

Civic Engagement

What does it mean to be involved?

Civic Engagement is working to make a difference in the 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.



Civic Engagement: Learning Goals

In this lesson, you will learn about

Different types of organizations related to civic engagement

The relationship between civic activity and government

Common community issues and how they might affect you and your community

At the end of the lesson, you should be able to start forming an action plan to begin addressing an issue that is important to you.



How do Americans shape government?

America is run by an **indirect democracy**. This means it is founded on the principle of elected officials representing the people.

In an indirect democracy (as opposed to a direct democracy), citizens vote for representatives with beliefs they support, who will make laws on their behalf.



This is the small part of federal lawmaking that citizens directly influence.



Civic Engagement: The Basics

What is civic engagement?

Civic engagement is the process of being actively involved in decision-making at a local, and sometimes national, level. Citizens may become involved through **participation in government** or through **community organizing**.

Government participation

when citizens use opportunities provided by the government to indicate their choices.

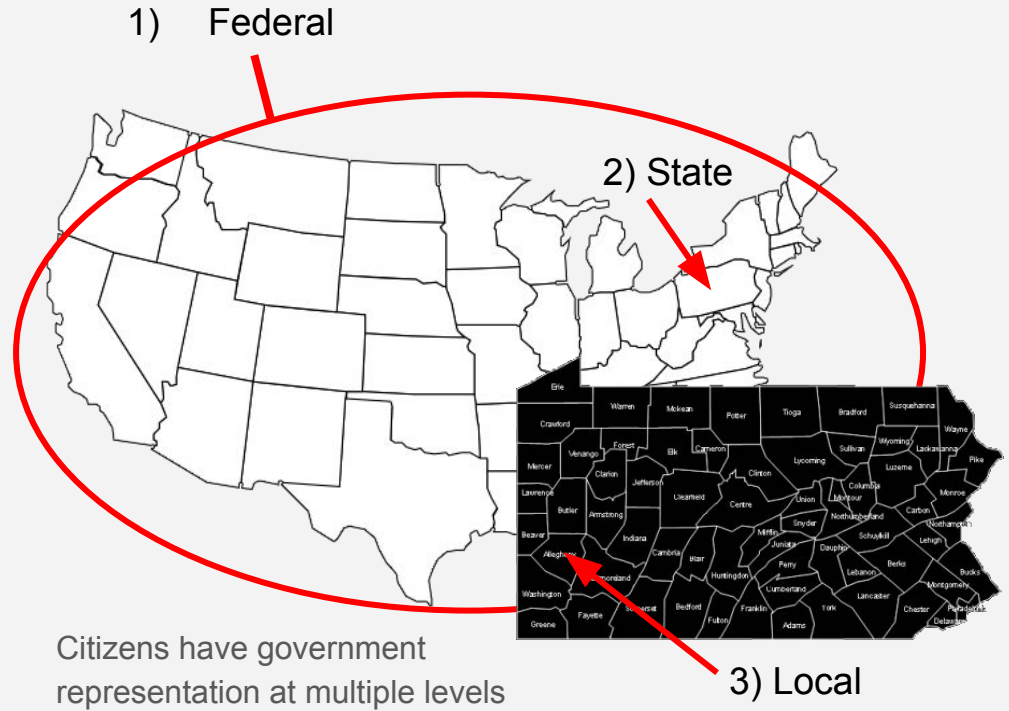
Community organization is

the process of people coming together to address common issues outside of government.



Civic Engagement: Government Participation

Government participation includes voting in elections, attending town hall meetings, and completing censuses or surveys administered by the government.



Community Action: Where Government Falls Short

The government is complicated and hard to run, so sometimes policies do not support the needs of local communities.

Community engagement can help make change locally, as well as influence state and national movements.

This is what makes community organizing so important.



Civic Engagement: Community Organizing

Here are just some examples of government and community groups, and issues they can help address.

