

CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAM GUIDANCE



ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies with open and multiparty political systems that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to establish and strengthen democratic institutions and practices around the world by building political and civic organizations, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

THE GUIDE'S DEVELOPMENT

NDI developed this guide with financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). To ensure the guide is responsive to the needs of democracy and governance practitioners and responds to emerging democracy opportunities and challenges, NDI conducted a comprehensive review of past and current NDI civic education research and case examples to distill lessons, methodologies, emerging approaches, and modes of delivery. NDI established an internal advisory group consisting of a cross-section of NDI staff working to advance civic education programming. NDI convened a one-day roundtable discussion with a group of external development practitioners, civic education experts, and curriculum developers working on civic education, including experts from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, United States Agency for International Development, Tufts University Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Johns Hopkins SNF Agora Institute, Street Law, Accountability Lab, IREX, Q2 Impact, and the National Endowment for Democracy. The internal and external convenings provided critical knowledge to develop the guide and allowed practitioners to expand their networks as well as exchange information, validate civic education tools and resources, and improve the quality and utility of existing NDI civic education interventions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Engaged citizens are the foundation of strong and vibrant democratic societies. For democracy to develop and endure, all people must be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Because democracy requires an informed and active citizenry, people must understand democratic principles and practices, and be capable of acting to influence political processes and outcomes. Strengthening citizenship is a fundamental democratic development objective. Civic education and lifelong learning - which equip people with democratic knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes needed to practice and defend democracy - are a critical aspect of developing new democracies and renewing established democracies in the face of emerging threats.

NDI has a history of conducting stand-alone civic education programs as well as embedding civic education components into broader programming. In every case, NDI's approach emphasizes building citizen power and driving democratic change and socio-economic development through collective action.

This guide seeks to equip democracy and governance practitioners with civic education strategies and participatory methodologies that reflect evidence-based practices for designing and delivering inclusive, tailored civic education interventions. In addition, the guide identifies areas for innovation and adaptation of educational content and learning techniques that help practitioners design programs that respond to emerging democracy opportunities and challenges.

2. CIVIC EDUCATION FUNDAMENTALS

WHAT IS CIVIC EDUCATION?

Civic education develops **knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes** that prepare people to participate in a democratic society and foster dignity for all.

Although civic education has long been a feature of formal school curricula, it emerged as an important element of democracy assistance programs in the 1990s. These programs, which aimed to “jump-start” democratic political culture in new or transitioning democracies, strengthened individual knowledge of the structures and processes of democratic systems and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Over time, the scope and objectives of civic education programs expanded to include a wider range of democratic competencies to foster civic engagement, build citizen power, and increase the defense of democratic governance.

Civic education helps individuals understand how governing systems work, recognize their rights and responsibilities, and develop an ability to engage peacefully in civic and political activities, such as voting, advocacy, community service, and elected office. Civic education contributes to an informed public that can hold government officials accountable for their actions. By cultivating democratic competencies, civic education centers citizens as power holders.

Core democratic competencies:

- **Civic knowledge**, refers to citizens’ understanding of the basic structures, functions, and processes of their political system, the fundamental rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the avenues for participation;
- **Civic skills**, refers to citizens’ ability to analyze, evaluate, and defend positions on public issues, and the know-how required to participate in different civic and political processes, including the holding of elected office;
- **Civic disposition**, refers to the characteristics and traits important in a democracy, such as empathy, political tolerance, sense of civic duty, and sense of self-efficacy that underpin the functioning of democratic political system; and
- **Civic attitudes**, refers to the key principles individuals hold to guide their behaviors, such as fairness, openness, justice and equality.

As the cornerstones for civic education, these four dimensions are used to frame the specific **learning objectives** of all civic education interventions. For example, a program might focus on: increasing citizen knowledge of the municipal budget process; the skills to analyze budget documents and advocate for increased investments in women’s healthcare; the disposition that citizen involvement is instrumental in municipal budget decisions; and the attitude that budget transparency is a democratic governance requirement.

Civic education approaches can target individuals of all ages and have a range of learning objectives, content, and delivery methods. They can involve formal, curricular-based “classroom” education or might involve informal, extracurricular learning opportunities. Informal civic education approaches can include content delivered through town hall

meetings, small-groups discussions, debate clubs, online tutorials, or any combination of these. In most cases, learners are provided information, tools and hands-on practice. NDI partners, such as civil society organizations, political parties, and media outlets, might also be involved in civic education activities. While attention should be paid to any do no harm issues or circumstances and situations that might perpetuate discrimination and inequality between groups in the community, **learning and practicing citizenship can happen in many settings.**

NDI'S APPROACH TO CIVIC EDUCATION

Organized and politically active citizens are instrumental in driving democratic development, by helping to transform how politics is practiced and improving the quality of life in communities. One way that NDI helps citizens assume responsibility and play these roles is through civic education interventions. This includes implementing programs primarily dedicated to achieving civic education objectives, or – more often – embedding civic education components into the objectives of broader democracy and governance programs. Standalone programs are focused on achieving specific civic education objectives, providing intensive learning activities tailored to a particular audience. For example, a youth leadership training program might include comprehensive workshops on democratic principles, government structures, and civic responsibilities. Participants might engage in practical exercises, such as organizing community events, leading public discussions, and engaging in mock debates. Embedding civic education components within broader democracy and governance initiatives involves integrating learning objectives under a larger program objective, such as strengthening the participation of people with disabilities. In this case, NDI might help a local disability partner facilitate discussions with public officials to increase knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other human rights frameworks that promote the “social model” of disability inclusion.

In every case, NDI's approach emphasizes participatory learning methods and connecting education to participation in real-world civic and political activities.

