Profile of Illinois: An Engaged State

Illinois Civic Engagement Benchmark Survey Results

Report of the Illinois Civic Engagement Project

Illinois Civic Engagement Project

From the University of Illinois at Springfield,
the United Way of Illinois and *Illinois Issues*

United Way OF ILLINOIS

Illinois Issues

~PLUS~
**68 practical recommendations
for enhancing civic engagement in Illinois
recommended by the Illinois Civic Engagement
Project Steering Committee**
See page 15

March 6, 2001

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March 6, 2001
Springfield, Illinois

"I don't make a significant difference. I think about that a lot. No one person can make a real significant difference ...**"**

"I am asked to volunteer all the time by members of my social network. Once you're a volunteer, you are asked. They call you all the time, and you can't say no.**"**

This report is dedicated
to the people of Illinois,
and in particular, to people in three sectors :
the private/business sector,
the government/public sector,
the nonprofit/independent sector,
all of whom have a vital role in building our communities.

"The interest in civil society is rooted partly in honest self-criticism by people left, right, and center willing to face evidence that may be inconvenient to their own arguments..."

— *E.J. Dionne, author and columnist*

In *Community Works: The Revival of Civil Society in America*
© 1998 Brookings Institute Press, Washington, DC

Executive summary

Introduction

How involved are Illinoisans in their communities? In what ways? Can we encourage them to be even more engaged in their communities and connected with each other?

This is the first comprehensive statewide report on the types and levels of civic engagement in Illinois. The report provides benchmark data about community involvement. It describes how Illinois people are engaged, and it reveals why some people are not engaged. Finally, this report offers 68 recommendations for stimulating citizen participation in their communities.

We find that most Illinoisans are involved in some form of community activity, but the forms of their activity vary remarkably. Some are most interested in political activity. Others participate in a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque (hereafter, "place of worship") but have little other community involvement. Still others focus their activity on their children's activities or their jobs, while some socialize informally.

In the summer of 2000 and early in 2001, the Illinois Civic Engagement Project commissioned survey research and focus group interviews. We join the important national discussion about civic engagement in the United States. Unlike some national studies that say American communities are facing a civic crisis, we cannot say whether civic engagement is declining in Illinois. We don't know, because this study has not been done before. We hope this benchmark study will be enriched by many discussions and further studies in the years to come. Our concern about the state of civic participation is as old as Tocqueville's study of America in the 1800s. But it is as fresh as the Robert D. Putnam's 1995 article, "Bowling Alone," and his release of a new nationwide survey of civic engagement on March 1, 2001. Putnam has sparked an important national discussion about citizen participation and how that relates to the strength of American communities.

We hope to spark an equally spirited discussion about civic engagement in Illinois. But we go further. We want more than study and debate. So in this report we provide 68 useful, practical suggestions for ways that individuals, leaders, institutions, organizations, and businesses can stimulate and enhance civic engagement in Illinois communities. Our suggestions emerge from our study (see pages 15-30 for the list of action steps).

Why people get involved

We asked a series of questions in the survey research and of the focus groups about why people choose to get involved in their communities. The three top reasons are:

1. **Altruism:** They want to make their community a better place or influence public policy in some way. This was most important to 68%.
2. **Faith or fellowship:** They respond to their own religious beliefs, or they like to be with people they enjoy. Important to 62%.
3. **Rational calculation or self-interest:** They want to make useful contacts, advance their job or career, or perhaps even run for office. This general reason, while significant, was not nearly as important as the first two reasons. Important to 23%.

Why people are not more involved

We also asked a series of questions about what prevents people from being more involved in their communities. The top reasons are:

1. Time pressure due to family (59%) and job (58%) responsibilities.
2. They were not asked to be involved (32%), or they do not feel a part of the community (13%).
3. They do not know enough about the issues (26%), or they do not know how to get involved (23%).
4. They feel they are already involved and cannot be more involved (22%).
5. Rational calculation: They think it is not worth their time and trouble, that nothing will come of their involvement (12%), that people want too much of their time (32%), or they don't like to join groups (17%).
6. Lack of resources: They believe they don't have the skills (13%) or money it takes (18%) to be involved.
7. Poor health (17%) or lack of transportation (9%).
8. They do not like the people who are involved (8%), or no groups exist that deal with issues of interest to them (14%).

Of great significance is that participants and non-participants sometimes differ on why they are not more involved. The single biggest difference between the two groups is that the non-participants are far more likely to say they have not been asked.

Eight major types of activity and seven major engagement groups

This report creates a profile of Illinois that identifies eight important forms of civic engagement activity. Those eight activities become our measures of civic engagement. After extensive analysis, the profile also describes seven basic engagement groups according to their most significant levels of activity (See Tables 1 and 2). The distinctions among the seven groups make it evident that many Illinois people choose their activities selectively. They make choices about what to do. The fact that they are selective should help Illinois leaders develop processes and structures that build upon that civic reality and not expect everybody to be doing everything.

This summary identifies why people choose to get involved or not get more involved. It then lists the eight major forms of civic engagement activity and the profile of the seven types of people. Finally, the research identifies some important differences among Illinoisans according to people's race, gender, age, political party, geographic residence, income, and level of education.

