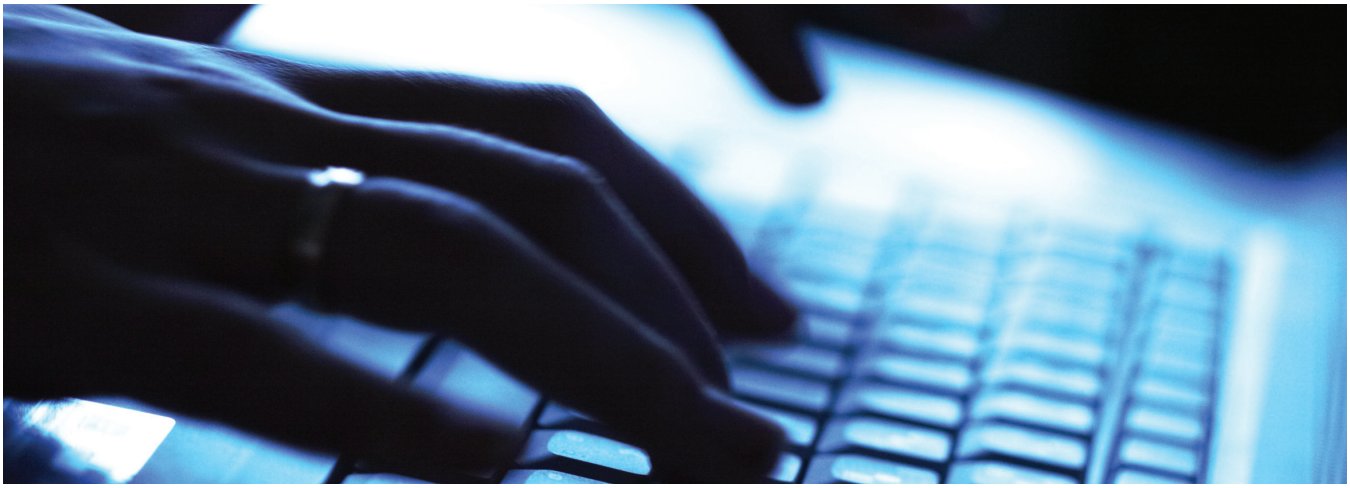
are often not invited to the table to problem solve, and being transparent by providing data and information in an understandable manner.

The good news is that when working together with a group of people who think differently or have a different background, experience, or history, your product—whether it is a strategic plan or a community vision statement—is better, stronger, and more reflective of the wants and needs of your community. This has been the NCL's experience and insight when coaching community leaders in participatory visioning and communitywide planning. NCL's Community Services program invariably recommends broad community representation in the process design and action planning. As Denver Mayor and NCL board chair Michael B. Hancock wrote years ago in an NCL report on governance and diversity in Fresno, California, "When people with different experiences and knowledge are brought together in constructive ways, decisions are improved because more perspectives are taken into account. Communities and organizations enhance their ability to solve problems and implement solutions when those involved and affected help make the decisions." Those words were written not long after the Rodney King beating and social disturbances that plagued Los Angeles in the early 1990s, but they remain true today.

Questions to Consider

1. How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity and inclusiveness (age, ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, and sexual orientation and expression)?

2. Does our community do a good job of addressing equity issues?



Networking, Information, and Communication

In our new age of media and technology, residents have an almost inexhaustible capacity for communication and information sharing. Yet the world of technology and media is growing and changing so rapidly that it is often difficult to know where things are going. It is not just a question of how information is gathered and disseminated but also the new relationships and networks that are being formed through social media and new media. Think of the way social media sites were used by crowds during the Arab Spring or the way political campaigns are using the Internet and mobile devices to reach and mobilize new audiences.

In earlier editions of the Civic Index, we focused on the importance of the news media in gathering and disseminating critical information about communities and public policy, but the business of reporting the news has been unalterably changed by new media and technology. The business model that once supported multiple newspapers in a single city is defunct, and observers of the media wonder who will pay for the kind of in-depth investigative reporting and comprehensive local coverage of public affairs that newspapers once provided. The answer to some is "citizen journalism," the plethora of outlets and forms of media that have come with the explosion in digital technology. This includes everything from local blogs that cover civic affairs to social media outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Recent studies have suggested that more people now get their news from the Internet than from newspapers, although TV continues to be the leading source.