NDI's civic education interventions are **purposeful, practical, and timely.**

- **Purposeful:** Interventions are intentionally designed to incorporate pedagogical practices (e.g., experiential learning) and tailored to develop select knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes based on needs defined by the local context or by the nature of the participant group.
- **Practical:** The learning objectives are connected to real-world issues, enabling participants to practice and reinforce their knowledge and skills through action.
- **Timely:** Interventions are often tied to a transitional moment, the need to address an urgent problem, or to foster broader and deeper participation in a particular process, such as an election.

NDI's approach adopts participatory and hands-on methodologies to foster a practical understanding of citizenship. An action civics model emphasizes learning-by-doing, where participants engage in real-world civic activities rather than only considering theoretical concepts. This model encourages people to practice democracy. For instance, this might involve citizens identifying community issues, researching their causes and impacts, and developing and taking actionable steps to address them.

Civic Forum

NDI developed an approach to civic education called *Civic Forum*, which aims to increase local-level citizenship competencies, the space for public participation, and accountability relationships between citizens and public officials. Civic Forum adopts a building-block approach to civic education that combines experiential learning, educational discussions, and citizen-led campaigns to address local-level community issues.

Representing a form of “action civics,” Civic Forum is focused on moving participants from education to activation and laying the foundation for collective action. The approach aims to promote behavior change by altering the way individuals, groups, and communities approach problem-solving and decision-making. Participants develop new perceptions and expectations around participation, including the roles citizens should play and the responsibilities of decision-makers. Over time, this can translate into new values and norms that support informed and active citizen engagement and government accountability.

An example of civic forum in action is NDI’s Ana Usharek, or “I Participate,” which is a suite of programming aimed at empowering young people with the competencies needed to be active in civil and political life. This program has been implemented in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, with the longest running program taking place in Jordan. Through different initiatives and in partnership with Jordan’s Ministry of Education, NDI engaged thousands of students in primary and secondary schools, as well as universities, in learning about democracy and active citizenship through an interactive, learner-centered curriculum. Students have applied this know-how while leading their own organizing initiatives designed to solve community issues. The Ana Usharek program not only led to the updating of Jordan’s primary education curricula to include democratic practices and citizenship concepts, but also supported the design and implementation of numerous community-centered advocacy campaigns by program participants.

NDI also has an established history of implementing voter education programs, which are a subset of civic education, with the objective of promoting informed electoral engagement. These programs help prepare citizens to vote by providing practical information, such as where, when and how to vote, and may also include reviewing the responsibilities of the legislative office being contested, comparing the positions of candidates on particular issues, or examining campaign-financing rules.

3. CIVIC EDUCATION PRACTICES

There are a few major considerations when designing civic education activities. These include the need to develop explicit learning objectives, as discussed above, and then to define the educational content and the methodology for conveying that content.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

Before diving into planning the civic education content and methodology, **practitioners must first establish specific learning goals and objectives**. This preparatory phase includes analyzing the context and defining learning needs and interests, paying particular attention to any inequalities in capacity and ensuring the materials and sessions are fully accessible. Based on this understanding, practitioners should consider what changes in knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes are desired and what educational outcomes to expect.

For example, a grassroots program aimed at solving a local service-delivery problem primarily affecting women will differ significantly from a national-level effort designed to reduce uncertainty during a transition out of conflict. For the grassroots service delivery program, this might require making reasonable accommodations according to the local socio-economic context to allow for women in all their diversities to participate, and could include strengthening knowledge of local governance structures, enhancing skills in gender-informed budgeting, promoting a disposition toward civic responsibility and inclusion, and fostering a proactive attitude and a sense of efficacy to solve local issues. Alternatively, the national-level program might focus on providing safety and security training to participants, strengthening understanding of conflict resolution mechanisms, building skills in negotiation and mediation, fostering dispositions toward tolerance, non-violence and inclusion, and shifting attitudes to support inclusive national unity and peaceful democratic transitions. By identifying measurable knowledge, skills, dispositions, or attitudes that participants should demonstrate, practitioners can then select appropriate (inclusive and accessible) educational content, methods, and monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure the program meets its learning objectives.

As noted, civic education programs utilize diverse content depending on the set of democratic competencies the intervention aims to strengthen. At the same time, interventions are more effective when they link the content and lessons to citizens' daily concerns and experiences. To enhance learning outcomes, it is crucial to communicate the value and relevance of the intervention to citizens' lives and interests. For example, if a core concern of participants centers around service delivery challenges, then lessons will be received better if they are woven around these concerns. In particular, adult learners benefit from seeing a concrete reason for learning something. They need to understand the relevance of the learning objective and content to their personal life and experiences.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Different educational methodologies offer unique opportunities, limitations, and trade-offs. Practitioners should understand and consider the different options and constraints, in relation to the desired learning goals and objectives, when designing an intervention to ensure the educational results are achieved. **Across the board, NDI recommends the use of participatory learning methods modeled on action civics whenever possible.**

When designing an educational intervention, practitioners should engage the target audience in an effort to understand their preferred learning methods, including times and places that might be most accessible and appropriate. Taking this step at the outset will help ensure that the intervention is learner-centered and meets participants where they are, considering different needs and interests based on identity, gender, location, culture and other contextual circumstances. It also recognizes that, when working with voting age citizens, it is important to incorporate adult education techniques that allow participants to take some ownership over the educational process and to draw on their lived experience. In most cases, adults also want to understand how the learning will be applied before educational content is introduced.

Effective civic education interventions often include diverse activities that emphasize participatory techniques, such as peer-to-peer discussion, simulations, role-playing, issue analysis, problem-solving, debate, or even community projects. Evidence also shows the importance of fostering open learning environments where participants and instructors or facilitators co-create the learning environment, enabling inclusive and equitable participation, the respectful exchange of ideas, opinions, and feedback. For example, an opening activity might entail collectively setting rules for the session that are based on democratic principles, such as civility, listening, equality, and dignity. An “open” learning environment has positive effects on democratic competencies. When well-facilitated, it is also associated with helping to close knowledge and participation gaps between different groups, generating positive compensation effects for participants from minority or marginalized backgrounds.

