



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

CIVIC LEARNING GUIDEBOOK

Instructional Guidance for All Teachers

Preparing Civic Ready Students, K-12



● 2024

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Part 1: Introduction

Rhode Island Students, Civic Ready

Rhode Island has embarked on a significant journey to strengthen civics education, reflecting a deep commitment to preparing students for active, informed citizenship.¹ This journey is rooted in a series of actions that have reshaped the educational landscape, including the requirement for students to demonstrate civics proficiency and engage in student-led civics projects. In a landmark move to fortify civics education, Rhode Island enacted pivotal legislation, advancing a comprehensive overhaul of the state's approach to preparing students for active and informed citizenship. The Civic Literacy Act {[RIGL §16-22-2](#)}, passed in 2021, mandates that all students demonstrate proficiency in civic education and engage in a student-led civics project as part of their graduation requirements. In addition, RIDE adopted new [Readiness-Based Secondary Regulations](#) in the fall of 2022 which includes “Real-World Relevant Proficiency Requirements” for civics beginning with the class of 2028. These milestones underscore Rhode Island's commitment to fostering a robust civics education framework, propelled by the active involvement and advocacy of its students, highlighting the transformative power of civic engagement among youth.

The introduction of the [Rhode Island Social Studies Standards](#) in 2023, aligned with this legislative action and the [Secondary Regulations](#), marks a significant shift in embedding civics education throughout K-12 education in Rhode Island. Specifically, these standards incorporate a focused study of civics and government in grade 8 and include standards for a model high school civics course. The subsequent development of the [Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#) released in 2024 provides essential guidance for implementing these standards, ensuring that educators are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to effectively shift to the new standards.

The next phase in standards implementation is this guide to civics education. The *Rhode Island Civic Learning Guidebook* serves as an extension of the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* with a focus on civics education. Using research-based practices that enrich social studies instruction, the guidance aims to support educators

“A civic ready student has a strong knowledge of history, democratic processes, citizens’ rights and responsibilities, critical thinking and problem solving skills, and is empowered to actively advocate and participate in their community. A civic ready student values having a range of perspectives, diverse communities, and promoting inclusion and equity in civic spaces.” Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force

¹ Throughout this document, the term 'citizen' is not used in a strict legal sense. When used in this document, it typically refers to anyone who is an active and responsible participant in society. This civic-focused use of the word is not intended to discount the narrower use to individuals with full rights under a particular system of government. Refer to page 26 of *Educating for American Democracy: Excellence in History and Civics for All Learners* report (2021) for more information about the dual meanings of “citizen” and ‘citizenship.’

in cultivating powerful, relevant, and localized learning experiences for students.

This guidance is also deeply informed by the [Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force](#), who submitted their recommendations in March 2023. The Task Force was established to address the need for strengthened civics education in Rhode Island and to respond to the advocacy of students who called for improved civic learning opportunities. Their report reflects the thoughtful and collective efforts and insights of a diverse group of stakeholders, including educators, parents, community members, students, and advocacy organizations. The report has helped shape the direction of civics education in the state, beginning with a definition of civic readiness which has been incorporated into the Vision for Student Success in Social Studies of the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework*.

Using the civic readiness definition as a bedrock, the *Civic Learning Guidebook* was designed to provide a flexible and comprehensive approach for schools and teachers to integrate the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* and the new Civic Learning Practices, outlined in Part 3 of this guide, into instructional practice from kindergarten through high school. **This Guidebook offers practical suggestions and strategies to ensure that civics education is a relevant, authentic, and cohesive part of the social studies curriculum that helps teachers draw direct and meaningful connections from classroom to community.** The aim is to equip educators with the knowledge and resources to build research-based civic competencies in their students, preparing them to be informed, thoughtful, and active citizens.

Part 2 of this guide outlines the instructional vision for civics education in Rhode Island and introduces the Rhode Island Civic Learning Practices.

Part 3 of this guide takes a deep dive into the Rhode Island Civic Learning Practices and includes guidance surrounding the Practices along with instructional tools and resources.

Part 4 focuses on the implementation of civic action projects which take two forms as Taking Informed Action Projects and Civics Capstone Projects. Taking Informed Action Projects are incorporated throughout a student's K-12 experience while Civics Capstone Projects are more comprehensive and serve as the student-led civics project required by legislation [{RIGL §16-22-2}](#) to be completed in middle or high school that will support students in meeting the civics proficiency requirements established by RIDE's *Secondary Regulations*.