People are being robbed in my neighborhood: Sheriff's Office

My landlord has ignored my broken heater for months: Housing Authority

A large pothole causes traffic during my commute to work or school: Public Works

My local park is full of rusty playground equipment: Parks and Recreation

I want to know what to do in case of a flu epidemic: County Health Department

Local jobs are being outsourced to companies in another city: Mayor's Office

Why do you think each of these answers were selected? Provide logic for three of the examples



Video: After school program makes learning fun



NEXT

Steps to Addressing Local Issues

UNDERSTAND THE
BASICS

Identify reasons a problem exists, and then (and only then) identifying possible solutions, and realistic options for improvement. The techniques for analyzing community problems require simple logic, and sometimes the collection of evidence.

ANALYZE THE
ISSUE

Understand the heart of a problem, think about the source without blaming anyone for the problem, determine barriers and resources to addressing it, and think about the behavioral and environmental factors that have led to the problem. Consider the relationship between these elements.

TAKE ACTION

Given what you've thought about, determine the resources, individuals, and organizations that can affect change.



NEXT

Understanding Community Issues



Now that you've seen how one organization works with the community, let's talk about another.

A group of kids gathers on weekends at a house across the street from yours. Sometimes they are peaceful, but lately they have been loud and carry on for hours. It appears they are drinking alcohol, but you know they are underage. There hasn't been an incident, but you're concerned.

What should you do?

Let's begin by observing how others handle issues in their community.



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Community Issues Case Study 1



Homelessness

Jack takes the highway to work, and sees homeless people gather in makeshift homes under an overpass. Each day on his way to work Jack is approached by someone looking for money or food.



Community Issues Case Study 1: Review



Audio: *“What is the root of homelessness? Homelessness comes from a number of sources: lack of jobs, lack of resources, healthcare, general economy.*

Who are the homeless? *The poor, drug addicted and mentally ill are disproportionately affected by homelessness.*

What are the barriers to solving it? *It's challenging to end homelessness because it requires money, cooperation from local authorities, and challenging the idea that people deserve to be homeless.*

What are my options? *You can help by volunteering at homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and donating money or supplies. Or you could do nothing.*



NEXT

Community Issues Case Study 1: Action plan



Homelessness



Narration: "Avoiding the problem isn't helping, so Jack begins to volunteer at a homeless shelter, and when he is approached by those who are struggling, he offers them the names and addresses of resources in the area. He notices over time that the homeless population decreases."



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Community Issues Case Study 2

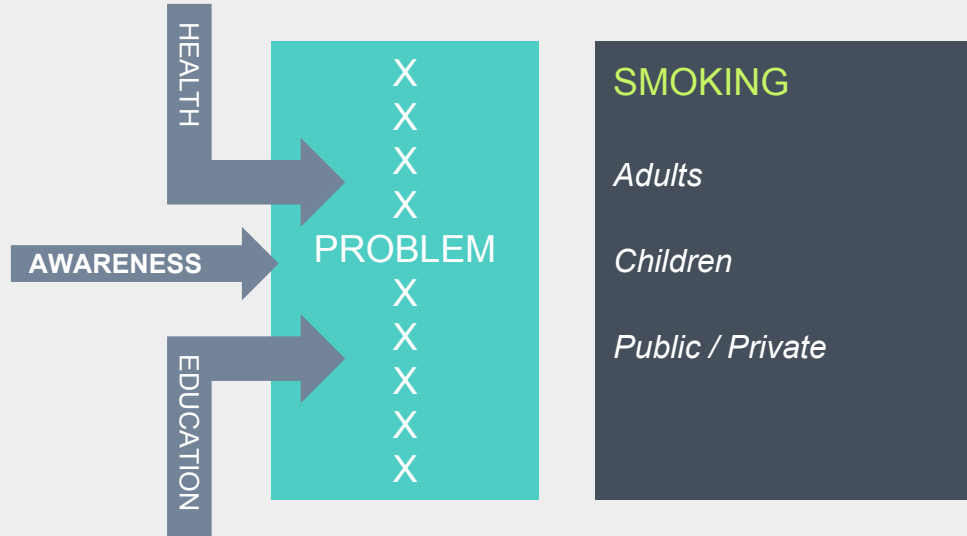


Smoking

Christa takes a walk in the park every day between classes. Each time she notices a group of medical professionals from the adjacent hospital taking a cigarette break near the playground. She's not affected personally by smoking, but wants to make sure it's not near the children.