With any transformative change, however, something is lost. The capacity for bringing new voices into the public arena also can mean a relaxation of professional standards. Some local news bloggers are providing invaluable information for the public, while others specialize in gossip and innuendo, creating more harm than good when they publish rumor as fact and don't fact-check the information they spread. Increasingly, residents are self-selecting their sources of news, and in many cases, they select only those voices—often those of opinion journalists—that correspond to preconceived ideas and ideologies. This tendency of residents to separate into informational factions can make the governing and consensus building even more difficult. In an interview in the *National Civic Review*, Alberto Ibargűen, chief executive of the Knight Foundation and a former newspaper publisher, raises another

question, the problem of the "authenticity" of new information sources, or as he put it, the "lack of authenticity, the amount of lies or willful misleading information and opinion masquerading as fact"

On the plus side, the new media and technology have also provided groups and individuals with valuable tools that they can use to unearth, verify, and weigh information without the intermediary of the officialdom. Communities now have an amazing repository of information that can be used to facilitate understanding and more knowledgeable discussions and dialogues on local affairs. An individual can carry more information in one iPhone, marketed by Apple Inc., than was contained in the entire library in Alexandria of the classical era.

It may be possible for some communities to bridge the gap between residents and government by providing greatly increased transparency. What may matter as much as the sum of different media is the way various information technologies can work together. For instance, for years, local governments have provided residents with the chance to watch city council meetings on government or public access cable channels, but now these meetings can be archived and accessed at the individual's leisure. Say he or she would like to find out about a particular issue or decision. In many communities, the person can go to the government website and find archived video to learn what was discussed and decided at a particular meeting.

Hampton, Virginia, was one of the first cities in the country to create a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week, one-stop customer call center using a 311 designation recently made available by the Federal Communications Commission. The idea was to provide customer service as quickly and efficiently as possible, minimizing the number of times residents would have to hold on the phone or be told to call another city department. The city used customer relations management (CRM) software that allowed call handlers to answer 4,000 different questions about local government and other nearby public agencies. The system was based on keywords, which meant that these "customer service advocates" could quickly input questions and get back the relevant answer. They also have the capability to issue work orders.

The system has helped alleviate a challenge: the ignorance of many residents about who is responsible for what government service and, consequently, whom to call. In many regions, government responsibilities are dispersed among villages, townships, cities, counties, and a myriad of special districts. Simply calling city hall, in other words, may result in nothing more than a referral to another agency or department. Now the customers–residents have an easy task. When in doubt, simply call 311.

Denver, Colorado's "Open Front Door" initiative has multiple access points to residents, a 311 call center, a website and the city's Channel 8 cable access station. Using the website, residents can find out about voting locations, property values, crimes statistics, and other useful information. They can also register for recycling and request e-mails to be sent to them to remind them of pickups. In time, more and more requests for information and services probably will migrate online, given the much lower cost of servicing requests as compared to a 311 phone-based system. This migration could take time, but as some cities are finding that the residents who most frequently report neighborhood problems are unfamiliar with computers.

Another goal is harnessing information sharing with performance management and civic engagement. In Somerville, Massachusetts, a Boston-area city of about 80,000, local officials hope to combine the benefits of a data-driven performance management system with regularly scheduled, ward-based public meetings. Somerville began its ResiStat meetings in 2007 to complete the feedback loop between residents and government. The comments and

suggestions of residents are reported back to the city's semiweekly data-driven performance evaluation meetings and compiled in an annual Resident Report that is published along with the official city budget.

As part of Somerville's ResiStat program, the mayor, the local alderman, and other city officials meet with residents in each of the city's nine wards, which correspond roughly to neighborhoods, and five special interest groups (parents, young people, and speakers of the city's three main foreign languages: Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole). The goal of these public meetings is to present information generated through SomerStat, the city's data-driven performance management system, and get feedback from residents. To build SomerStat, the mayor borrowed the CitiStat model from Baltimore, which itself had been adapted from New York.