Eight major civic engagement activities and profile of seven major engagement groups in Illinois

Eight major civic engagement activities in Illinois:
1. Community Involvement Activities (secular)
2. Religious and Faith-based Activities
3. Contribution Activities (secular)
4. Political Activities
5. Discussion of Politics and Current Events
6. News Exposure Activities
7. Technology-Based Activities
8. Informal Socializing

Profile of Illinois: Seven "engagement groups" according to significant activities:
1. Civic Leaders: Broadly and Highly Engaged (8% of sample)
2. Community Activists: Politically Engaged (11%)
3. Faith-based Activists: Religiously Engaged (22%)
4. Cyber-Activists: Technologically Engaged (16%)
5. Informal Socializers (11%)
6. Informed Contributors: Passively Engaged (16%)
7. The Relatively Disengaged (16%)

Definition and measures of civic engagement

This research defines "civic engagement" broadly. Other research shows that all forms of citizen interaction and participation contribute to a community's strength. Thus, our definition includes everything from joining an organization to donating to a charity to socializing informally. We cast a wide net and try to count all of the ways that people tell us they are connected with one another outside of their family routines. Then we summarize the activity into eight basic categories, which become our basic measures of civic engagement:

Summary description of the eight major types of civic engagement activity

1. **Community Involvement Activities (secular):** Such activities include volunteering, membership and participation in organizations, working with others to solve community problems, serving on a board, and attending a committee meeting or a board or council meeting. Almost two-thirds of our respondents (66%) reported volunteering time to at least one type of organization. More than one in five (22%) respondents volunteer in youth organizations, and 14% volunteer in civic organizations. Nearly half the respondents (49%) were involved in some kind of humanitarian activity, which is the leading form of community action. More than eight in 10 (83%) belong to at least one type of secular group or organization.

2. **Religious Activities:** Nine in 10 Illinoisans (91%) claim some form of religious affiliation. Two-thirds (67%) belong to a place of worship, and 47% attend religious services weekly. About seven in 10 (72%) contributed money to a place of worship within the past year, and one in five served actively on a board in the past three years. (This type does not include volunteering for a faith-based organization; those activities are included in "Community Involvement" above.)

3. **Contribution Activities:** Almost nine in 10 (87%) reported giving money to a secular charitable or religious organization within the past year, and almost six in 10 (58%) reported giving to both. Almost nine in 10 (88%) also reported donating food, clothing, or toys to a needy family or charitable organization, and 15% reported donating blood. (Our overall score here, however, excludes giving to religious organizations.)

4. **Political Activities:** About eight in 10 (82%) reported voting in the November 2000 national election. (This is somewhat higher than the Illinois State Board of Election's figure of a 69% official voter turnout, but methods of measuring "voter turnout" are in dispute.) About one in six (16%) said they attended a candidate forum, debate, or information night in the past year. About one in 10 (9%) said they worked for a party or candidate in 2000. About one in seven (15%) reported giving money to a political action committee, candidate, interest group, or political cause in the past year. One in twenty (5%) said they had run for public office at some point, and another 16% said they had thought about running.

5. **Discussion of Politics and Current Events:** One in five (20%) said they discuss local politics or community affairs almost every day, and two-thirds said they do so weekly with family members, co-workers, or friends and neighbors.

6. **News Exposure Activities:** Illinoisans watch local television news more frequently than they listen to radio news or read newspapers. That is consistent with national trends. More than seven in 10 (72%) watch the television news every day, while half (50%) read the newspaper every day. Six in 10 (60%) listen to radio news every day. Nearly four in 10 (38%) reported watching or listening to a talk show or call-in show about news or public affairs on radio or television several times a week.

Of those who watched or listened, one in five (22%) said they had attempted to call one of the shows. About one in seven (13%) said they watch C-SPAN several times a week, while about half (54%) said they generally do not watch it.

7. **Technology-Based Activities:** This category is a place to look for new forms of civic engagement. Excluding e-mail used for work, almost half (46%) reported using e-mail at least several times a week, with one in four (26%) reporting daily usage. Seven in 10 overall (72%) have used the Internet. For information about current events and public affairs, one in six (16%) use the Internet every day, and four in 10 (40%) use it at least several times a month. One in four have visited Web sites for local schools or community colleges (26%) and local government (24%). About one in 20 (6%) have visited the site of a local civic group. Four in 10 (38%) have never used e-mail, and almost three in 10 (28%) have never used the Internet. Very few (4%) are using chat rooms every month to discuss current events.

8. **Informal Socializing:** Americans get together in many ways beyond their place of work and formal organizations and institutions. Informal socializing is an important aspect of the social fabric because it provides ways for people to bond with each other, and those bonds help build communities. Seven in 10 respondents (70%) said they participate at least monthly in a small informal group for socializing or recreation such as playing cards, meeting for dinner or drinks, golfing or bowling, or similar activities. Almost half (47%) do so several times a month, and one of eight (13%) do it several times a week.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE PROFILE OF ILLINOIS:
Seven engagement groups categorized by civic engagement activity

Extensive analysis of the survey research data led us to see that only a small percentage of Illinoisans is highly engaged in all activities. Most who are engaged seem to specialize in one or a small number of the activity types. And a small percentage of Illinoisans is not very engaged – that is, not involved in any activities, or involved at a level far lower than other people in Illinois. We label each "engagement group" with a name for the sake of conversation and summarization, but we want to be clear that people in each group also engage in some of the other activities at lower levels (see Table 1).

We also discovered that people in the different groups had different reasons for becoming engaged or not being more engaged. Those motivations and barriers are explained in the full report and become significant for people who want to learn more about how to motivate leaders and others to be more involved.