As we embark on this journey, it is crucial that we, as a community of educators and administrators, commit to supporting meaningful implementation of these standards, practices, and the broader goals of civics education across all Rhode Island schools. This includes providing ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers and sharing best practices and resources that can enhance civics instruction. By working together, we can ensure that all students in Rhode Island have access to high-quality civics education, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to society and participate actively in our democracy.

Part 2: 21st Century Civics Instruction for Rhode Island Students

What is Civics Instruction in K-12 Social Studies?

The role and purpose of civics instruction in K-12 social studies are foundational to nurturing informed, engaged, and responsible citizens. Civics education serves as the cornerstone for preparing students to participate actively and effectively in a democratic society. It aims to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the principles of democracy, the workings of government, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. This education is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about fostering critical thinking, media literacy, and the skills necessary for civic engagement and political participation.^{2 3 4}

Civics learning in all social studies is crucial for developing students' ability to analyze, understand, and engage with social, political, and civic issues. It encourages students to explore the enduring questions that have shaped political thought and action over time. Moreover, civics education is instrumental in promoting civic virtues such as respect for diversity and a commitment to the common good. By integrating discussions of current events, controversial issues, and service-learning opportunities, civics instruction helps students apply their learning to real-world contexts, thereby enhancing their sense of agency and capacity for social change.⁵

The purpose of civics instruction in K-12 social studies is to prepare students not only to understand the mechanisms of government and their civic rights but also to actively engage in civic life with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for thoughtful and effective participation. This education is critical for sustaining and strengthening our nation's constitutional democracy.^{6 7} Research underscores the importance of a robust civics education for all youth, highlighting its role as a vital pathway to civic engagement and political participation, and high-quality civics programs are shown to reach beyond merely transmitting knowledge, providing developmental, career, and academic benefits. Unfortunately, disparities in access to quality civics education persist, often leaving marginalized communities with fewer opportunities for civic learning. The *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* and the Civic Learning Practices that will be outlined in this document aim to address these inequities to ensure that all students,

² Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. "[What the Research Says: History and Civics Education](#)." *Circle at Tufts*, 17 April 2021.

³ National Council for the Social Studies. "[Revitalizing Civic Learning in Our Schools](#)." *National Council for the Social Studies*.

⁴ Rhode Island Department of Education. "[Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force Recommendations Report](#)." *Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force*, 2023.

⁵ Educating for American Democracy. "[Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#)." *Educating for American Democracy: Home*, 2022.

⁶ CIRCLE. "[Equitable Civic Learning for All: How K-12 Schools Can Grow Voters](#)." *Circle at Tufts*, 3 March 2023.

⁷ iCivics. "[New Research Provides K-12 Civic Education Insights](#)." *iCivics*, 3 June 2009.

regardless of their background, can develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for civic readiness.⁸

Overview of Civics Proficiency Requirements for Graduation (Legislative and Readiness-Based Graduation Requirements)

Rhode Island’s civics education legislation {[RIGL §16-22-2](#)}, and RIDE’s [Readiness-Based Graduation Requirements](#) require that all students, beginning with the class of 2028, demonstrate proficiency in civics to graduate high school. To support students’ demonstration of civic proficiency LEAs (Local Education Agencies) must “provide no less than one student-led civics project for students during either their middle or high school.” The [Rhode Island Social Studies Standards](#), the [Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#), and this *Civic Learning Guidebook: Instructional Guidance for All Teachers* all work together to ensure student success in meeting these requirements.

To meet the proficiency requirement:

- The *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* have established that civics and government is taught in grade 8, setting up LEAs for success in giving all students the opportunity to meet the proficiency requirement (refer to pages 170-192 of the *Standards*).
- While it is not required that students take a stand-alone civics course, the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* recommends that LEAs also at least offer a stand-alone civics course in high school to capture the students who moved into the district from out-of-state after grade 8 (refer to pages 36-37 and 41-42).
- The *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* have outlined standards for a stand-alone high school civics course (refer to pages 193-225 of the *Standards*).
- Furthermore, the Civic Learning Practices outlined in Part 3 of this *Civic Learning Guidebook* are designed to be incorporated throughout K-12, and the civics-based anchor and content standards of the *Standards* are woven throughout K-12 grade and course themes. These work in concert to establish civic proficiency in our students even before high school and work above and beyond legislative and graduation requirements. This contributes to RIDE’s instructional vision for Rhode Island civic learning as noted in the following section and RIDE’s definition of a civic-ready student in Part 1 of this document.

⁸ Educating for American Democracy. “[Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#).” *Educating for American Democracy: Home*, 2022.