One outcome from SomerStat was development of a 311 Call Center, a twenty-four-hour service allowing residents to ask questions and make requests for service from the city. Easy-to-answer questions are handled immediately. Others are answered in a timely manner through e-mail or a follow-up call, ensuring that residents are not shunted from one department to another. Requests for service are entered into a database and given a tracking number so residents can find out how things are proceeding. The 311 calls and work orders became an important source of data for SomerStat.

It is too early to judge the success of ResiStat. Somerville officials readily acknowledge that it is a work in progress, but it offers an interesting model that other cities seeking to link data management, performance assessment, and civic engagement may want to consider. Also, it has already raised expectations among Somerville residents. When a change in parking regulation was announced recently, some complained that there wasn't adequate public input. "The perception is that the old modes of civic engagement aren't good enough anymore," says Thomas Champion, director of the city's office of communications. "Residents do feel that on a whole range of issues and services, they are better informed and more engaged than they have ever been."

Olathe, Kansas, recently was named one of the top "digital cities" by the Center for Digital Government and Government Technology magazine. Like most communities, the city has public meetings to discuss budget issues and holds them in different venues to get more people to attend. But even going out to the neighborhoods and bringing meetings to the people didn't seem to get the crowds, so the city's communications and public engagement department went in search of new ideas. It decided to hold an E-town meeting in the studio of the local government access cable station and to drive interest and participation with social media. Chris Hernandez, a Kansas City TV news personality, hosted the meeting, which was cablecast and live-streamed, and members of the public asked questions to city council members via e-mail, the city's budget Web page, Twitter, and Facebook.

The city launched an online forum six days before the scheduled e-meeting, asking residents to submit questions. Questions could also be submitted live during the meeting. Local officials consider the experiment a success. The city's Facebook page saw an increase of about 60 percent in post views during the live-cast of the event, and traffic on the city's budget Web page increased nine-fold. "We're trying to meet the residents where they are, which is online," explained Chris Kelly, the city's information technology director.

The rise of new media has raised new concerns, however, about the need for equity. Some people within communities have much more access than others to fast broadband connections and digital media. It's not just a question of access. There is also a question of knowledge and familiarity. Some communities are finding new ways to get media training to young people and others who find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In San Benito, California, an ordinary public access cable channel morphed into a technology and media resource for the community, especially for youth. Ironically enough, given its proximity (sixty miles) to Silicon Valley, the county has remarkably low level of technology and media penetration. Some parts of San Benito County are so inaccessible that broadband service isn't available. Also, many families are unable to afford a broadband connection. The area has been hard hit by the Great Recession with some of the highest rates of unemployment and foreclosure in the country.

When CMAP TV started its youth training, it found that a majority of the kids in the program had never used a word processing program, much less owned a laptop. "When you haven't learned Microsoft Word and you haven't had access to a computer," asks executive director Kathy Bisbee, "how are you going to get those twenty-first century jobs skills? The idea of working on a laptop at a coffee shop is just so foreign to them." But thanks to CMAP TV and the San Francisco–based ZeroDivide, which provided some of the funding, more and more young people in the county are learning to use not just laptops but cameras, audio equipment, lighting, and editing software to create and upload their own videos. Today, residents are capable of accessing information through a dizzying variety of means: the traditional news media, the Internet, open public records, networks of community-based organizations, or even through smart phone applications. There is a clear link between information access and citizen participation. When community information sharing and communication are working optimally, residents understand the vital issues of their communities and make informed decisions. Just as it is the responsibility of media, government, and other community sources to make information readily available to the public, residents have a responsibility to search out a true cross section of opinions and viewpoints.

Questions to Consider

1. Is the community well informed of and involved in discussions and planning processes when it comes to important issues and goals?

2. Are there both online and face-to-face public forums where community residents can engage in civil conversations and dialogue about their interests and concerns?

Decision Making and Consensus Building

More and more communities are discovering new and better ways of talking about (and hearing about) public issues. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, for instance, an all-volunteer organization, known as Portsmouth Listens, conducted regular "study circles" on important local issues, small-group, consensus-based discussions of eight to twelve people that would take place during a four-week period, meeting once a week. Portsmouth Listens produced a written report on their findings, which was published in the local paper, the Portsmouth Herald.