Table 1 – A Profile of Illinois
Overall Activity Profile of Civic Engagement Groups
[Percentiles of Average Scores on Civic Engagement Activities for Each Group]

Seven Engagement Types	Total Civic Engagement and Eight Categories of Engagement								
	Total Civic Engagement	Community Involvement	Religious Activity	Contribution Activity	Political Activity	Discussion of Politics & Curr. Affairs	Active Exposure to Sources of News	Technology-Based Activities	Informal Socializing
Civic Leaders	95th	95th	80th	82nd	93rd	83rd	62nd	74th	64th
Community Activists	86th	75th	46th	75th	86th	85th	71st	70th	78th
Faith-Based Activists	68th	68th	86th	70th	65th	52nd	61st	51st	54th
Cyber-Activists	47th	45th	36th	39th	45th	67th	35th	80th	71st
Informal Socializers	36th	50th	37th	68th	38th	28th	34th	40th	88th
Informed Contributors	34th	39th	43rd	67th	50th	70th	63rd	36th	33rd
The Relatively Disengaged	9th	31st	45th	26th	32nd	14th	24th	42nd	27th

Table 2
Overall Rank of Each Group for Each Type of Activity*

Seven Engagement Types	Total Civic Engagement and Eight Categories of Engagement								
	Total Civic Engagement	Community Involvement	Religious Activity	Contribution Activity	Political Activity	Discussion of Politics & Curr. Affairs	Active Exposure to Sources of News	Technology-Based Activities	Informal Socializing
Civic Leaders	1	1	2	1	1	1-2	2-3-4	2	4
Community Activists	2	2	3-4-5	2	2	1-2	1	3	2
Faith-Based Activists	3	3	1	3-4-5	3	5	2-3-4	4	5
Cyber-Activists	4	5	6-7	6	5	3-4	5-6	1	3
Informal Socializers	5	4	6-7	3-4-5	6	6	5-6	5-6	1
Informed Contributors	6	6	3-4-5	3-4-5	4	3-4	2-3-4	7	6
The Relatively Disengaged	7	7	3-4-5	7	7	7	7	5-6	7

*Multiple ranking for an activity indicates a tie for that activity.

The Seven Engagement Groups

We identify the first four groups as leaders and activists because they are engaged in various activities at levels far higher than the typical person in the total sample. Only the first group of "Civic Leaders" is highly involved in everything, while the next three groups are more specialized in their high levels of activity.

1. **Civic Leaders: Broadly and Highly Engaged (8% of sample)**

   Civic Leaders are highly engaged in many community activities, in political activities, in religious activities, and discussion of current events – and they make donations to causes they deem worthwhile. They seem to show up everywhere. People ask them to be involved, and they ask others. More than eight in 10 (82%) say they have been asked to get involved in the past year, and nearly the same number (79%) have asked others to get involved. The group is evenly divided between men and women. With one in four (24%) being African American, this group contains the highest percentage of African Americans of all seven engagement groups. The Civic Leaders lead the way in every respect. They are highly educated and highly motivated. Two-thirds have a four-year college degree. The median age of people in this group is 49 years old.

2. **Community Activists: Politically Engaged (11%)**

   The typical Community Activist is similar to the Civic Leader, with high levels of involvement in community groups, informal socializing, and making donations. These people are highly engaged in political activity and discussion of current events, but less involved in religious activity. The dropoff in religious activity is what separates them from the Civic Leaders group (See Tables 1 and 2). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of this group is male, and more than eight in 10 (83%) are white. Half of this group (51%) has a college degree. This is the group with the highest proportion of people (72%) who are married or partnered. The median age of people in this group is 47 years old.

3. **Faith-Based Activists: Religiously Engaged (22%)**

   What makes the typical person in this group stand out is a very high level of religious involvement. The Faith-Based Activist has even more place-of-worship and faith-based activity than the Civic Leaders. For this group, religious activity is the most important activity. The typical person in this group belongs to and is active in a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, and is also highly engaged in community activity and makes donations. This group is only moderately involved in technology-based activities and informal socializing. The typical Faith-Based Activist also engages in discussions about current affairs and is exposed to news sources more than most Illinoisans. More than six in 10 (62%) are women, and the racial makeup is typical of the overall sample, with eight in 10 being white (82%) and 14% being African American. More than half (54%) live in the Chicago suburbs and almost one in five (18%) lives in Chicago. While 70% are married/partnered, one in eight (13%) is widowed. The median age of people in this group is 48 years old.

4. **Cyber-Activists: Technologically Engaged (16%)**

The Cyber-Activist is more technologically engaged than the typical person in any other group. The Cyber-Activist discusses politics and current events and socializes informally at fairly high levels. But the typical member is significantly less engaged than the other leaders and activists in religious activity, exposure to sources of news, and making donations. General community involvement is average. More than four in 10 (44%) of their households have children, and nearly one in five (18%) have pre-school children. Only 2% are widowed, and 44% are single. Nearly half (48%) call themselves political independents. The median age of people in this group is 33 years old, making this the youngest group by far.

5. **Informal Socializers (11%)**

The most common way that these people connect with others in their communities is in informal settings (see Table 2). They are average in general community involvement, and their contribution activity is moderately high. But they don't discuss politics or current affairs much, nor do they spend much time watching the news or reading newspapers. More are single (46%) than married/partnered (43%) – which is different from the statewide figures. Nearly six of 10 (59%) are male, nine in 10 are white. While their median age is 45 years old, they tend not to be middle-aged, but clustered in the youngest or oldest age groups.