The appropriate approaches should be determined by considering the broader civic education learning objectives, and type of content, as well as the challenges, opportunities, needs, and motivations of all the participants. For example, if the learning objective is to shift democratic attitudes, interactive methods and reflection exercises are more likely to promote the desired outcome. Alternatively, suppose the learning objective is to promote knowledge about a discrete topic, such as registering to vote, then more passive methods like providing accessible reading materials (meeting levels of literacy and/or language) with the appropriate attention to any safety considerations or communicating public-service announcements over radio may be appropriate. **When a program is designed to address gaps in knowledge, skills, disposition and attitudes simultaneously, then participatory and experiential learning will almost always be the best route and will need to be planned with inclusion and safety considerations in mind.**

Common methodologies include:

► Formal Curricular Instruction (in-person, online, or hybrid)

Delivering content in a formal curricular-based format usually entails a fixed set of learning goals and objectives and a methodology that generally takes people through a step-by-step, iterative learning process where the content builds on itself. This process often involves the use of an instructional workbook with different sections or modules. The idea is to master one section at a time. Such curriculums are designed to be taught to a wide cross-section of citizens who all benefit from the content. For example, a curriculum might focus on the key elements of a country’s constitutions or electoral system. This type of instruction can be delivered live or asynchronously through in-person, online, or hybrid models. Each different approach offers advantages and trade-offs to consider. Real-time instruction (virtual or in-person) can facilitate real-time interactions and feedback while asynchronous or online/hybrid instruction can provide additional flexibility and accessibility

for participants. Asynchronous instruction can either be instructor-paced – meaning learners must complete the material within a timeframe set by the instructor – or self-paced. Instructor-paced courses tend to have higher completion rates, especially when paired with a certificate of completion, whereas self-paced courses - supported with consolidation materials in the form of workbooks where practicable and safe to do so - provide learners with more flexibility.

► **Workshops, Public Forums, Small-Group Discussions, Learning Circles**

These methodologies are designed so that participants interact and discuss their ideas, opinions, and questions. This type of interaction relies upon experienced facilitators who can effectively ensure inclusion and guide and shape the discussion. These delivery modalities can offer opportunities to engage diverse segments of the target population recurrently over a period of time to disseminate information and engage participants in an experiential learning cycle. Evidence shows that greater gains in democratic competencies are made if participants are exposed to civic education learning as early in their lives as possible, over more frequent and longer durations of time. One-off interventions might be effective for raising awareness, but will not allow for significant skills development or attitudinal change.

► **“Edutainment”**

“Edutainment” methods blend educational content with entertaining formats to engage and inform learners. These methods leverage various media and interactive activities to make civics learning entertaining and memorable. They can be effective strategies to reach diverse audiences, including indigenous communities and young people with disabilities. Common approaches include games (narrative-fiction games, table-top simulation exercises), interactive digital platforms (websites, apps, virtual reality experiences), and multimedia content (podcasts, educational videos).

NDI’s first experiential digital security resource, **CyberSim**, is an in-person tabletop exercise designed to mimic the security challenges faced by democratic actors. The initial version of CyberSim is set in the context of a political campaign. During the game, participants take on different roles within the campaign, working together to win an election while responding to security threats as they arise. For example, participants may need to scramble to bring the campaign’s website back up from a DDOS attack if they fail to set up appropriate mitigations, or they may need to spend precious campaign funds on new computers if they fail to keep their devices physically secure from theft. The Institute is actively developing versions of the game to cover scenarios for civil society organizations and election observers, and recently launched and piloted a version specifically for parliaments.

► **Arts-Based Curriculum**

The arts occupy a critical space in every culture and are essential to cultivating an engaged and active citizenry. Arts-based approaches can use mediums like theater, visual arts, and digital media to create projects that address local problems and foster a sense of agency and civic responsibility. They have the potential to enhance critical thinking and empathy by exploring diverse perspectives around local, national, and global issues. Opening conversations that address challenging topics like human rights, social justice,

international cooperation, and environmental degradation through artistic works can make these topics more approachable, in particular to young audiences. Additionally, arts-based practices can stimulate creative problem solving, innovation, and cooperation through interactive installations, multimedia presentations, or performing arts that address complex social challenges.

In Côte d'Ivoire, NDI integrated **participatory theater activities** into a broader initiative aimed at enhancing democratic governance and political stability by fostering inclusive political processes, community resilience, and addressing deep-seated grievances at local and national levels. Local theater troupes performed plays about issues related to land management and disputes and violent extremism. These interactive performances engaged religious leaders, women and youth associations, and administrative authorities to raise awareness and foster community action. Following the performances, participants engaged in discussions about how the play's characters should have acted, connecting these suggestions with real-world recommendations and generating solutions to reduce land conflict and enhance social cohesion and community resilience.

Participatory instructional methods can include:

- Group discussions
- Role-playing
- Simulations
- Theater, music, dance, or photography
- Peer-to-peer exchange
- Service-learning
- Group projects

INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Democracy is more likely to develop and endure when all segments of society are educated on their civic rights and responsibilities, and are free to participate. However, large portions of the population are often excluded from public life based on their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other identity factors. Civic education is one way to help better position marginalized people so they can use civic and political participation as a fundamental means of addressing the social and economic inequities associated with marginalization.

Different considerations should be given to mainstreaming versus targeted inclusion in civic education interventions. For example, when mainstreaming inclusion in a civic education program, NDI works to ensure representation and equitable participation of young people, women, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ communities. Special consideration should also be made to include communities that are traditionally marginalized from formal education opportunities, including hard-to-reach populations that may reside in rural areas and have limited access to educational opportunities.

