



DEFINING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

“Civic engagement” covers a broad range of activities and approaches, and both funders and grantee partners use the term to mean different things. Having internal clarity about how your foundation understands the term can be an important first step in building shared understanding of this strategy. Below, we’ve gathered some definitions to show how various philanthropic institutions define civic engagement and how it connects to their strategies for change.

Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation: Civic engagement – the active participation of people in the decision-making processes that shape their communities and their lives – is critical to a healthy society. In fact, we only realize the full promise of democracy when people participate; when all segments of a community have fair and equal access to institutions of government and meaningful opportunities to voice their opinions about important issues driving the public policy agenda.

James Irvine Foundation: Our goal is for California to have a representative electorate, with policymaking bodies incentivized to consider the long term, and public decisions made based on good data about effective solutions. Our grantmaking prioritizes support for organizations fostering greater participation in elections and other public decision-making among traditionally underrepresented populations (low-income, ethnic and immigrant communities). We emphasize organizations that are working at a regional or statewide scale and are engaging residents during and between election cycles.

Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE): From volunteering to voting, from community organizing to political advocacy, the defining characteristic of active civic engagement is the commitment to participate and contribute to the improvement of one’s community, neighborhood and nation.

Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta: Civic engagement is a multifaceted strategy that involves a diverse spectrum of voices and platforms to serve the public interest. This work must be based on reliable facts, figures and credible study to provide objective information and fair debate. It encompasses a broad range of activities that can strengthen the nonprofit sector and influence community life.

Silicon Valley Community Foundation: Civic engagement means working together to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. It can take many forms – voting, giving, volunteering and joining civic and community organizations are the basic elements of civic engagement. (Adapted definition from American Democracy Project).

OTHER READING ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- *Leveraging Limited Dollars: How Grantmakers Achieve Tangible Results by Funding Policy and Community Engagement*, NCRP (2012)
<http://www.ncrp.org/files/publications/LeveragingLimitedDollars.pdf>
- *Foundations for Civic Impact: Advocacy and Civic Engagement Toolkit for Private Foundations* (2010) by the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, Council on Foundations and Rockefeller Brothers Fund.
http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/PF_Toolkit_Complete.pdf