



Civic Engagement



Highlights of the 100th
Arizona Town Hall

April 22-25, 2012
Tucson, Arizona



Participants break up into five panels for two full days of discussions. Pictured above is “Panel Saguaro”.

Civic engagement includes more than just involvement with the political process; it also includes how individuals participate in the life of a community and how they come together for a public purpose that is not solely self-serving.

- From the 100th Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations



For 50 years, Arizona Town Hall has engaged, educated and empowered Arizonans to create solutions to critical policy issues.

Participants in the historic 100th Arizona Town Hall, held April 22-25, 2012 in Tucson, considered a topic at the very core of our society—civic engagement. The result: a consensus of recommended actions to strengthen, support and solidify Arizona’s future through the civic engagement of its people.

Prior to the Town Hall session, participants from throughout the state reviewed a comprehensive background report developed by Arizona State University. Meeting in facilitated small groups for two days, the participants addressed a common set of discussion questions. Trained recorders captured points of consensus and the entire group then gathered for a plenary session on the third day to adopt a report of findings and recommendations.

This publication is a summary of the complete report including ASU’s background research and the report of recommendations. Town Hall reports are published and made available to Arizona Town Hall members, elected officials including the Arizona Legislature, public libraries, and the general public. Download or order copies online at www.aztownhall.org, or call 602-252-9600 to request a copy.

Key Points from Background Report prepared by



Setting the Stage

- The Gallup Arizona Poll found that Arizonans are highly attached to their communities but don't feel connected to their community or to one another.
- Arizona citizens agree on more than they disagree about the issues, including a strong dissatisfaction with their elected leaders.

Principles and Processes of Civic Engagement

- Civic engagement can mean many things. There is no one way of doing it and no simple recipe for success.
- Civil discourse is important to civic engagement. It can be defined as robust, honest, frank and constructive dialogue that seeks to advance the public interest.
- Deliberative democracy is a range of practices aimed at involving lay citizens in issues of general public interest or community concerns. Deliberative democracy brings together diverse groups of community members to learn about each other, work through differences, and seek areas of common ground and agreement.
- There is a need for stronger structures that embed and sustain civic engagement, better tracking and assessing of engagement, and further exploration on how online and face-to-face engagement can support one another.

Exploring the Civic Infrastructure

- Arizona's civic culture is in flux. Gaps exist in the development of future civic leaders, particularly at the state level. There is currently no system that links civic learning, engagement, and learning across ages.

- Effective citizen engagement can foster a greater sense of community, engender trust, enhance creative problem solving, and even increase the likelihood that citizens will support financial investments in community projects. A wide range of tools and approaches are available to effectively engage citizens.
- In "ballot box democracy," citizen participation is sporadic, and citizens are perceived as consumers rather than as partners of government. In this situation, the few avenues for citizen involvement that do exist seldom go beyond information and consultation.
- Participatory governance refers to democratic spaces of deliberation and decision-making that allow people to influence policies and share control on matters that affect them. Participatory governance revitalizes democracy by reducing feelings of disconnection that people have with government and with their own communities.
- Schools contribute to citizenship by providing opportunities to engage in discussions where one's narrower interests are held up to the scrutiny of a larger community. Civic engagement is enhanced when schools prioritize open inquiry and free interplay of ideas.
- Nonprofits play a central roles in citizen engagement—acting as vehicles for citizens to organize outside of government and without financial gain.
- Throughout history, the arts have been used to provoke, inspire and catalyze social change and civic dialogue.
- Local businesses can help foster civic engagement and civic pride in communities. Conversely, states with higher levels of civic engagement are more resilient to unemployment and better equipped to handle periods of economic downturn.
- Civic engagement plays a key role in science and in how we imagine, design, and implement research and technology.

- The media is an important contributor to civic life, principally by informing, educating and providing a forum for public debate.
- Many fear that media coverage has become increasingly negative, polarizing, sensational and biased, eroding the confidence and cohesiveness of our state and its people.
- The rise of Internet-based information outlets threaten traditional media's economic base but also exponentially expand the reach and connections among policymakers and citizens.

Engaging Arizona's Diverse Communities

- Opportunities abound in Arizona's municipalities for local residents to engage in the civic life of their communities, whether as a first-timer or a veteran participant.
- Two factors have a significant impact on civic engagement among youth and young adults—college education and race-ethnicity. Studies have identified a large and growing number of "civically alienated" young people who are most likely characterized as "Latino, non-college-educated and low income youth."
- Today's college students are coming to college more service-oriented, but the mindset is not translating into other action-based forms of civic engagement.
- Connecting older adults to civic engagement opportunities is a newer movement and there are a growing number of formalized programs in this area.
- Civic engagement in tribal communities is often derived from affinity to a unique set of tribal sovereignty rights, as well as principles and practices stemming from Indigenous origin stories.
- Civic engagement in rural Arizona encompasses many of the traits that are present in urban Arizona, with some unique aspects: limited resources, informal networking, more holistic knowledge, greater social cohesion in isolated geographic regions and stronger peer pressure.