When developing a civic education program that addresses the specific needs of a marginalized population, that community's expertise and lived experience should be leveraged in developing content and special consideration should be given to making the education accessible. Additionally, all the program designs should be gender-informed and reflect an understanding of the sociocultural and institutional barriers for people who are marginalized or excluded in that specific context. In addition, the civic education materials should be designed to overcome intersectional challenges, proactively counter harmful social norms, and promote inclusivity and the equal participation of all individuals. Without careful consideration these harms can be perpetuated in civic education curriculum since they mirror the status quo, which can have a negative effect on the program's outcomes.

Some best practices for inclusive civic education interventions are:

- Work with local partners, and when appropriate a local consultant, to ensure that the content is relevant to the context and addresses the specific challenges and opportunities in the country or community in which the project is based;
- Ensure the active and meaningful participation and leadership of traditionally marginalized groups such as young people, women, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTQI+ communities;
- Design activities that are relevant to diverse groups of people and cultural contexts within a given community;
- Include diverse perspectives and examples in discussions and materials;
- Create a welcoming and safe space where participants feel comfortable expressing their opinions and identities without fear of judgment or discrimination;
- Offer flexible learning formats and assessment methods to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of participants;
- Allow for alternative means of participation, such as written comments rather than verbal input, or online discussions in addition to in-person meetings;
- Provide equitable opportunities- including reasonable accommodations if required- for all participants to engage in learning activities, discussions, and decision-making processes;
- Provide materials and instruction in multiple languages and for different levels of literacy, to accommodate participants who may not be proficient in reading the primary language of instruction;
- Offer translation services or multilingual facilitators if necessary; and
- Use plain language and avoid jargon or complex terminology that may be difficult for participants to understand.

When considering the inclusion of people with disabilities in civic education programming, reasonable accommodation should be included to ensure the equal and meaningful participation of people with diverse disabilities. The term **reasonable accommodation**, which appears in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, describes any appropriate or necessary adjustment that gives persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate alongside their fellow citizens. This might entail hiring a sign

language interpreter for meetings with Deaf participants, moving an activity to a location that is accessible, ensuring materials are available in accessible formats, or providing spaces for sensory breaks. While some reasonable accommodations require an investment, others have little or no cost. These accommodations are called “reasonable” because they are not meant to impose an undue or unrealistic burden on the implementer. Rather, they should be thought of as what is needed to actualize the equal rights of persons with disabilities and prevent discrimination.

When people have access to civic education opportunities this can translate into influence over the decisions that impact their lives and can make better, more informed decisions for themselves and their communities. To ensure equal access, civic education programming should seek to provide educational materials in formats accessible to people with different types of disabilities, such as braille, large print, audio recordings, electronic formats compatible with screen readers and Easy Read formats. Easy Read is a method of producing and presenting written information that is easier to understand and accessible to persons with diverse disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. Easy Read also benefits people with low literacy levels, those who may not speak a majority language, and those experiencing memory problems. Easy Read combines short sentences that are clear and free of jargon with simple images to help explain the written content. Additional best practices include ensuring that images are accompanied by alternative text for those with visual disabilities ensuring compatibility of digital platforms and materials with common assistive technologies. Other considerations may include choosing venues that are accessible to people with diverse disabilities and have amenities such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms.

One method for engaging marginalized populations is to work on programming that targets a specific demographic that is often underrepresented or absent in civic education and other development initiatives. For example, the Gender, Women and Democracy (GWD) team at NDI has developed a targeted curriculum for adolescent girls (ages 12-17). Based on research, NDI found that most youth civic education and leadership programs in development contexts focused on young men. To fill this gap, the GWD team developed **DISRUPTHER** - a curriculum to support adolescent girls and young women holistically by enhancing their confidence, capacity, and connections. The curriculum adopts a “whole girl” approach and is designed to be implemented by CSOs already working in the contexts and designed to be delivered alongside other programming that supports adolescent girls and young women. Taking a cross-sectoral approach, **DISRUPTHER** is also delivered within programs that are outside of the democracy and governance sector, but have other socioeconomic, sports, and cultural entry points. It is important to note that because of the age range of the participants, stringent safeguarding policies are put in place and special consideration about the suitability of partner organizations who wish to implement the program is taken.

In another case, the **EMERGE program** in Mali, which aims to improve governance and increase citizen voice, works with partners who focus on engaging marginalized communities like persons with disabilities, women, hereditary slaves, internally displaced persons, and nomad communities. After conducting a baseline assessment of the barriers and opportunities of each target community, the program adopted similar educational content, but targeted engagement methods. For example, partners working with women used radio shows to reach women during the day, whereas groups working with young people selected in-person, small-group discussions. Because partners built their outreach strategies in response to the baseline assessment, this set them up to more effectively deliver content in a meaningful way.

4. CIVIC EDUCATION TO ADDRESS TODAY'S DEMOCRACY CHALLENGES

Globally, democracies are facing emerging challenges and threats, such as democratic backsliding, resurgent authoritarianism, extreme polarization, global anti-equality campaigns and the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation. There is a need to expand and innovate traditional civic education content and delivery methodologies to better address these challenges and threats.

EMERGING CONTENT AREAS

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

The transfer of knowledge and technical skills are viewed as essential to developing citizenship competencies. However, there is also a growing understanding of the need to develop certain interpersonal or socio-emotional skills that sustain the effectiveness of civic participation. Interpersonal skills include self-efficacy, critical thinking, empathy, teamwork, listening and communication skills. Socio-emotional skills underlie most activities that are necessary for leaders, activists, and informed citizens in a democratic context. Citizens who develop empathy, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills are better equipped to play leadership roles and undertake more nuanced discussions of political issues. Through the practice of political analysis, opinion formation, negotiation, and debates, participants develop critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. Where NDI brings together different groups, such as young people, ethnic and religious communities, LGBTQ+ communities, and people with disabilities to interact with one another and discuss their experiences, participants develop a deeper understanding of others' lived realities and may develop greater empathy.