6. **Informed Contributors: Passively Engaged (16%)**

The Informed Contributors are older and keep informed by discussing current affairs and paying attention to the news. They also make monetary donations and are moderately active politically, but they are not as active in religious or technological activity. Nor do they spend much time socializing informally. One in six (16%) is widowed, six in 10 are women, and three-fourths have household incomes less than $50,000. More than four in 10 (45%) are Democrats, with the rest evenly split between Republicans and independents, making this the group with the highest proportion of Democrats. The median age of people in this group is 55 years old, the oldest of the seven groups.

7. **The Relatively Disengaged (16%)**

For every activity except religious activity, the people in this group are less active than people in any of the other groups. They rank particularly low on discussion of politics and current events and regular news exposure, they tend toward more religious activity (see Table 2). It is a consistently low level of engagement on the other six types of activity that defines this group. More than half (52%) have a high school diploma or less, and nearly half (47%) are in households in the lowest income category, those making up to $30,000 a year. Democrats and independents are equal in number (38%), with just 23% being Republican. The median age of people in this group is 48 years old.

Differences in involvement by race, gender, age, education, employment, region, and party

Race: There is no significant difference between whites and African Americans on their overall level of civic engagement. (Our sample size of other racial or ethnic groups was not large enough to make significant comparisons.) On specific types of activity: African Americans have a higher level of community involvement than whites. African Americans also volunteer to more types of organizations and have a higher level of religious activity and news exposure. Whites have a higher level of secular contribution activity and technology-based activity. They are similar in their levels of political activity.

Gender: Men and women do not differ in their overall level of civic engagement, although they do differ in the particular forms of engagement. Men are significantly more active in informal socializing, discussion of politics and current affairs, and technology-based activities, while women are significantly more involved in church activities, and women volunteer to more types of organizations. There are no significant differences in the level of political activity, news exposure, and contribution activity.

Age: This study divides adults into three age groups: 60 and older, 40 to 59, and under 40. People between 40 and 59 years old have the highest level of total civic engagement, while the oldest group has the lowest level. However, the pattern of generational involvement depends upon the type of activity. The mid-range group has the highest level of community involvement, political activity, discussion of politics and current affairs, and contributions. The youngest group has the lowest level of political activity and contributions. The oldest group has the highest level of religious activity and exposure to news. The youngest group has the highest level of technology-based activity and informal socializing. In those two categories, the oldest group is lowest in both.

Education: Overall, persons with higher levels of education have a greater level of civic engagement. A higher level of education is also correlated with four specific activities: community involvement, political activity, technology-based activity, and contributions. Education level is less significant when it comes to religious activity, news exposure, and discussion of politics and current events.

Employment: Those with full-time jobs have a higher level of civic engagement than those with part-time jobs. Retired people have the highest level of news exposure, and those with full-time jobs the highest level of technology-based activity. Retired people and those with part-time jobs have higher levels of church activity.

Region: The level of engagement does not differ dramatically among the four regions: city of Chicago, Chicago suburbs, northern/central Illinois, and southern Illinois. However, Chicago suburbanites have the highest level of contribution activity, while Chicago and southern Illinois residents have the lowest . Chicago residents have the highest level of news exposure. Southern Illinois residents have the highest level of political

activity. Northern/central Illinois residents report the highest level of informal socializing. No significant differences for religious activity were found across the four regions.

Political Party: Republicans show the highest level of total civic engagement, religious activity, and contribution activity. Both Republicans and Democrats are more likely to participate in political activity and be exposed to the news. Independents and Republicans are more likely than Democrats to engage in technology-based activities and to socialize informally.

Employers have impact on civic engagement

Employers can have a profound impact on civic engagement in Illinois. Employers' encouragement of community participation is positively correlated with volunteer or contribution activity by employees and with their total level of civic engagement activity. Nearly four of 10 of the employees (38%) said their employer encourages them to volunteer for community projects. More than one in four (28%) reported that their employer gives incentives or recognition to employees who volunteer, and one in four reported that their employer gives money to organizations for which their employees volunteer. Employee contributions to a local charitable organization (aside from religious organizations) are positively correlated to the number of reported employer efforts in this area.

Engagement is also related to perceptions of one's community

We thought it was important to ask people about the context in which their social engagement takes place. Not surprisingly, we found that the more favorably people view their community, the greater their level of civic engagement. Citizens' higher level of civic engagement was related to more positive evaluations of their local government and politics and the role they could have in it.

Overall, one in three (33%) of our respondents viewed their community as an excellent place to live. Another 48% called it good. Almost one in five (18%) rated their communities fair or poor. People in the Chicago suburbs are the most likely to have a sense of civic pride and to rate their community as an excellent place to live.

So what? Addressing the three sectors with 68 ideas to stimulate civic engagement

In our project and in other work about civic engagement around the country, the question inevitably arises, "So what? Why does all of this matter? What can we do?"

We have a partial answer. We have built a list of 68 recommendations to stimulate citizen participation in their communities (see page 15). Most of these suggestions emerge directly from the research, while several come from a combination of our research, the work of others, and our lived experiences. One conclusion that emerges from this work is that leaders have to do a better job of articulating to one another and to their constituencies what "civic

engagement" means. This study shows that community involvement means different things to different people, and leaders can build on that reality . It is with that in mind that we offer the 68 recommendations. Some may not seem new, but in the context of this analysis of civic engagement in Illinois, we fervently hope that these recommendations will be viewed under a new and hopeful light. Our recommendations are divided into these categories:

1. 6 action steps for **everyone**
2. 10 things **individuals** can do
3. 10 things **leaders** can do
4. 8 things **places of worship** should encourage
5. 10 things people in the **business/private sector** can do
6. 10 things people in the **government/public sector** can do
7. 9 things people in the **nonprofit sector** can do
8. 5 ways the **three sectors** can collaborate

We deliberately made an effort in this report to keep three distinct sectors of Illinois in mind: the public/government sector, the private/business sector, and the nonprofit sector. Each sector faces different challenges, and when it comes to civic engagement, some of our recommendations overlap but others are distinct for each one.