To meet the requirement of the student-led civics project:

- The *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* recommends that LEAs use the grade 8 focus on civics and government as an opportunity to fulfill their requirement to provide a student-led civics project (refer to page 36 of the *Curriculum Framework*).
- The *Curriculum Framework* also outlines recommendations for LEAs on when to offer the project based on their choice of whether or not they decide to require students take a civics course in high school. Please refer to the *Curriculum Framework* pages 41-42 for those recommendations.
- Part 4 of this *Civic Learning Guidebook* is dedicated to RIDE's recommendations and instructional guidance for what the student-led civics project should look like. In fact, Part 4 establishes two types of civic action projects – Taking Informed Action Projects and Civics Capstone Projects with the Capstone representing the project required for graduation. RIDE's vision is that students will have practiced throughout their schooling with Taking Informed Action Projects before completing the Civics Capstone Project as their graduation requirement.

Of note:

- LEAs can opt to allow a high school Civics Capstone Project to fulfill a students' performance-based diploma assessment requirement.
- Schools and districts will need to record students who have met the civics proficiency and civics project requirements using their existing systems, like other graduation requirements. LEAs could leverage the ILP for this purpose as well.
- LEAs can opt to accept student projects that are completed outside of school, such as through an afterschool, Girl Scouts / Scouts BSA, or other civic-oriented program. Students should be able to demonstrate that the project meets the requirements of a student-led civics project as established in Part 4 of this *Guidebook*.

Standards and Instructional Vision for Rhode Island Civic Learning

The *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* and *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* are roadmaps to ensure that all Rhode Island students receive a comprehensive social studies education from kindergarten through high school that will be aligned across the state. Together, the *Standards* along with the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* help teachers:

- connect social studies education to current events that affect students' lives,
- prepare students to be informed and engaged citizens as they move to their college, career, and civic lives,
- include representation of historically marginalized voices throughout the curriculum,

- emphasize inquiry-based learning,
- be culturally responsive.

The kindergarten to high school scope and sequence of the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* transcend the mere acquisition of knowledge, emphasizing the application of this knowledge through critical thinking, analysis, and active participation in civic life. Students are encouraged to engage with current events, debate diverse perspectives, and contextualize contemporary issues within their historical background. This approach aims to equip students with the ability to make well-reasoned decisions and actively contribute to their communities and society at large, and the Civic Learning Practices included in this document will assist educators in these instructional shifts.

The Rhode Island standards outlined for the 8th grade and high school civics courses are strategically designed to provide a rich foundation in civic knowledge that is crucial for fostering informed and active citizenship. The standards emphasize the structure and functions of government, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the foundational principles of democracy. Through these courses, students are expected to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the democratic process. As students progress into high school, the curriculum expands to explore more complex topics such as policy-making, international relations, and the global role of the United States, ensuring a deeper understanding and engagement with civic life.

The expectation for civic learning extends beyond the grade 8 and high school civics courses, aiming for a seamless integration of civic knowledge and skills across the entire social studies curriculum from kindergarten to high school. This ensures that students encounter civic concepts and practices throughout their educational journey, providing continuity and depth to their learning experience. The integration of the Civic Learning Practices outlined in this guidance is informed by the recommendations of the Rhode Island Civics Readiness Task Force, which underscores the importance of inquiry-based learning, elevating student voice, and engaging with complex, real-world issues. For instance, students might analyze the impact of historical legislation on current societal structures, engage in simulations of democratic processes, or participate in service-learning projects connected to their communities. By incorporating Civic Learning Practices throughout the social studies curriculum, educators in Rhode Island are crafting a rich tapestry of learning experiences that prepare students to be knowledgeable, skilled, and engaged citizens. These practices are designed to foster a sense of civic responsibility and the ability to thoughtfully contribute to the democratic process, both locally and globally.

RI Civic Skills, Knowledge, and Dispositions

Rhode Island's comprehensive approach to civics education, informed by the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards*, *The Social Studies Curriculum Framework*, this guide, and current research in the field,^{9 10 11} aims to develop the following skills, knowledge, and dispositions for active, thoughtful, and equity-driven engagement in our democracy:

Civic Skills

- Critical Thinking and Analysis: Ability to critically evaluate information, arguments, and evidence from multiple sources.
- Effective Communication: Proficiency in articulating ideas clearly and engaging in respectful dialogue and debate.
- Media Literacy: Skills to critically assess and engage with media content and understand its influence on public opinion and democracy.
- Participation in Civic Processes: Understanding of how to participate in democratic processes, including voting, collaboration, advocacy, and community engagement.

Civic Knowledge

- Foundations of Government: Understanding of the principles of democracy, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.
- Functions of Government: Knowledge of how local, state, and national governments operate and the roles of different branches.
- Rights and Responsibilities: Awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.
- Historical Context: Understanding of historical events, movements, and figures that have shaped current civic life.