Anti-Corruption and Transparency

It's widely agreed that corruption stymies development, hinders economic growth, violates social and economic rights, and undermines democratic values and processes. Civic education can help foster citizen awareness about the prevalence and costs of corruption. It can also enhance civic activism designed to promote public-sector transparency and accountability, while encouraging honest and ethical government behavior. Civic education in the area of anti-corruption might include information sharing on laws, individual rights, and how to monitor various forms of corruption, as well as mechanisms to report bribery and hold political leaders accountable for their actions. In most cases, civic education will be embedded in wider efforts designed to shift social norms and behaviors in the direction of a more democratic culture, where corruption is viewed as unacceptable and penalized accordingly.

Digital & Media Literacy

Information manipulation, including disinformation and misinformation, threatens democratic resilience. Digital and media literacy curriculum equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to critically analyze and engage with information online and other forms of media to make informed decisions by enhancing their ability to discern credible sources of information, understand media influence, and participate responsibly in the digital age.

The goal is to foster informed, critical, and responsible digital and media users who can navigate the complex media and digital information landscape and participate actively in a democratic society. This includes digital and media literacy to prepare individuals to navigate the complexities of the media landscape and engage responsively and effectively in democratic processes in increasingly digital societies. The development of digital and media literacy curricula should be informed by an assessment of the target audience's digital and media habits. Key components include: identifying bias and propaganda, evaluating sources of information, understanding media production, understanding media influence and effects, digital citizenship, technical skills to use civic technology and digital tools, and ethical and responsible media use.

Cybersecurity & Digital Security

Citizens are increasingly using digital tools and social networks to engage in democratic processes, including using social media to coordinate online and in-person activism and activities. In addition, democratic activists globally are under increasing threat of digital attacks, including account hacking, targeted spyware, website takedowns, and surveillance of location and internet activity. These attacks threaten democratic actors' daily operations and undermine the public's trust in democratic systems. A digital security curriculum aims to prepare learners to navigate and protect themselves in the digital world. Key components include understanding the importance of digital security, learning practical skills for safeguarding personal and sensitive information, and recognizing the broader implications of digital resilience in society. The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of a holistic risk assessment to inform the creation of a context-specific security plan, inclusive of both physical and digital security.

Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

A conflict resolution and peacebuilding curriculum within civic education aims to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to positively engage in conversations on contentious issues, manage conflicts constructively, and contribute to building peaceful communities. This curriculum emphasizes understanding the roots of conflict, effective communication techniques, and strategies for fostering peace and reconciliation. It can help provide a framework and impart values to strengthen non-violent civic identities, community problem-solving, and community resilience. Key components include: understanding conflict, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, peacebuilding strategies, emotional intelligence skills (empathy, compassion, perspective-taking), and cultural competence.

Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Evidence shows that political participation is declining among both adults and young people, and forms of political engagement are evolving. Young people, in particular, are turning away from "formal" politics towards informal or innovative modes of participation. Integrating education on participatory and deliberative democracy processes reflects efforts to revitalize democratic engagement and represents a shift towards more interactive, inclusive, and practical approaches to teaching democracy. This type of curriculum aims to prepare individuals for the complexities of modern democratic life by fostering deeper understanding and active participation in innovative democratic processes. It also aims to empower individuals to engage in or design participatory and deliberative democratic processes. Key components include the principles and structures of participatory and deliberative democracy, civic engagement skills, dialogue and deliberative techniques and technologies, critical thinking and reflection, collaborative problem-solving, and ethical and respectful communication.

Anti-Polarization

Polarization is on the rise in many democratic societies, leading to political gridlock, decreased trust in institutions, and challenges to democratic norms and processes. An anti-polarization curriculum aims to build a foundation for a more inclusive and cohesive democratic society by equipping individuals with the skills and attitudes necessary to bridge divides and engage in constructive, respectful civic discourse. Key components include the causes and consequences of polarization, including its impact on democratic processes and social cohesion, emotional intelligence skills, conflict resolution skills, critical thinking and media literacy, and dialogue and deliberation techniques.

Integrating Trauma-Informed and Safeguarding Approaches

Civic education often involves discussion on sensitive and contentious topics. Therefore, civic education interventions must create physically and emotionally safe environments for participants. Incorporating trauma-informed approaches and safeguarding measures into civic education programs can help create a safe and supportive environment to facilitate individual engagement, empowerment, and a pathway to civic participation. Trauma-informed approaches recognize and respond to the diverse needs of individuals who might have experienced or are experiencing trauma whether on an individual or collective level- ensuring they feel safe and supported in the learning environment. These approaches help individuals develop coping skills, self-regulation strategies, and resilience to engage more effectively in learning activities and navigate challenges to participate more fully in democratic processes. Participants should be advised that they may experience anxiety or discomfort during the session and made aware of any on-side counseling support that is available, and should be provided with access to referral resources.

Safeguarding measures are essential for mitigating potential harm and creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Safeguarding measures help protect vulnerable individuals from potential harm or exploitation during activities. These measures also help foster an inclusive and safe learning environment and atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding where all individuals feel comfortable expressing their opinions and engaging in productive discussions.

Key Considerations and Recommendations

- **Cross-Sectoral Integration:**

Civic education can be integrated into other development sectors, such as health, workforce development, or environmental sustainability, to enhance citizenship and participation in these issue areas. Cross-sectoral approaches can also help in addressing funding gaps and foster collaboration between different stakeholders. Identify areas of overlap and synergy between civic education and other development sectors and incorporate civic education content and activities into existing programs, curricula, or initiatives. For example, integrate lessons on civic rights and responsibilities into health education initiatives or incorporate community engagement projects into workforce development training. Foster collaborative partnerships between organizations working in different sectors to leverage expertise, resources, and networks.

