

**Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative:**

**Measuring and Improving Campus & Community Civic Health**

The Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative, part of the American Democracy Project (ADP), serves as ADP’s contribution to the new American Commonwealth Project. The Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative is informed by the critical work of the National Conference on Citizenship on America’s civic health, by national thought leaders, and by research centers and projects on civic issues (e.g., CIRCLE, the New England Center for Research on Civic Learning and Engagement).

ADP’s Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative is intended to engage American colleges and universities in efforts to assess and improve campus and community civic health. It seeks to engage college and university campuses in determining their role in addressing societal issues and improving the overall civic health of their campuses and communities.

**Introduction**

Civic health data have become an increasingly central component of the national dialogue on civic life. The National Conference on Citizenship’s (NCoC) civic health index, “America’s Civic Health Index,” comprises data from states and cities. This annual report assesses our nation’s civic health based on a variety of civic indicators – including how often citizens report discussing current events, the number of political and voluntary action organizations and community groups we belong to, how neighbors problem solve together, participation in volunteer and service activities, and political action.

Creating a complimentary Civic Health Assessment and Action Initiative would 1.) develop tools for assessing the civic health of campuses and communities; 2.) expand our understanding of the current state of civic health on college campuses and in local communities; and 3.) identify ways that a college or university – in partnership with a local community – can improve the civic health of the campus and/or community.

This document outlines the Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative’s activities and goals, guiding principles, operational design, plan of action, and key organizations and individuals.

**Activities & Goals**

The focus of the Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative is on creating nationally informed but locally developed assessment tools which allow colleges and universities to assess and take action on campus and community civic health issues. The activities of the project will include:

1. Raising awareness about campus and community civic health
2. Identifying areas of civic health that are most promising for improvement
3. Providing opportunities for action to improve civic health

The goal of the initiative, and its parent project, ADP, is to produce informed and engaged citizens for our democracy.

The Civic Health initiative will result in a repository of new and existing assessment tools and measures that can be adapted by any postsecondary institution. This repository will be publically available on the AASCU website. The results of the Civic Health Assessment and Action Initiative may serve as another set of data points for NCoC city- and state-level Civic Health Indexes.

**Guiding Principles**

* Use this work to link to AASCU’s concept of institutions as ‘Stewards of Place’
* Involve students in the creation of the toolkit and in measuring and improving civic health of individual campuses and communities
* Hold Civic Health Summits as part of next three ADP annual meetings

**Operational Design**

1. Relationship to American Commonwealth Project

ADP’s Civic Health Assessment and Action Initiative is a complementary, grass-roots effort to understand the civic health of our campuses and their communities, supporting the goals of the American Commonwealth project. The dialogue being lead by the American Commonwealth Project will inform the development and implementation of the Civic Health Assessment and Action Initiative. At the same time, the Civic Health Initiative will hopefully inform the national conversation about how civic health can be measured and addressed by colleges and universities on their own campuses and in their own communities. The Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative supports the American Commonwealth Project’s overall aim to “develop colleges and universities as schools for informed, engaged citizenship; as centers in community life contributing to civic health, economic vitality, and social well-being; and as agents and architects of a diverse democracy undergoing rapid change in an interconnected world.”

1. Relationship to key partner organizations and thought leaders

The American Democracy Project will convene a group of key partner organizations and thought leaders, the first and foremost being our friends at the National Conference on Citizenship (see list of Key Organizations and Individuals, below). With the assistance and input of these organizations and thought leaders, the Civic Health Assessment and Action Initiative will begin to identify existing civic health assessment indicators and to develop new measures for assessing campus contributions to civic learning and health.

1. Relationship to campus and community leaders and stakeholders

In fall 2011, the American Democracy Project and its community college counterpart The Democracy Commitment will identify approximately 30 public colleges and universities that will participate in further developing and piloting the processes and tools of the Civic Health Assessment & Action Initiative. Pilot campuses will then identify local campus and community organizations, leaders, and stakeholders with which to collaboratively begin to assess, and later create action plans to improve, civic health. Campuses will be encouraged to hold their own Community Civic Health Town Hall Meetings and Civic Health Summits to shape their thinking about what aspects of civic health they want to focus on and what existing indicators already exist in the community and to later disseminate overall findings and to develop recommendations and action plans for improving civic health on their campuses and in their communities.

**Plan of Action**

Year 1: Develop Free or Low-Cost Set of Measures

* Finalize partners and thought leaders
* Convene thought leaders and begin to identify campus and community civic health indicators
* Develop, in a collaborative manner, a free or low-cost set of institutional measures or tools – a “toolkit” – for measuring these indicators
* Incorporate existing civic health indicators, when and where appropriate
* Identify a set of institutions that will serve as the Initiative’s participating institutions, and engage them in a development process for the creation of their own Civic Health Assessment and Action Plans.
* Convene a Civic Health Summit at June 7-9, 2012 ADP national meeting in San Antonio, Texas for representatives of participating institutions.

Year 2: Pilot Measures

* Participating institutions will conduct campus/community civic health assessments on approximately 30 ADP and TDC campuses
* Participating institutions will develop local action plans designed to improve and foster campus/community civic health
* Convene a second Civic Health Summit at June 6-8, 2013 ADP national meeting in Denver, Colorado for representatives from participating institutions

Year 3: Refine Measures

* Connect, celebrate, and refine the work through ADP and ACP
* Follow a continuous improvement cycle of refining assessment measures and processes
* Convene a third Civic Health Summit for all ADP institutions at the ADP national meeting

**Key Organizations and Individuals**

Partner Organizations:

* National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC)
* CIRCLE: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement
* The Democracy Commitment
* New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE)
* Wayne State University’s Center for the Study of Citizenship

Other Potential Partner Organizations:

* Campus Compact
* The Democracy Imperative
* *The New York Times* Knowledge Network

Thought Leaders:

* National Conference on Citizenship: David Smith and Kristen Campbell
* CIRCLE: Peter Levine
* NERCHE: John Saltmarsh
* Wayne State’s Center for the Study of Citizenship, Marc Kruman
* KerryAnn O’Meara, Higher Education faculty member, University of Maryland College Park
* Michael Stout, Sociology faculty member, Missouri State University

Other Potential Thought Leaders:

* The Democracy Imperative, Nancy Thomas
* *The New York Times* Knowledge Network: Felice Nudelman

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