Civic Dispositions

- Commitment to the Common Good: A sense of responsibility to contribute to the welfare of the community and society.
- Respect for Diversity: Valuing diversity and practicing inclusive thinking, action, and respect for others with different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Civic Mindedness: A disposition towards engagement and service to the community and civic participation.
- Ethical Reasoning: Ability to make informed, ethical decisions and consider the impact of actions on the community and society.

⁹ National Council for the Social Studies. (n.d.). [Position Statements](#).

¹⁰ CIRCLE. (n.d.). [Research](#).

¹¹ Educating for American Democracy. (2021). [Roadmap](#).

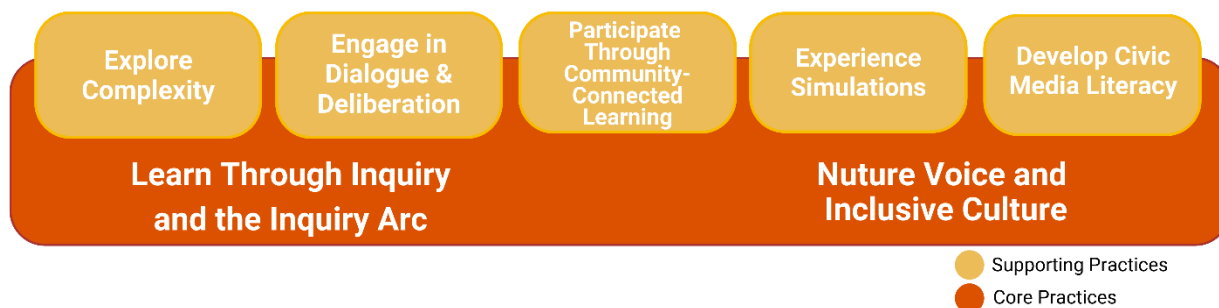
Civic Learning Practices for Powerful and Authentic Instruction

Leveraging the Civics Readiness Task Force’s recommendations, and in the support of all K-12 social studies teachers, RIDE has assembled research-based practices designed to enrich and align to the *Social Studies Standards* and the High-Quality Instructional Practices outlined in the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework*. These practices should be implemented from kindergarten through high school.

The Civic Learning Practices are divided into two categories: *Core Practices* are the essential, daily strategies that provide a strong foundation for student learning, while *Supporting Practices* should be included regularly in instruction as they are advanced strategies that build upon this foundation to deepen understanding, develop critical civics skills, and connect learning to real-world contexts.

By framing civics education through these practices, students can develop a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens, and develop the knowledge and skills to participate fully and contribute to their communities, country, and world:

Figure 1: Rhode Island Civic Learning Practices



Core Practices (implemented daily)

The Core Practices provide grounding for all classroom instruction and should be the foundation with which all other practices are embedded. These practices are:

1. Learn through Inquiry and The Inquiry Arc (based on the [C3 Framework](#)¹²):
Inquiry practice is the foundation for instruction, and encourages critical thinking, curiosity, and a deeper more nuanced understanding of history and contemporary life.
2. Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture:
Curriculum and instructional practices should be grounded in the diverse histories, experiences, cultures, and values of students, and include topics relevant to them and

¹² National Council for the Social Studies. (2013). College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. <https://www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3>.

their communities, encouraging their development of potential solutions to social and economic problems in their schools, communities, and world.

Supporting Practices (implemented often)

The Supporting Practices are instructional moves and strategies that students should experience regularly in order to develop the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to lead powerful and impactful civic lives. These practices are:

1. Explore Complexity
Question, analyze, and critique government, politics, and history through varied perspectives and ideas
2. Engage in Dialogue and Deliberation
Engage consistently with difficult or controversial topics
3. Participate through Community-Connected, Relevant Learning:
Take action via civic action projects, localized learning experiences, and civic writing
4. Experience Simulations:
Learn about and practice civic skills within democratic processes
5. Develop Civic Media Literacy:
Analyze and create varied media and mediums in civic contexts

Coherence: The Social Studies Curriculum Framework and Civic Learning Practices

The Rhode Island Department of Education has set forth a vision for high-quality, standards-aligned instructional practices across all content areas that are outlined within all content-specific curriculum frameworks.¹³ The [Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#) builds around these instructional practices with those specific to social studies instruction.¹⁴ The Civic Learning Practices directly support and extend the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* and are foundational to daily civic learning from kindergarten to high school.