- **Technology Integration:**

Thoughtfully leverage technology to expand the reach of interventions, increase engagement, and foster innovative and interactive learning experiences. The [Principles for Digital Development](#) can serve as a guide to ensure tech-enabled interventions are inclusive, sustainable, and do no harm. When integrating technology, strike a balance with in-person interactions to maximize effectiveness and ensure accessibility. Where possible, blend technology-enabled activities with face-to-face interactions, workshops, or community events to provide a meaningful learning experience. Ensure technology-enabled interactions are accessible. This may involve providing alternative formats, such as captioning or audio descriptions, for multimedia content and ensuring compatibility with assistive technologies. Meet participants where they are by providing training and technical support on using digital tools effectively and addressing technical challenges. In general, taking a human-centered design approach can help to make technology accessible, intuitive, and easy to use. NDI's [Co/Act Toolkit](#) adapts and expands a human-centered design approach to digital products, services, and campaigns through guided activities that are low cost and high impact.

- **Messaging Clarity:**

Clearly communicate the tangible benefits of civic education and democratic engagement to participants' daily lives to enhance buy-in and relevance. Messages should emphasize the practical applications of civic education, such as how it helps individuals make informed decisions, access and advocate for their rights, and address community issues. Highlighting real-world examples and success stories can help individuals better grasp the significance of their involvement in civic education and their engagement in democratic processes, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their communities' well-being.

- **Recruitment of Diverse Communities:**

Employ a variety of strategies and adequately invest in efforts to engage diverse or hard-to-reach communities. For example, consider using innovative methods like board games or storytelling sessions to enhance relevance or organize activities in community centers, places of worship, or local festivals to meet individuals where they're at. Tailor interventions to the specific needs and experiences of marginalized and hard-to-reach populations, such as utilizing culturally relevant materials, providing interpretation services, offering childcare support, or scheduling sessions during non-traditional hours to facilitate participation and engagement.

- **Invest in Quality Facilitation:**

Equip facilitators and educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to design and deliver high-quality inclusive civic education. High-quality facilitation can enhance the relevance and impact of civic education interventions, ultimately empowering individuals to become informed, engaged, and active citizens in their communities. This includes offering ongoing professional development opportunities, mentorship, and peer learning networks to support facilitators in refining their skills and adapting to evolving educational needs and contexts.

- **Support Locally-Led Solutions:**

Support locally-led initiatives by equipping communities with tools, resources, and support to take ownership of the issues affecting them and implement locally-identified solutions. Establish safe feedback mechanisms - some should allow for anonymity - to allow individuals to provide input, share feedback, and monitor the progress of the civic education intervention. Foster accountability through transparent decision-making processes, regular reporting, and other accountability mechanisms.

- **Build Partnerships:**

Foster partnerships with local communities and stakeholders to ensure effective and sustainable impact. Community buy-in and collaboration is key to enhancing learning outcomes and addressing complex civic challenges effectively and sustainably. Particularly if the community is being asked to bridge divides between dominant and marginalized group - for example between generation or with racial, ethnic or sexual and identity minorities - preparing both sides for the civic engagement is important to ensuring participants are ready to listen and to receive different points of view - a key democratic trait.

5. DESIGNING EFFECTIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED CIVIC EDUCATION INITIATIVES

High-quality civic education is a central component of improving civic outcomes in communities. The best civic education activities are not a matter of transmitting facts and concepts to participants, but rather of encouraging them to learn through study, reflection, and experience. Training programs in civics should be grounded in the evidence based practices in [adult learning](#) which has been shown to impact participants' knowledge, skills, and practices. Adult learners are autonomous and self-directing, and seek out learning based on personal needs. Civic education trainings must be interactive and involve participants in discussion and collaboration. A high-quality civic training program must focus on engaging participants in these practices to help build a deeper understanding of the knowledge and skills they need to engage in these practices in their communities. This also means ensuring that training content and methods are inclusive and sensitive to diverse perspectives and experiences, addressing barriers that may disproportionately affect marginalized groups, and promoting inclusive and equitable participation and leadership opportunities for all individuals.

These aspects of high quality trainings, highlighted below, have been proven to improve civic engagement and should be adopted by civic learning training programs worldwide. Yet, they do not occur in a vacuum, and programs should take into account the wide variety of contexts that shape civic engagement, including national and local policies, community values, and intersectional challenges. Sustained, high-quality training programs are critical to ensuring that participants are prepared to engage in civic action impacting their communities.

An [analysis of research](#) on current adult learning principles and [civic education professional learning practices](#) that impact civic engagement demonstrates the necessary components required for trainings to be effective. Research shows that in order to be effective, the major shift is that the trainer's role changes from being a "transmitter" of knowledge to a "facilitator", who assists the participants in their own learning, provides relevance to the content and context, offers examples of application to practice, invites reflection, motivates and helps to provide significant meaning to new knowledge. Additionally, the facilitator ensures inclusion by creating a welcoming and safe space and providing equitable opportunities and accommodations for all participants to engage in learning activities, discussions, and decision-making processes. The key research-based elements to ensure programs are successful include:

- Learners need to have clear goals and objectives of what they will achieve by the civic education intervention (e.g., the lecture)
- Content should be relevant and useful to the learner's real-life
- Content should be connected to experience and previous knowledge
- Learners should reflect on what they learn and how they learn
- Learners should actively participate in their learning
- Teaching should be learner-centered, i.e., consider theories by which adults learn and implement the most adequate strategies that help them learn, according to their needs, the training's objectives, and the context

The following template, built using the evidence-based practices above, is separated into two parts:

Prepare: The prepare phase encourages trainers to analyze and address the context in which the training is being developed and implemented, using research to support an understanding of the context. This phase also focuses on defining the purpose for the training and identification of the goals, objectives and outcomes.