Report of Recommendations

After reviewing the full background report prepared by Arizona State University, participants in the 100th Arizona Town Hall convened in Tucson from April 22-25, 2012. The result: a consensus of recommended actions to improve and enhance civic engagement in Arizona.

TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- One person can make a difference. It is up to each of us to become involved, to the extent possible, in our communities.
- Model courteous interaction and encourage civic engagement.
- Demonstrate by example the importance of being involved.
- Encourage people to accept responsibility for public comments that may discourage others from exercising free speech and engaging.

INVOLVE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Formally integrate civic engagement and civil discourse into the curriculum of schools for students at an early age.
- As children progress through school, require civics and history courses. Weave the lessons and issues of civic engagement into the core standards for substantive courses such as language arts and history.
- Include classes that involve the teaching of conflict resolution, critical thinking and active listening skills, and encourage civil interactions, especially during times of disagreement.
- Include programs like Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's I-Civics program.
- Have the Department of Education review state regulations for civics education and make changes to ensure that Arizona's regulations satisfy national standards.
- Encourage post-secondary educational institutions to create centers for civic engagement and to provide continuing education courses that include all levels of government, community planning, civic engagement and civil discourse.

ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

- Encourage students to become involved in extracurricular activities including student government as well as music and drama clubs, afterschool sports, and speech and debate clubs.
- Support opportunities for students to become directly involved in their communities through internship programs, summer camps and volunteer projects.
- Reward students who engage in civic activities making it prestigious to be civically involved.
- Encourage creation of a mechanism for student loan forgiveness in return for significant civic engagement accomplishments.

HARNESS MEDIA TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Encourage government officials to write articles about the importance of government participation.
- Have municipal organizations publicize lists of opportunities for people to become involved with their communities.
- Create a series of public service announcements with civic engagement themes for television and radio.
- Evolve the communications strategies and tactics of Arizona Town Hall to use current and emerging social media to promote the recommendations of current and past Town Halls.
- Businesses and nonprofits can use their social media accounts to educate people about volunteer opportunities and ways to become involved in the community.
- Encourage news media to report a more balanced perspective.
- Businesses can hold the media accountable by withdrawing sponsorships from biased media.



After reviewing a draft of the report of recommendations, Tina Ochoa and others wait their turn to present proposed amendments during the plenary session on Wednesday morning.

From ancient times to the current day, civic engagement has been critical for a vibrant, productive, and enlightened society. The members of the 100th Town Hall call on all Arizonans to embrace the concepts of civic engagement and practice the best aspects of this positive political philosophy.

- From the 100th Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations



Panel Yucca's discussion group had 25 participants including those pictured above: Craig Miller, Stephanie Miller, Michael McDonald and Gail Lewis.

To encourage more participation from traditionally underrepresented groups, we should provide formal and informal forums for discussion, such as community gardens and community advisory boards.

- From the 100th Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations

UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO BECOME CIVICALLY ENGAGED

- Through the Secretary of State's office, continue ongoing research on an online voting system.
- Permit people to provide testimony and address at the state legislature and other bodies without having to physically register in Phoenix at the State Capitol.
- Use television and online mediums to make public meetings interactive.
- Have cities and nonprofits keep community calendars posted on their websites to promote events and recruit volunteers for particular projects.
- Establish an Arizona Town Hall website that would include a listing of Arizona and national organizations that support civic engagement, a resource list of materials, a calendar of relevant activities in Arizona, and a speaker's bureau identifying speakers knowledgeable about civic engagement.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SERVICE

- Consider and analyze factors that deter individuals from serving in public office.
- Once barriers are identified, have advocates work to eliminate those barriers.

INCREASE GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Undertake measures at the State Legislature to increase transparency, including 72 hours advance notice of any revisions to bills.
- Increase advance notice with respect to the state budget to seven days.
- Televis and stream over the internet legislative hearings and committee meetings.
- Use clear and universally understandable language in initiatives, referenda, and communications from officials. Disseminate in a way that is accessible to everyone.
- Increase transparency in campaign finance and lobbying expenditure disclosures.

MAKE POLITICS LESS POLARIZING

- Insist that state and local government officials work on keeping their disagreements civil.
- Require officials to take a course on civil discourse that includes a discussion of "constructive confrontation" principles and that discourages negative campaigning.

PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- Expand Arizona Town Hall's scholarship program to help students and others in need to attend this event.
- Encourage civic education organizations to collaborate to create a civic engagement directory that can be maintained online.
- Offer or expand training on the theory and skills of civic engagement through civic education organizations to neighborhood associations, civic groups and other community organizations.
- Recommend that the various leadership organizations in Arizona include training and curriculum on civic engagement.
- Promote personal involvement and mentorship to encourage others to become civically engaged.
- Encourage the adoption of election reform that facilitates increased voter participation in both primary and general elections.
- Undertake grassroots and other campaigns to raise awareness about the valuable resources available from groups across Arizona that help people become more knowledgeable about civic issues.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT ACTION

- Have an agency with expertise in civic engagement convene Arizona's experts on this topic to collaborate on developing a plan to create a Civic Engagement Roadmap for Arizona.
- In the roadmap, address: the startup and rollout of implementation at the state and local level; identifying and coordinating current civic engagement resources, opportunities and best practices; identifying funding sources for implementation and sustainability; and providing technological resources for implementation.
- Encourage the use of a code of civil discourse by the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, public universities, colleges, schools and state and local governments.