TOWARD THE FUTURE:
Keep up with two Web sites

This project deals with how Illinois citizens connect and interact with one another. Therefore, we are giving the project an "extended life" with the creation of two Web sites.

Illinois Civic Engagement Project. The first is about this project itself. Go to civic.uis.edu, the site of the Illinois Civic Engagement Project (but do not type "www" first!). It contains additional information and links to other civic engagement initiatives around the country.

Illinois Electronic Neighborhood, which is accessible by a link from our civic engagement project site. A product of this project, the Illinois Electronic Neighborhood is our effort to provide ongoing information about local Illinois initiatives that enhance civic engagement. There is not only information there about interesting projects around the state. There is also a form you can complete to let us know about creative civic activities or projects being done in your neighborhood or in a group with which you are affiliated. Let's make this an ongoing conversation! Go to civic.uis.edu and then click on Illinois Electronic Neighborhood, or contact *Illinois Issues* or the United Way of Illinois for more information.

About the Illinois Civic Engagement Project

The United Way of Illinois and *Illinois Issues* magazine directed this Illinois Civic Engagement Project, with funding from Caterpillar Inc., Peoria; State Farm Insurance, Bloomington; the Woods Fund of Chicago; and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, Chicago. The United Way of Illinois, based in Oak Brook, serves 106 local United Ways. *Illinois Issues* is a unit of the Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

The Survey Research Office and Institute for Public Affairs at UIS conducted the telephone survey research, and the firm of Lipman Hearne, Inc., of Chicago conducted the focus groups under the institute's direction. In addition, the Donors Forum of Chicago assisted with in-kind support, the establishment of the steering committee, and project development.

This is the first report, a benchmark study, about the level of civic engagement in Illinois, with a focus on activity at the local level.

The Survey Research Office conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of 1,050 Illinoisans between November 2000 and February 2001. Lipman Hearne, Inc., conducted seven focus groups in December 2000 and January 2001 in Chicago, Deerfield, Peoria, and Carbondale.

Summary

We discovered that most Illinoisans are civically engaged in some way, but their forms of participation and interaction differ significantly. A small percentage are involved in many ways, but most people are more specialized or selective in their forms of engagement. Some focus almost exclusively on their church, for example, while others thrive on political activity. To make sense of the many forms of civic engagement, the research led us to develop a description of seven basic civic engagement groups, which present a new kind of profile of Illinois.

The good news is that many Illinoisans are engaged in their communities. People are still making a difference where they live. The bad news is that people feel significant barriers to participation in their communities.

The challenge for individuals is to choose to make a difference in their communities. They can make that choice, and many do.

The challenge for leaders is to understand what motivates people to become involved. They should remember that we're living in an age when most people already feel they don't have enough time to do what they want to do.

The challenge is to ask people to become involved in ways that satisfy people and in time frames that are manageable.

68 Ways

We Can Make a Difference in Our Communities, and Why We Should

These 68 recommendations offer practical suggestions for ways that individuals, leaders, organizations, and businesses can be involved on behalf of their communities. They are sorted into eight categories:

- 6 action steps that work for **everyone**
- 10 things **individuals** can do
- 10 things **leaders** can do
- 8 things **places of worship** should encourage
- 10 things people in the **business/private sector** can do
- 10 things people in the **government/public** sector can do
- 9 things people in the **nonprofit sector** can do
- 5 ways the **three sectors** can collaborate

Plus, we suggest:

The Illinois Electronic Neighborhood: We are creating the Illinois Electronic Neighborhood, on which we will provide examples of local initiatives to promote civic engagement around the state. You can find this electronic neighborhood at the Web site civic.uis.edu, the site of the Illinois Civic Engagement project. You will also find a form on which you can tell us about a project, and we'll update the list periodically.

Additional resources: This project is released in the midst of an important national discussion about civic engagement. On our Web site, therefore, we recommend many other resources to you. Especially noteworthy are efforts of the Pew Charitable Trusts (www.pewtrusts.com), the reports of the Saguaro Project at Harvard University (www.bettertogether.com), the Kettering Foundation (www.kettering.org), the Independent Sector's push for collaboration (www.indepsec.org), and the Harwook Institute (www.theharwoodgroup.com).

We agree with the person who said at one of our focus groups that life is "a balance of responsibilities and rights. You have rights as a citizen, but you have responsibilities to your community, too."

With that in mind, here are our 68 recommendations:

6 Action steps
that work for everyone

Simple yet powerful ways to truly change Illinois

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
1. Ask people to be involved.	A big difference between nonparticipants and participants in local communities is that nonparticipants often are not asked to help. 32% of those polled said they would be more involved if they were asked. The power of the personal invitation is enormous. Also use newsletters, Web sites, and community bulletin boards to make it easy to identify ways to be involved.
2. Ask for a limited amount of time.	The biggest barrier to participation is pressure people feel due to job and family obligations and responsibilities. So make your request seem reasonable – a specific duration of time and number of hours.
3. Teach civic skills.	People evidently feel intimidated; 23% do not know how to get involved. So they need not only to be asked, but to be told, perhaps step by step, exactly what to do, whom to write, where to go, whom to call.
4. Appeal to people with reasons for which most people get involved.	Some of the main reasons people get involved are to to improve their community, to be with people they like (fellowship) and with those who share their ideals, and to influence policy.
5. Remember the power of faith-based motivation.	35% of people become engaged in response to their faith. Some limit their activity to their place of worship. So extend collaboration to places of worship and faith-based organizations, and help them make connections to other community needs.
6. Also remember the power of corporate commitment.	Many people are engaged through their job. So make such opportunities easier by encouraging employees to join professional organizations, volunteer their time, and make contributions to good causes. Our research shows that the more committed a business is to community involvement, the more involved their employees will become.