Portsmouth Listens began as a one-time effort to mobilize parents and students to deal with issues of bullying and violence in schools. Local attorney Jim Noucas and a group of residents contacted the Study Circles Resource Center (now known as Everyday Democracy) to help put together a dialogue on the subject. More than twelve years later, the city was still using study circles for local dialogues, most recently, an extensive dialogue and report on the city's budget challenges.

It was the idea of Portsmouth city manager John Bohenko to use the study circles in a decision-making process to review the city's master plan, the document that guides policy on such issues as development, open space protection, affordable housing, transportation, and infrastructure needs. The master plan involved more than 400 residents during a period of two years. The process led to the development of a visioning statement and set of recommendations adopted by city government.

Portsmouth Listens also held candidate forums using a dialogue-based roundtable to allow meaningful interaction between voters and candidates. Portsmouth has a nine-member council with an average of eighteen candidates running every two years. So the roundtables were divided into five groups of two or three candidates and the voters into groups of twelve to fifteen. Each voter group was given fifteen minutes to engage in a roundtable with the candidate groups. Each candidate was given three written questions, and their answers were printed in the Herald. The questions were formulated by city officials, former council members, and school board members. Reportedly,

the Portsmouth Listens helped change the way local government did business. The city was more likely to consult the public on issues before evaluating the solutions, and the public was much more likely to support solutions that have been developed through deliberation.

Communities have plenty of issues on which to disagree but relatively few places where they can come together to build agreements. As anyone who has attempted it knows, convincing diverse interests to work together for the common good can be a challenging task. Conflict is an integral part of consensus building; yet, understandably, many residents and civic leaders fear and try to avoid conflict at all costs. Successful communities recognize that conflict is a reality, and that, when managed well, it can be a very healthy and defining mechanism for the community. It provides the community with the opportunity to share different points of view and, as a result, to more richly define challenges and the means of addressing them. Ultimately, conflict can be a constructive force toward building strong decisions that everyone, regardless of perspective, is willing to support.

The National Civic League defines "consensus" as being able to live with a decision to the point of supporting and assisting, and not blocking, its implementation. In this day of widespread political polarization, consensus building is dependent on the effectiveness of the processes by which local officials and community leaders reach out to the public to engage diverse groups and individuals in dialogues and discussions. The process of consensus building across viewpoints and interests is a skill that sets successful communities apart from those that struggle. Consensus building is democracy in action. It is challenging, messy, and time consuming. Yet, when it works (and it does work), it presents communities with an unparalleled opportunity for widespread buy-in on initiatives to create change in specific areas.

Successful communities regularly incorporate key segments of the community in their consensus-building efforts. These elements always include credible, facilitative leaders who set their personal interests aside for the broader interests of the community. These leaders, or community guardians, convene those with diverse perspectives in safe spaces, where challenging dialogue and deliberation can take place. Once convened, the participants abide by ground rules and procedures agreed to by the group. No one will get everything they want—but everyone will get something they want. As NCL's former senior vice president Derek Okubo used to say, a community process is successful when people may not get everything they want, but they understand why decisions are made. The growing number and complexity of problems we face in our communities demands that people of diverse perspectives work together to set common goals and achieve them. Employing consensus-building practices can facilitate problem solving and at the same time strengthen communities.

Questions to Consider

1. Does the community address challenges directly and quickly instead of deferring or postponing difficult decisions?

2. Is the community willing to try new ideas to solve problems?

Partnerships and Collaboration

In the late 1990s, Rancho Cordova, California, seemed like a community in decline. As an unincorporated suburb of Sacramento, it was a town with a distinct identity but without a responsive local government of its own. After more than twenty years of advocacy, Rancho Cordova was officially incorporated in 2003. The next step was building a new city hall. In 2008, the Rancho Cordova chamber of commerce, city government, and the Cordova Community Council (CCC) came together under one roof at city hall. The synergy created by the co-location of all three major components of city life has created an atmosphere of collaborative problem solving in which partners from all three sectors—public, private, and nonprofit—share equal status. This unique convergence has come to be called alternatively Rancho Cordova's civic heart and its three-legged stool.