Plan: The plan phase walks trainers through the key steps for designing evidence-based training programs. The trainer will take each objective identified in the prepare phase and plan strategies to ensure participants will meet the objectives. This phase concludes with trainers identifying ways to ensure they are differentiating learning strategies for different learners, focusing on ways to help participants understand how to translate the training into taking action in their communities and designing evaluations to gather feedback on the training program.

An interactive version of the template can be found [here](#).

PREPARE

This phase focuses on analyzing two important features in preparation for developing a high quality civic education training program: context and content. Use the questions to gain a deeper understanding of the context for the training and to clarify the purpose, goals and objectives prior to planning the training.¹

CONTEXT

Needs of the Community: Are there specific opportunities, problems, or issues the civic education training needs to address?

Key Audience(s): Who is the main audience for this training? Why?

Perspectives: What local perspectives need to be taken into consideration? Who are the main leaders both for and against civic education in the state (e.g., reformers, elected politicians, political parties in Parliament) and in society (e.g., women, youth, business) that are emerging? How do we get these voices in the training?

¹<https://www.pactworld.org/library/promoting-civic-engagement-through-we-act-project-learning-review>

CONTEXT

Funding Possibilities: Where are there possible funding streams to support this work?

Community Partners to Engage: Who are the key partners to engage with to ensure success?

Opportunities to Explore: Are there other programs, policies, or projects to connect this work to?

Language to Consider: Is there any language to emphasize or de-emphasize to ensure success?

CONTENT

Purpose: What is the purpose of the civic education training? What opportunities and/or challenges is it trying to address?

Goals: What changes in knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes are expected as a result of the civic education training?

Objectives/Outcomes: What are the measurable skills, abilities, knowledge or values that participants should be able to demonstrate as a result of this training?

PLAN

The *plan* phase guides trainers to use the *prepare* analysis to design a step-by-step approach to each objective. Trainers should place one objective/outcome in each column and work through steps 1-8 per objective/outcome to build out the training. Once trainers work through each objective then they should work through steps 9-11 as more holistic components across all of the objectives/outcomes.

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 1: Identify</p> <p>What knowledge, skills, dispositions/ attitudes, and capacities will participants gain? (See samples from KSDA chart)</p>	<p>Research suggests effective civic education training should engage participants with civic based content and practices in order to help them understand how to incorporate these components into their own lives.</p>				
<p>Step 2: Question</p> <p>What are the key questions participants should grapple with?</p>	<p>Questions can review, restate, emphasize, and/or summarize what is important. Questions stimulate discussion and creative and critical thinking, as well as determine how students are thinking. Questions help students retain material by putting into words otherwise unarticulated thoughts.</p>				

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 3: Pre-Assess</p> <p>How will you gather what participants already know as well as their needs and concerns?</p>	<p>The development of pre-assessments allow trainers to develop programs responsive to the special characteristics of their participants' needs, gaps in knowledge and individual contexts to begin to identify common learning goals.</p>				
<p>Step 4: Engage</p> <p>How will you engage/hook participants at the beginning?</p>	<p>The role of engagement in adult learning is important to the retention of information as well as the transfer of knowledge. Trainers need to concentrate time and effort to construct meaning for what individuals are learning; otherwise, individuals may not be engaged or motivated.</p>				

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 5: Explore</p> <p>What sources/stories will participants engage with to explore and better understand the topic?</p>	<p>Adult learners accumulate knowledge most effectively when they are active participants in their own learning process. Stories enable participants to engage with new knowledge, broader perspectives, and expanded possibilities because they encounter them in the familiar territory of human experience.</p>				
<p>Step 6: Collaborate</p> <p>How will participants collaborate to expand and/or develop new understandings?</p>	<p>Allowing participants to build collaborative relationships around common content, skills, and issues can strongly impact the implementation of these strategies in their communities: Training activities that include collective participation—that is, the participation of participants from the similar contexts and/or communities—are more likely to afford opportunities for active learning and are more likely to allow participants to apply across experiences.</p>				

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 7: Apply</p> <p>How will participants extend their learning, expand upon their thinking and apply it?</p>	<p>Participants need to be informed of the real-world benefits beforehand, and should be reminded of these benefits periodically. Designing specific activities for participants to apply what they have learned will allow them to realize the purpose behind the educational experience, so that they become motivated.</p>				
<p>Step 8: Assess</p> <p>How will you know participants have mastered the objective/outcome?</p>	<p>Assessments throughout the training are essential for gathering information about participants' learning throughout training to make decisions for improving that learning. Participants' self-regulated strategies play an important role in this type of assessment.</p>				

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 9: Differentiate</p> <p>What strategies will be used to meet the needs of all participants?</p>	<p>It is essential to design the training with consideration of the varied levels of readiness, learning needs, and interests of each participant in the training.</p>				
<p>Step 10: Action</p> <p>How will participants use their learning to take action?</p>	<p>Providing opportunities for participants to build a sense of community through advocacy and activities that build engagement with local civic and community-based systems is an essential outcome of civic education training programs. There is some evidence on the benefits of civic engagement opportunities (e.g., leadership, service projects, volunteerism) for individuals, such as enhanced professional advancement and network expansion, increased sense of belonging and self-efficacy, political knowledge, engagement and advocacy, and reduced social isolation.</p>				

Steps	Evidence Base / Why	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome	Objective / Outcome
<p>Step 11: Evaluate</p> <p>How will you gather feedback from participants regarding the experience?</p>	<p>Effective professional development evaluations require the collection and analysis of the five critical levels of information; participants' reactions, participants' learning, organization support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills and participant learning outcomes/objectives.</p>				
<p>Resources</p>					
<p>Notes</p>					