Participants discuss the principles of civic engagement at the Youth Town Hall.

I widened my idea of civic engagement, and saw that there are many ways to get involved with my community as well as to get my community involved with everything else. I always thought that politics didn't involve me, but now I see that it does.

- Comment from a student attendee of the Youth Town Hall on Civic Engagement.

Youth Town Hall on Civic Engagement

On April 11, 2012, the Arizona Town Hall, in partnership with Arizona Students' Association, and Maricopa Community Colleges, held a Youth Town Hall on Civic Engagement that drew hundreds of high school and college students from around the state. Following are the key points developed from the gathering.

Forms of Civic Engagement and Factors Affecting Participation

- Civic engagement is more than just politics. It can be any activity that strengthens the community and creates a common bond.
- Volunteering and becoming involved in grass roots initiatives are important for all ages in increasing engagement.
- The goal of civic engagement should be the organization of members of the community to educate themselves about issues.
- Individuals must take responsibility for informing themselves and exchanging viewpoints with each other.
- Civic engagement is the first step toward making an impact and driving change.
- Educational and income levels can impact civic engagement because they impact the access to information and the understanding of it.
- The involvement of parents in civic issues has the tendency to trickle down to their children.
- There should be more forums and discussion groups at the community level to help people get informed and have an opportunity to talk about issues together.

The Role of Social Media in Civic Engagement

- Social media helps raise awareness.
- The effectiveness of social media may be limited by access, author bias, and the demographics of those participating.
- Social media allows for instant distribution of information to a wide audience, and its full potential has yet to be reached.
- Discussions and in-person contact are still important in communicating ideas and viewpoints and engaging people in issues.

- Social media is effective for planting a seed and is an efficient way to enlarge the conversation.
- Social media can be a great organizational tool that supports civic engagement and maintains the passion behind the cause.

Importance of Respect and Collaboration in Civic Engagement

- Respect is important because it prevents the exclusion of people or ideas that might be relevant.
- Mutual respect allows for a closer community and the ability to create better solutions.
- People have become discouraged from getting involved because there is so much negativity in politics.
- Without respect and collaboration, we cannot work together to create positive change.
- Attack the issue, not the person.

Increasing Civic Engagement Among Youth

- The greatest challenge in increasing youth engagement is getting them to care and believe that every voice and vote counts.
- High school is the best place to start getting youth involved. High school students can be great leaders and can learn and teach civic engagement.
- Young people lack confidence in the political system and often lack knowledge of the issues. Expand the scope of information available through schools, families, social media, and community activities.
- Civics classes create a strong foundation for engagement.
- Role models can help youth realize that they can find and follow their passion and have a positive impact for themselves and others.



Tuesday's Arizona Town Hall lunchtime program included a performance by local Tucson musicians.

The arts and humanities educate about social issues in attention-grabbing ways, bring communities together, teach the values of diversity and other cultures, and ultimately promote further discussion, deep thinking, and civic engagement.

- From the 100th Arizona Town Hall Report of Recommendations

How You Can Have An Impact

- Be the change. Model the behavior you expect from elected officials, youth and others.
- Use available resources, such as the appendix to the background report for the 100th Arizona Town Hall, to partner with existing organizations and develop ideas for increasing civic engagement in your community. Download the full report, including the appendix of resources for civic engagement at <http://www.aztownhall.org>.
- Make your views on improving access to the government known to your elected officials. Visit Vote Smart (<http://www.vote-smart.org/index.htm>) to find contact information for your elected officials.
- Keep up to date on relevant programs in your community and action you can take through the Arizona Town Hall (<http://www.aztownhall.org>).
- Arrange a program in your community. Arizona Town Hall can provide resources, speakers, and printed materials. Use social media and personal networks to share information.
- Share your knowledge and the work of Town Hall participants with family, friends and coworkers.
- To join existing efforts to pursue recommendations from the 100th Arizona Town Hall, contact the Arizona Town Hall office.



We welcome your involvement,
questions, and perspectives.

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Since 1962, Arizona Town Hall has been educating, engaging and empowering Arizonans. Town Hall recommendations are a valuable resource for policymakers because they do not represent the agenda of a particular group or political perspective. Instead, Arizona Town Hall reports contain the informed consensus of Arizonans from different political parties, professions, and geographic areas of the state. A private, non-profit civic organization, Arizona Town Hall has served as a catalyst for conversations and recommendations that have influenced significant changes in Arizona's public policy over the years. Countless local, state, and national leaders have cited Arizona Town Hall as an important factor in educating people about complex issues, and fostering the development of civic and community leaders.

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