Housed together, representatives of the three sectors meet regularly to pursue a common vision for the city's future. The results have been positive. The chamber, which had been on the brink of dissolution in 2007, has become a strong business organization hosting national economic experts on business topics. The CCC is a bustling center of activity that sponsors monthly public events attracting thousands of residents to community events that celebrate everything from patriotism to cultural diversity. City services are accessible on a ground-level one-stop center offering everything from building plan review to passports. The second floor houses offices such as city manager and attorney, finance, and human resources. As convener, facilitator, and catalyst, city government seeks the input and support of the other two sectors. Government concentrates on providing municipal services and assuring financial stability. It is the ambassador to other jurisdictions and providers of services that cross jurisdictional lines.

Local governments have discovered that their role in community governance has changed dramatically during the last thirty years. A host of factors have altered government's traditional role: Local issues have become increasingly complex; responsibility has devolved from the federal and state levels; the public's faith in community institutions has declined; financial resources have diminished; and the local political environment has become increasingly combative. In order to be effective, local governments have learned to rethink and change the ways in which they

provide leadership and solve problems within their communities. Many public sector leaders have discovered that their new role includes involving many community interests in the decision-making and problem-solving process. Analysts have recognized the important part today's local governments must play in bringing together the diverse elements of local communities to achieve effective solutions.

The role of the private sector in a community's civic infrastructure is fundamental yet often overlooked. In today's world, businesses must view themselves as key members and contributors to the overall health of the community. For some businesses, such as banks, hospitals, and other corporations, this may be hard to accomplish because of their national or international scope. Nevertheless, they must work to create cross-sector partnerships with government and nonprofit organizations. An increasing number of businesses are encouraging and cultivating the spirit of volunteerism within their own walls by providing company time for their employees to volunteer. Rather than simply writing checks, many businesses are strengthening their communities by lending talents and abilities used in the work environment to schools and community improvement efforts.

More and more, business is recognizing the mutual benefits of involvement in the community. In essence, businesses must move away from operating only within the traditional philanthropic role that focuses on quick results and strong public relations opportunities. Today's business investments must be more strategic, focusing on core issues and long-term impacts, and include investments of time, energy, and expertise as well as money.

Nonprofit organizations—such as community services providers, churches, schools, advocacy groups, and youth organizations—historically have played the roles of advocating for specific community needs and providing services to meet those needs. Nonprofits have traditionally held a special relationship with the general populace and have been a key force for creating change in communities. In some communities, nonprofits have represented the interests of the disenfranchised and provided much-needed services and support where none would exist otherwise. Nonprofit organizations also have provided residents an avenue by which to play a fundamental role in creating positive change in the community through the many volunteer opportunities they provided. Today's role for nonprofits continues to be one of service deliverer and change agent.

Today's tough realities of limited resources and increasing need are forcing nonprofits to do more with less. This reality has amplified anxieties and tensions within the nonprofit community. Many organizations are "protecting their turf" and are more often competing with other agencies for available resources. This dynamic often manifests itself during joint nonprofit efforts. Agencies come to the table not for the benefit of the broader community but to protect their own programs. For communities to be truly effective, nonprofits must overcome these barriers in order to be more collaborative and effective.

Increasingly, a variety of issues that once were under the purview of the federal and state government (for example, the impacts of welfare reform) are becoming the responsibility of local communities. Limited resources only compound the problems. The reality is that no agency alone can address the complex community challenges that nonprofits face on an everyday basis. The health of the entire community demands that nonprofits cross lines in order to be truly effective. Crossing those lines means changing the way they do business with one another and being willing to coordinate services and collaborate whenever possible. Nonprofits must spend their energy on building new alliances and partnerships with each other, with business, and with government.

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a national initiative led by philanthropic organizations, state and local

officials, businesses, nonprofits in an effort to improve reading proficiency for under-served students. In 2012, the campaign partnered with the National Civic League to use the All-America City Awards as a catalyst for enlisting communities and regions in the national effort. More than 120 communities committed to the partnership, drafting comprehensive, ten-year community solutions action plans with the goal of getting more children in their communities reading proficiently by the end of 3rd Grade.