Community Issues Case Study 2



Audio: “What is the root of people smoking in parks? People may not know it’s not allowed or they may not care. **The people affected by smoking in parks are** nonsmokers, and even other smokers. Innocent children and people of all ages frequent parks. People’s health is affected by smokers, and so are their social habits. **It’s challenging to stop smoking in parks** because smoking is still legal, not all public places have bans, and people disregard warnings and signage. **To address this issue**, you can hang a “no smoking” sign in the park, if it is legal. You can ask the smokers to move, or call the parks department.



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Community Issues Case Study 2



Smoking



Narration: “Christa approaches the Parks Department and requests they post signage near that end of the park, to reduce smoking near children who are playing. She’s not the first with this concern, so The Parks Department decides it’s better to ban smoking in and around the park and begins a local campaign to raise awareness.”



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Community Issues Case Study 3

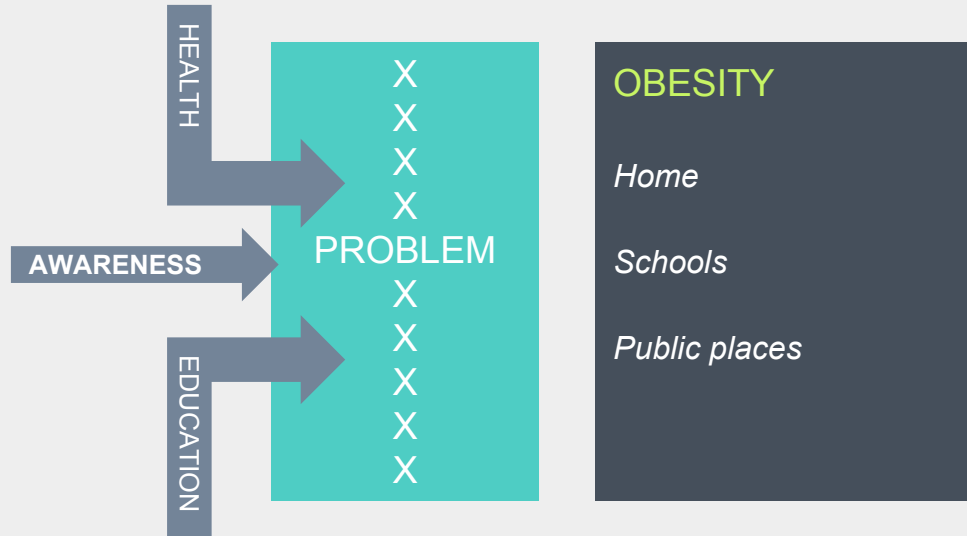


Obesity

Rhonda is a local middle school teacher, who notices that many of her students are overweight. If they bring lunches to school they are often unhealthy, and she fears that parents might not have the knowledge and access of free food for their students.



Community Issues Case Study 3



Audio: “**One root of obesity** is bad habits stemming from a lack of good food, lack of exercise, and too little nutrition education. **Obesity affects everyone. This issue can be influenced** by increasing access to nutrition information and healthy food. **Your options for addressing obesity in your neighborhood include** things like offering kids better food in schools, and educating families about where to find healthy meals.”



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Community Issues Case Study 3



Obesity



Narration: “Rhonda decides to start a campaign for healthy eating in her classroom, and to pass information home to parents, following up at parent-teacher conferences. She starts a student-run farmer’s market at her school. Students and parents become educated about healthy choices and the children become healthier.”



NEXT

Revisiting a Community Issue



A group of kids gathers on weekends to hang out at a house across the street from yours. Sometimes they are peaceful, but lately they have been loud and carry on for hours. It appears they are drinking alcohol, but you know they are underage. There hasn't been an incident, but you're concerned.

What should you do?



NEXT

Revisiting a Community Issue

A group of kids gathers on weekends to hang out at a house across the street from yours. Sometimes they are peaceful, but lately they get loud and carry on together. It appears they are drinking alcohol, but you know they are underage. There hasn't been an incident, but you're concerned.

What would you do?

Explain your reasoning.