10 Things individuals can do

ACTION:

RATIONALE:

1. Vote.

While 82% of those surveyed report voting in the last national election, only 57% reported always voting in local elections. What happened in Florida last fall should remind us of how important it is to go to the polls.

2. Stir the pot. Dare to ask questions.

51% of those surveyed say they got involved to learn more about the community. Some things never get done because no one challenges the system. You can write, call, send e-mail, or attend meetings and dare to ask questions that your believe a lot of people want to ask. Dare to ask the tough questions of community leaders.

3. Attend community meetings on issues of importance to you.

Meetings are a great way to get to know others who share your concerns. 23% of those surveyed said they didn't know how to get involved. Attending meetings is one way, but only 29% report going to meetings of neighborhood groups.

4. Invite a friend; bring a friend.

Studies show that people are more likely to get and stay involved when they are asked personally. 32% of those who are not involved attribute it to the fact that they have never been asked.

5. Pick up your phone or your pen and make your voice heard.

Send letters to your legislators and the media expressing your point of view. 34% of those surveyed report having contacted a state or local official, while only 9% have written a letter to a magazine or newspaper. Most elected officials will say they receive only a handful of letters on any given issue. Your letter matters. Officials' addresses and e-mail addresses are available in libraries and many Web sites.

6. Identify your own talents and interests. You don't have to do everything.

Whether you are good at analyzing policy, interacting with people, making posters, or baking cookies, everyone has something valuable to contribute. Yet 13% feel they lack the necessary skills to get involved. And remember most people are selective in how, when, and where they get involved. So choose carefully. But choose something!

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
7. Civic participation is a learned behavior.	Make opportunities to involve young adults, students and youth groups in civic activities. The responsibility of child care is cited as an impediment to 26% of the respondents. So find ways to make your kids partners in the community. Some companies have "family days" for the involvement of everyone. If you have children, involve them in discussions of community affairs, and when appropriate, take them to meetings. Children whose parents were involved are more likely to become involved themselves as adults.
8. Learn how to become involved.	From your local library to the United Way to your cable access television screen, your communities are full of resources about activities. Many groups probably have tried and failed to reach you. So look for them. 23% of those surveyed said they didn't know how to get involved. Information is as close as your community calendar. The next time you visit the library or supermarket, look for information on upcoming events.
9. Do something for yourself.	Although 65% of citizens believe that everyone should be involved, people have different reasons for doing so. One of the top three reasons is to meet people or improve your own situation in some way. So be "selfish" by getting involved and doing things for others.
10. Realize that your "informal socializing" is healthy for your community.	For some people, getting together informally with friends and family is their primary way of connecting with other people. Those gatherings provide opportunities for discussion of community needs and politics, and that strengthens our democracy. Studies prove it. So get together!

10 Things leaders can do

ACTION:

RATIONALE:

1. **Teach people how to become involved; teach them how to use "civic skills".**

Many people don't know how to become involved or say they don't have the necessary skills. So don't assume people have civic skills or know how to reach their elected officials or sign up to volunteer. Be creative. Reach out. Some people are waiting to be taught.

2. **Conduct forums for dialogue and conversation as a routine step in solution development.**

13% of those polled don't feel they are part of the community, and 9% say they don't participate more because they don't feel welcome. Forums can be casual informational meetings in neighborhoods and homes.

3. **Emphasize public listening more than a formal public hearing when possible.**

All too often, a public hearing is merely an event that satisfies a legal condition for making a decision. Such occasions should be opportunities for people to express themselves. Leaders should listen, then determine specifically about how they will respond to citizens' concerns. Then they must do what they promised to do.

4. **Exploit technology to impart information and encourage such audience participation as cable television programming, telephone call-in, or cyber-town hall meeetings.**

26% report they know too little about the issues, 17% are often not involved because of poor health, and 9% are without transportation. For lots of people, new technology is a primary means of interacting. And 53% watch or listen to a call-in show at least weekly.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
5. **Be an active listener.**	Some people do not feel heard even when they do show up. They say their efforts do not make a difference, and 30% of those surveyed believe a small number of people control their community.
6. **Publicize efforts to solve community and neighborhood problems that affect people where they live and work.**	19% say the reason they don't participate more is that local politics and community affairs have nothing to do with the important things in life. You have to make the connection for them.
7. **Establish policies that make it easier for employees or constituents to volunteer.**	Research shows that the more an employer shows a commitment, the more an employee contributes money and volunteers time.
8. **Make it clear in many ways how citizens can contact officials in order to get involved or express an opinion.**	This reinforces community interaction, rather than passivity, dependence, and isolation. Advertising studies indicate that when you're tired of putting out a message, the public may just be starting to hear your message.
9. **Conduct asset inventories (such as youth, seniors, etc.) rather than problem inventories to focus you vision on success.**	Every community already has human assets. Focus on people's abilities to solve problems, not to be problems.
10. **Involve diverse constituents.**	View diversity as an opportunity, publicizing and celebrating the many attributes of constituent groups and sectors. Our state is getting more diverse, and leaders have to work at inclusivity.