Communities must recognize that improving the quality of life means being flexible and learning to operate in new ways. Successful jurisdictions are working with neighboring municipalities in order to be effective in today's world. Communities should understand the interrelationship they have with each other within a larger region. They are beginning to realize that the strengths and challenges of one jurisdiction ultimately impact the health of the entire region. As a result, neighboring jurisdictions are working together as never before. Making regional decisions can be challenging because it requires each participating community to alter its standard way of doing business. Functioning as a regional body requires a common vision, shared goals, accountability, and strong leadership.

The St. Louis Regional River Ring is a unique, 600-mile web of forty-five greenway biking trails that, when completed, will encircle the St. Louis region along the natural flow of the area's rivers and streams. The Mississippi, together with the smaller Meramec and Cuivre rivers, naturally forms a three-quarter ring around the St. Louis area. The circle is completed by creating a series of greenway trails alongside the three rivers and joining the trails to the great Missouri River via connected greenways. Conceived in the 1990s, the project didn't gain real traction until 2003, when a citizen-created entity, the Great Rivers Greenway District, began implementing an ambitious, grassroots-driven regional plan. Excitement at the neighborhood level grew, spurring dozens of creative regional, state, and national partnerships that are making the River Ring a reality. Because it touches the jurisdictions of more than 100 regional municipalities, plus state and national jurisdictions, it is a case study in successful regional collaboration.

When intercommunity cooperation works, local communities must move beyond historical boundaries to create safe space, to construct plans, and to implement initiatives that benefit not only themselves but, ultimately, the entire region. Leaders must recognize that regional cooperation is becoming more important. It requires both an inclusive regional governance structure and ongoing forums for dialogue that monitor accountability and implementation of regional plans.

Questions to Consider

1. Do local governments in the region work well with each other to address local and communitywide challenges?

2. Are most community leaders able to set aside their own interests for the broader community good?

Community Vision and Pride

With an aging population, strict boundaries that prevented physical growth, declining revenues, a stagnant business environment, and inadequate city services, Gladstone, Missouri, was a small suburban city with some serious challenges. There was only one ambulance and two paramedics to provide emergency services, and there was no place to house the city's recreational programs for youth. With technical assistance from the National Civic League, more than 150 residents participated in the community effort known as Gladstone on the Move.

The group identified six key performance areas (KPAs):

1. Business and Economic Development
2. Neighborhoods
3. Community Center
4. City Services
5. Education
6. Identity and Regionalism

The group researched and discussed the issues and put together a list of priorities. Gladstone on the Move came up with a plan that could be used to guide the city during the next twenty years. Next step: Create an implementation committee to figure out a timeline and an action plan for achieving the desired results.

The residents themselves recommended Gladstone's first ever property tax increase to the city council and also the extension of a sales tax that was about to expire to pay for parks and recreation needs. The council put the tax increases on the ballot, and Gladstone on the Move campaigned to get them passed. The community now has a complete ambulance service that is fully staffed; it supplies not only basic life support for getting people to a hospital but advanced life support for people suffering heart attacks, strokes, and other medical emergencies. It

also has a marketing program. It is building more sidewalks than ever before. It has a comprehensive street lighting program, three major economic development initiatives, several hundred square feet in retail, and several thousand in housing units with an affordable housing philosophy.

As Gladstone residents discovered, communities that deal successfully with the challenges they face have a clear sense of their past. They also have a shared picture of where they want to go. A vision is a starting point, not an end, for creating long-term change in a community. To establish a vision for the future and to develop pride in past accomplishments requires broad participatory planning activities. A vision describes the shared desires to be created by a community. It reflects the highest standards of excellence and achievement for the community. It involves and encourages the commitment of the broader community to make it a reality. It is inclusive of the community's population diversity, and it reflects common values. It also reflects those qualities that emphasize the community's uniqueness.

When residents of all perspectives share in the development of a community vision, they are more likely to become invested in that vision and to support it. Without it, plans for community improvements can often fall prey to intractable disagreement and opposition. The vision provides the residents with a springboard to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses and to develop action plans to reach the desired future. Participation in developing that vision encourages stakeholders to be active participants in efforts to implement those plans for a better future.