RESOURCES

Steps	Evidence Based Strategies
<p>Step 3: Pre-Assess</p> <p>How will you gather what participants already know as well as their needs and concerns?</p>	<p>Pre-Assessment Strategies</p>
<p>Step 4: Engage</p> <p>How will you engage/hook participants at the beginning?</p>	
<p>Step 5: Explore</p> <p>What sources/stories will participants engage with to explore and better understand the topic?</p>	<p>Using Stories in Adult Education</p> <p>Media Literacy/ Digital Literacy</p> <p>Trauma Informed Teaching - includes some good transferable strategies to include in training sessions</p> <p>Story Recordings</p>
<p>Step 6: Collaborate</p> <p>How will participants collaborate to expand and/or develop new understandings?</p>	<p>Facilitating Collaborative Dialog</p> <p>GoVocal</p> <p>Participatory Democracy Tools</p> <p>People Powered Participatory Democracy Resources</p> <p>Civic Forum - NDI</p>

Steps	Evidence Based Strategies
	Structured Dialogue Examples to Build From Peer to Peer Instruction Emotional Intelligence & Active Listening Skill Building Workshops The Better Arguments Project Civil Discourse Resources
<p>Step 7: Apply</p> <p>How will participants extend their learning, expand upon their thinking and apply it?</p>	Experiential Learning
<p>Step 8: Assess</p> <p>How will you know participants have mastered the objective/ outcome?</p>	Formative Assessment
<p>Step 9: Differentiate</p> <p>What strategies will be used to meet the needs of all participants?</p>	NDI Framework and toolkit Differentiated Instruction Universal Design for Learning Generational Learning Intergenerational Learning (nursing example but applicable)

Steps	Evidence Based Strategies
<p>Step 10: Action</p> <p>How will participants use their learning to take action?</p>	<p>Civic Action/Action Civics</p> <p>Ladder of Participation</p> <p>Street Law Tools</p> <p>Project Citizen</p> <p>Service Learning</p> <p>Civics Advocacy Tool Kit</p> <p>Civic Engagement Resources</p> <p>Civic Responsibility Resources</p>
<p>Step 11: Evaluate</p> <p>How will you gather feedback from participants regarding the experience?</p>	<p>Evaluating PD</p> <p>Kilpatrick Model</p> <p>Assessing Outcomes</p>

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, DISPOSITIONS AND ATTITUDES

To be an engaged citizen, individuals must understand how governing systems work and must recognize their rights and responsibilities as citizens as well as the responsibilities of those who govern them. In the context of civic education programs, participants should be afforded the opportunity to grapple with complex problems that affect their own lives and take action to find solutions. Civic education programs need to be grounded in the development of key knowledge, skills, dispositions and attitudes. These understandings and perceptions can best be achieved through project- and problem-based learning approaches or by following an integrated, contextualized approach that uses civics topics as the content of instruction (e.g., learning about critical historic issues that demonstrate democratic processes at work). Developers of civic education can use the list below to identify the focus of their programs.

Civic Knowledge	Civic Skills	Civic Disposition	Civic Attitudes
<p><i>Understand the government structure, government process, relevant civic knowledge, and concepts.</i></p> <p><i>Fundamental understanding of the structure of government and the processes by which the government passes laws and makes policy.</i></p> <p><i>Separation of powers, federalism, individual rights, and the role of government.</i></p>	<p><i>Competencies in the use of one's voice, including writing, speaking, and listening, research investigation, and critical thinking as well as competencies in the use of the practices of democracy and digital literacy.</i></p>	<p><i>Characteristics important in a democracy, such as a sense of civic duty, sense of efficacy, concern for the welfare of others, and commitment to trustworthiness and bridge-building.</i></p>	<p><i>Behaviors such as access to networks, opportunities to participate, and other forms of social capital that promote civic agency.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of political systems • Principles of democracy • Political and economic rights • Roles, rights and responsibilities of citizens • Functions of government • Separation of powers • Federalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective action • Collaboration • Community organizing • Public advocacy • Ability to gather and process information • Communication skills (both expressing and understanding facts and opinions) • Democratic deliberation/collective decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal character: moral responsibility, self discipline, respect for individual dignity and diversity of opinion (empathy) • Public character: respect for the law, willingness to participate in public affairs, commitment to the rule of the majority with respect for the rights of the minority, commitment to the balance between self-interest and the common welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to seek changes in unjust laws in a peaceful and legal manner • Voting • Participating in community meetings • Being an independent member of society • Assuming the personal, political, and economic responsibilities of a citizen • Respecting individual worth and human dignity

Civic Knowledge	Civic Skills	Civic Disposition	Civic Attitudes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructs of local government • Rule of law • Role of organizations in a democracy • Individual rights (personal, political, economic) • Electoral processes • Democratic values- equality, justice, etc. • Purpose of government • Constitutional principles • Structures of government • Concepts, principles, and values underlying the political system, i.e. authority, justice, diversify, rule of law • Individual rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical analysis of political information • Media & digital literacy • Civic discourse • Analyze public issues and to participate democratically • Participate as informed, effective and responsible citizens • Use democratic procedures when making decisions and managing conflicts • Critical thinking skills: gather and assess information, clarify and prioritize, identify and assess consequences, evaluate, reflect • Participation skills: communicate, negotiate, cooperate, manage conflicts peacefully and fairly, reach consensus • Communicating with elected and appointed officials • Signing petitions • Participating in demonstrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern for others' rights and welfare • Fairness • Reasonable levels of trust • Sense of public duty • Persistence • Compassion • Patriotism • Courage • Tolerance of ambiguity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming an independent member of society • Participating in civic affairs in an informed, thoughtful, and effective manner • Promoting the healthy functioning of democracy • Respect for the rights of other individuals • Respect for law • Honesty • Open mindedness • Critical mindedness • Negotiation and compromise • Volunteering

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