8 Things places of worship should encourage

Places of worship – churches, congregations, synagogues, mosques – are institutions with members who are among other things (employers, mothers, husbands, doctors, etc.), citizens. Places of worship can be places where people are provided opportunities to enhance and strengthen their responsibility to be good citizens.

Two rationales dominate this list of suggestions: Many people don't know how to get involved, and many are not asked.

Also, keep in mind that one's religious faith often motivates people to become involved:

ACTION:

1. *Appoint, hire or find a volunteer coordinator for your church.*

2. *Establish relationships with groups and organizations such as women's shelters, tutoring programs, and Bread for the World, which need volunteers. Make a list of organizations and encourage members to volunteer. Encourage friends to volunteer together.*

3. *Create a child care cooperative, making church facilities available, providing parents with an opportunity to volunteer for something or to gather with other parents to talk about education in their community.*

4. *Sponsor a gathering, get a speaker, explore themes such as diversity (cultural, social and religious diversity as well as diversity of opinions), provide people with the opportunity to discuss how diversity affects their lives and communities.*

RATIONALE:

A primary reason people volunteer is to be with people they like.

Lack of child care is a major barrier to participation for 26% of parents.

A new national benchmark study on civic engagement identifies diversity as one of the major opportunities for new forms of civic engagement.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
5. Provide facilities where members can volunteer, e.g., establish a "cooking for the homeless" program in your place of worship or provide transportation so that members can visit prison inmates (some prison systems provide opportunities for tutoring as well).	People volunteer to help their communities and for humanitarian purposes. Sometimes they just need a place to do it or a way to get there.
6. Provide legislative advocacy or information opportunities. Highlight important pieces of legislation in which members might be interested. List the addresses and phone numbers of those who should be contacted to express an opinion about an issue.	This suggestion may depend upon the doctrines and principles of your place of worship. But many people are motivated by their faith and say they don't know enough about issues.
7. Sponsor a visit by community, civic, social service professionals, or elected officials.	As a place of worship, you already have one of the places where people are most likely to get involved. But many don't know enough about issues or don't know how to get involved beyond the church. Bring people together.
8. Establish a social concerns committee to encourage all of the above and think of others.	The number one motivation for people to get involved is to make their community a better place.

10 Things people in the business/private sector can do

ACTION:

RATIONALE:

*1. **Adopt company policies that make it easier for parents to attend their children's functions, and identify opportunities for "family volunteering" events – in which the whole family can get involved.***

Youth-related activities are a main form of civic engagement for adults.

*2. **Encourage your employees to make donations to workplace campaigns.***

Corporate support makes it more likely that employees will donate time and money.

*3. **For parents with children, allow flexible working hours so that their work schedules are more in line with school schedules.***

Despite great changes in the workplace and in families, our society still operates as if two models can coexist independently: the 8-to-5 business hours and the 8:30-to-3 school hours. Surely, schools and businesses could work in better harmony.

*4. **Encourage and pay for participation in business-related and professional associations, locally and nationally.***

For many people, their work IS their life. 28% of our sample belong to a professional organization already, and 9% are active members of a local business or professional group. Encourage more of what people already are doing.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
5. Make it easy for your employees to contribute to the United Way and other local charities, through payroll deduction if possible. Encourage them to participate and set company goals for participation.	Many people say they don't know how to get involved or that they were never asked. Some said their employers' encouragement led them to give. The company goal lets your employees know that you are concerned about their community.
6. Encourage employees to take walks or do physical exercise and offer them the time to do it, such as at lunchtime.	This lets employees know you are concerned about their overall health and well-being. The number of health clubs is growing rapidly and has the third highest membership in our study, so encouraging workouts on "company time" is good for everybody.
7. Understand different approaches to civic engagement taken by people of different generations.	Some younger people are more technology oriented, and some older people limit themselves to making contributions and watching the news. Build on what people are already doing and respond to how younger people like to get involved.
8. Encourage employees to get involved in a community activity or organization, and give them flexibility in their work schedules to allow it.	Many say the pressures of work and time prevent them from getting involved. So use company newsletters, bulletin boards, verbal encouragement, and leaders' examples to make it known that community service is important. A sustained effort is preferable to a one-time announcement.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:

9. ***Endorse employee requests to scoordinate activities such as Toys for Tots, blood drives and local festivals.***

88% donated food, toys, or clothing within the past year. Hop aboard this bandwagon.

10. ***Provide informal socializing opportunities for employees and provide friendly spaces for such interaction.***

For one of every 10 people, informal socializing is their primary form of social connection. So employers should encourage it at the workplace as a healthy form of civic engagement. That time spent chatting may be valuable to the person's health, your community's development, and your employees' overall job satisfaction. It would also provide settings where one person can ask another person to become involved or talk about community issues and problems.

10 Things people in the public/ government sector can do

ACTION:

RATIONALE:

1. Build on the civic pride in your community – be positive and assertive.

Every public official hears criticism. But 83% of Illinoisans rate their community as an excellent or good place to live, and 79% think most people in their communities have civic pride. Tell people this, and say it's time to put that pride to work instead of dwelling on the criticism.

2. Be a teacher and promoter of civic skills.

A number of people say they do not know how to get involved – write a letter, attend a meeting, participate in a public forum. Do not assume that people know – and don't assume they know how to get in touch with you or other leaders.

3. Provide leadership training as part of the civic-skill building process.

Our form of government depends upon future generations of leaders coming along. Teaching civic skills to children, teenagers, young adults and adults will help develop the leaders of the future. Work with schools and civic groups to identify and promote civic skills.