Communities with a shared vision have a clear sense of direction. Community priorities are already determined and more easily steered toward the desired end. Shared vision emphasizes proactive community problem solving rather than the status quo (reactive approach). Agreement on the community vision provides all players with a foundation to build on and a plan to evaluate and implement future plans and ideas.

Years of running the All-America City Awards has provided the NCL with a treasure trove of evidence that civic pride—a strong sense of identification with and affection for a particular place—is an important part of civic infrastructure. You can see it in the enthusiasm and excitement at the event. Communities take pride in their civic accomplishments and want their communities to gain recognition for the work they have done in improving job opportunities, housing education and public safety. Fayetteville, North Carolina, an All-America City in 2011, provides a good example.

Back in the days of the Vietnam War, Fort Bragg was a major stopping-off point for soldiers bound for Southeast Asia. Being an army town during those years was a mixed blessing for Fayetteville, North Carolina. Most of the draftees who went through the town were not happy about being there. Nor were the townies always thrilled about having them. Strip clubs, cheap bars, and tattoo parlors proliferated downtown, earning the town a new nickname that stuck—"Fayette-nam." Flash forward to the year 2001, when Fayetteville, like much of the industrial South, was languishing economically. Per capita income was stagnant. Few jobs were being created, and young people who grew up there often had to look elsewhere for promising career paths. A community improvement effort known as Greater Fayetteville Futures produced an idea. Why not make the town's military presence a source of community identity and pride? Community members were given the opportunity to vote online for their town's new slogan: "History, Heroes and a Hometown Feeling." Fayette-nam rebranded itself as "the most patriotic town in America."

A few years later, the city opened up its North Carolina Military Business Center, working with local businesses and individuals to garner defense industry contracts. Instead of attracting strip clubs and cinder-block taverns, the city would bring in high-tech companies and defense industry entrepreneurs. Residents were encouraged to fly flags and say "thank you" to servicemen and women they pass on the street. Local organizations were formed to help military families find housing and jobs. There was a local baby boom a few years ago when 22,000 members of the 82 Airborne returned from Iraq, so the town threw a mass military baby shower for the hundreds of expectant mothers. The results have been impressive: more than 5,000 jobs, $586 million invested, and a housing market that is booming, according to the city's application for All-America Award. Per capita income growth is the second highest in the country. Tourism is also on the rise with a convention bureau that touts the military-friendly posture to vets planning army reunions and other events and local attractions like the Airborne and Special Operations Museum and the soon-to-open Veteran's Park downtown.

Civic pride is the glue that makes communities capable of overcoming challenges and divisions and working together toward common solutions and the common good. Community vision is what gives them the road map they need to get where they want to go.

Questions to Consider

1. Do our community members regularly engage in strategic planning and other actions to help achieve a shared vision?

2. Does our community have a shared vision of what we want it to be in the future?

Sample Survey

Consider the following statements and indicate the level of your agreement with each by assigning a letter grade from A to F to each statement listed below. Assigning "A" would mean a very high level of agreement with the statement and "F" a very low level of agreement. Give an average letter grade to each component of the Civic Index and average the grades of the various components to get an overall community Civic Index grade. Use the outcome of the survey as a discussion point in a group meeting to discuss your community's civic capacities, where you are strong and where you need work.

Community Leadership	Grade
Our community has active programs to encourage the development of emerging leaders.	
Our community has specific programs to encourage the leadership development and community engagement of young people.	
Our local leadership programs provide multiple avenues for new leaders to apply their skills.	
Our leadership programs seek to develop and encourage a diverse and inclusive group of leaders.	
Community leaders listen to the views of others and encourage the public to be engaged in local problem-solving and planning efforts.	
Community leaders encourage and seek collaboration in local planning and decision-making efforts.	
Average	

Public Participation and Civic Engagement	
Residents of our community feel their participation matters in solving community challenges.	
Most residents are more committed to problem-solving to address community issues rather than assigning blame.	
It is easy to get people's engagement in community issues.	
It is easy to get qualified people to run for public offices.	
The community has adequate public opportunities for residents to engage in public planning, decision-making or problem-solving.	
Residents have ample opportunities to learn and practice their rights and responsibilities as members of the community.	
Public spaces in schools, libraries, and local government buildings are readily made available to community residents as welcoming spaces to meet.	
Public participation efforts in our community typically lead to positive outcomes.	
Average	

Diversity and Inclusiveness

	Grade
Our community recognizes and celebrates its diversity and inclusiveness (age, ethnicity, race, gender, culture, religion, income level, abilities and sexual orientation and expression).	
Our community takes the extra steps to ensure the broad diversity of residents is included in local and regional planning and actions that directly impact them.	
Our community is welcoming and inclusive of immigrants and refugees, seeing them as assets and not liabilities.	
Our community does a good job of addressing equity issues.	
Our community does a good job of creating democratic spaces for young people where they can actively participate with other community residents in addressing community issues.	
Average	

Networking and Communication

The community is well informed of the plans of the local governing bodies.	
Most community residents know how to access information on public issues.	
The local news media report credible information about public issues.	
Community residents use social networking tools to organize and/or communicate on important issues.	
There are opportunities for community residents from all walks of life to access communications and information technology.	
Local governments and school districts have a strong commitment to openness and information sharing.	
There are both online and face to face public forums where community residents can engage in civil conversations and dialogue about their interests and concerns.	
Average	

Decision-Making and Consensus-Building

The community addresses challenges directly and quickly, instead of deferring or postponing difficult decisions.	
Community-members can disagree about ideas and issues without differences typically leading to a breakdown in progress.	
Community leaders usually resolve controversial issues fairly with practical compromises and solutions.	
The community does have neutral conveners and forums to resolve pressing conflicts and challenges.	

	Grade
The community is willing to try new ideas to solve problems.	
The community holds local governments accountable for the decisions that are made.	
Average	

Partnerships and Collaboration

Local governments in the region work well with each other to address local and communitywide challenges.	
Most community leaders are able to set aside their own interests for the broader community good.	
Community agencies and organizations do a good job of coordinating their activities.	
Our local governments seek partnerships with nonprofit groups and private sector leaders.	
Nonprofit groups manage "turf" issues well and collaborate with each other in seeking resources.	
Nonprofits work together to jointly address community problems.	
Local businesses partner with nonprofits and schools to achieve better community outcomes.	
Local businesses encourage community voluntarism and charitable giving on the part of their employees.	
Average	

Community Vision and Pride

Our community regularly engages in strategic planning and other actions to help achieve a common vision.	
Our residents have strong positive identification with the community and a clear sense of what makes the community unique.	
Residents feel a strong sense of attachment and pride in their neighborhoods and community.	
Our community has a shared vision of what it wants to look like in the future.	
Average	
Total Civic Index Average	

National Civic League

Today, more than ever, the National Civic League is critical to vibrant communities and a strong democracy. NCL provides unique opportunities for people to transform themselves and their communities through the All-America City Awards (AAC), the *Model City Charter*, the *Civic Index,* the *National Civic Review*, and research into leadership and community engagement in leading local government fiscal sustainability. NCL depends on groups and individuals across the country that believe in promoting community engagement and problem solving approaches to support this important work.

Vision

A country in which all people engage in the process of self-governance and encourages cross-sector partnerships resulting in an active civic culture reflecting the diversity of community voices.

Mission

To strengthen democracy by increasing the capacity of all of our nation's people to effectively and responsibly participate in and build healthy, prosperous communities across America.

Core Values

- Public participation and civic action
- Diversity and inclusiveness
- Greater democracy and higher performing governments
- Hope and the nurturing of successful communities

Founded in 1894, NCL is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Denver, CO. Its mission is accomplished by fostering and sharing promising practices of local government and public engagement and celebrating the progress that can be achieved when people work together.

Through strategic partnerships with local government organizations, nonprofit organizations, AAC communities and others, NCL will carry out its work. NCL will fully engage those that are already part of the NCL family, particularly NCL members and the 600 plus AAC communities. Find out more about the National Civic League at www.ncl.org and www.allamericacityaward.com or by calling (303) 571 4343.