4. Make it easier for citizens to register to vote.

Perhaps move the registration deadline closer to election day, or allow people to vote on Saturdays. What is so sacred about Tuesday?

5. Get up to speed technologically.

Part of your younger audience is most engaged in technology-based activities. If you want to reach them, you can probably do so with Web sites.

6. Support an Illinois television channel like C-SPAN to track the actions of Illinois state government.

Not enough Illinoisans know what's really happening in state government. Many Illinoisans already are watching C-SPAN regularly, and television is the number one source of news in Illinois.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
7. *Foster more relation- ships with businesses, nonprofit organiza- tions, schools, civic organizations, and places of worship*.	50% believe there is shared power in their community, but 30% believe a small group is in control. Attack this negative attitude with outreach.
8. *Commit to hosting at least one town hall meeting per quarter*.	A significant number of people do attend such sessions, and atten- dance would probably increase if people are personally asked to attend. But only about half the respondents said their community has a local forum of some kind.
9. *When you are with groups, tell citizens the importance of ask- ing others to contact you and other com- munity leaders.*	Of all the people who contacted a public official, four in 10 said some- one had asked them to do so. With civic engagement, there is rarely a substitute for personal contact or a personal suggestion to do some- thing.
10. *Participate in your statewide associations.*	Many people in Illinois already do. A primary general motivation for participating in society is to influence government policy and to make your community better. Another major reason is to be with people who share your ideals. Associations exist for every kind of public offi- cial. So join.

9 Things people in the nonprofit/ independent sector can do

ACTION:

1. ***Ask citizens to support specific events or programs, get their help as board members, or simply ask their advice.***

2. ***Structure volunteering opportunities to help participants succeed.***

3. ***Utilize untapped potential.***

4. ***Use talk radio as a way to spread the word about the work of your nonprofit.***

5. ***Invite a religious leader to serve on your board or to help advise on a project.***

RATIONALE:

41% of those citizens who are "unengaged" have not been asked. Conversely, many of those who give time, money, and expertise were asked by someone to contribute. Citizens need to be invited to participate. Who does the asking is also important: tapping into existing social networks is best. Ask existing volunteers to help recruit their friends and co-workers. See if an existing network like a youth or church group might take on a project.

Offering prospective volunteers small projects, with limited time commitments, and mentoring to make them feel comfortable and capable may help to ease apprehension and, over time, might lead to more involvement. The data also show that potential volunteers want to *believe* that their effort – no matter how big or small – is making a difference.

The work of many community-based organizations has shown that community improvement efforts succeed when impacted populations – youth, older adults, low-income persons, single parents – are part of the process.

Some groups, and particularly nonwhites, rely on talk/news radio as an important source of information.

Other research indicates that citizens have strong social networks through their church and religious affiliations and are very likely to be involved through these networks.

ACTION:	RATIONALE:
6. Encourage and recognize employee volunteer involvement and leadership.	Volunteer activities add value, build camaraderie and relationships among staff, and help employees feel they are making a difference. Short-term projects not related to work can help employees connect with community needs in a different way. The research suggests that employer encouragement does indeed motivate people to participate and volunteer.
7. Use your office space as a place for meetings of community groups.	Getting people in the door – even if it's for a different group or issue – helps citizens of all types become more familiar, comfortable, and connected with the work that your nonprofit is doing.
8. Educate your employees, members, and constituents about public policies related to your issue(s).	Citizens are involved in issues they care about. By learning how to become active in the policy arena process through your organization (writing a letter about public school funding or a zoning change, for example), they can learn a new skill and add a valuable voice to the policy process. They will also take these skills with them elsewhere in their personal, community, and professional lives.
9. Find ways to involve youth.	Not only do they need to be involved, you are giving them valuable skills for the future. Young people are not as involved as other groups in community activities – including those organized and run by nonprofits. Real youth involvement takes work – training, mentoring, skills building and listening.

5 Ways the three major sectors can collaborate civically

ACTION:

RATIONALE:

1. **Move beyond partnerships and into true collaboration.**

The buzzword used to be "partnerships." Now the trend is to make collaborative efforts more inclusive. The Independent Sector, for example, has an initiative to encourage government, nonprofit, and business leaders to collaborate. See www.independentsector.org for more information.

2. **Provide a "safe space" for joint discussions.**

Any of the three sectors can call people together . A significant number of people feel alienated from their community. Some people in our study feel nothing would happen as a result of what they think or do. Some officials think they are rarely heard, we have been told. Design a forum in which everyone can share freely their own concerns and interests.

3. **Don't invite only the "usual suspects." Look for new suspects. Build relationships.**

This is an idea from the Pew Partnership – that new people, organizations, and approaches must be brought into the discussion. A Pew study showed that many leaders do not really believe ordinary citizens have the ability to make a big difference. So Pew emphasizes building relationships over time, not just holding a listening session or having people work together.

4. **Promote the concept of interdependence.**

There seems to be an organization, publication, or Web site for every cause and interest. While those can be informative and helpful, they can also be a source of factionalization in society.

5. **Explore what's already happening in Illinois: a lot! And enter the new Illinois Electronic Neighborhood.**

From the "Neighborhood College" in Springfield to the "Common Ground" project in northeastern Illinois to the work of the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference to the joint efforts of city and suburban mayors, including Mayor Daley, many projects are under way. Go to civic.uis.edu (Illinois Civic Engagement Project) periodically and click on "Illinois Electronic Neighborhood" to get more ideas.