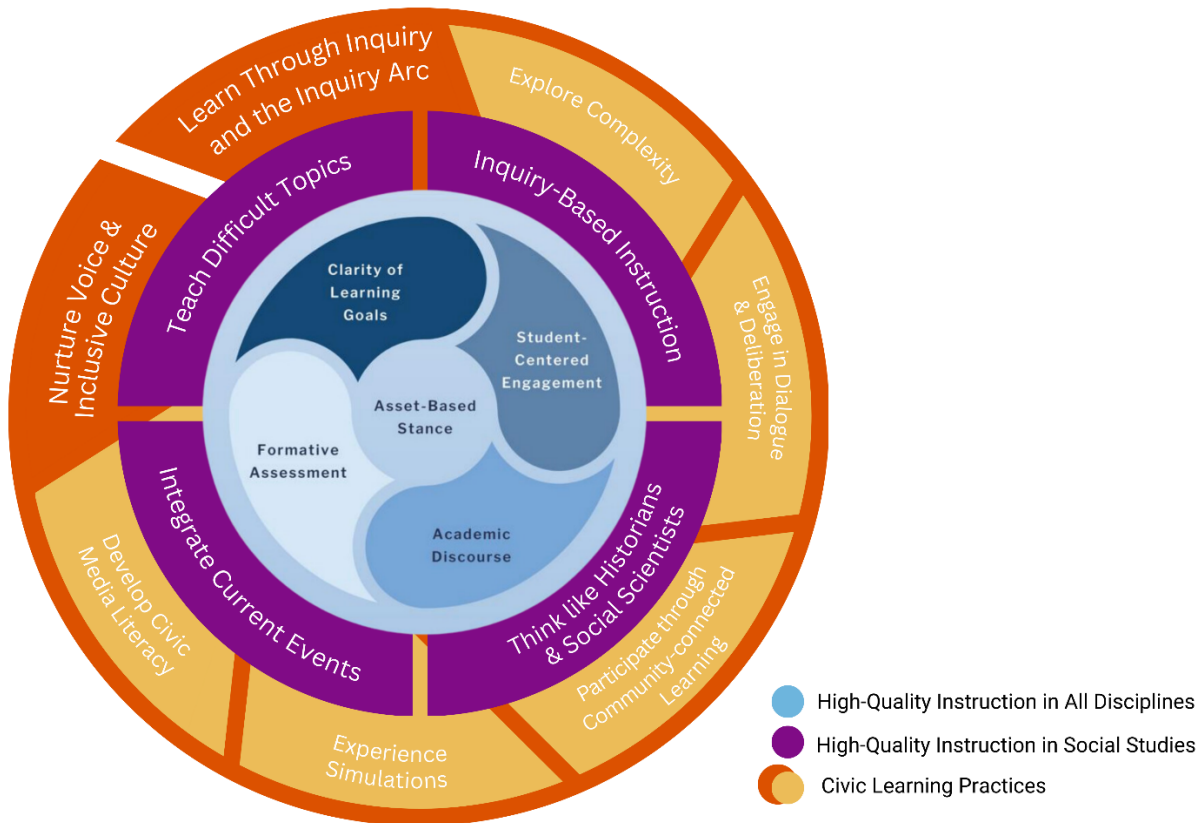
Altogether, they articulate the learning experiences every Rhode Island student should be exposed to in social studies from kindergarten through high school. By integrating these practices,

¹³ Refer to RIDE's [Curriculum Frameworks page](#) for subject-area curriculum frameworks and the [Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#) pages 62-83.

¹⁴ Refer to the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* pages 83-91.

educators provide powerful learning experiences that not only adhere to the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework's* core principles but also engage students in real-world civics.

Figure 2: Civic Learning Practices and High-Quality Instructional Practices



Alignment between the High-Quality Instructional Practices outlined in the *Social Studies Curriculum Framework* and the Civic Learning Practices outlined here ensures that this guide not only complements but also enhances the existing *Social Studies Curriculum Framework*, providing a cohesive and comprehensive approach to civics education across all social studies curricula:

- **Assets-Based Stance**

The *Curriculum Framework* emphasizes an assets-based stance, recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences students bring to the classroom. The Civic Learning Practices and instructional strategies emphasize student voice and lived experiences as valuable and central to learning and civic life. They also prioritize community-connected content throughout, ensuring that civics education is relevant, resonant, and values community and student perspective. By grounding curriculum and instructional practices in the diverse histories and cultures of students, civics education becomes a more inclusive and empowering experience, directly reflecting the assets-based stance.

- **Clear Learning Goals**

Setting clear learning goals is fundamental to the *Curriculum Framework*, ensuring that students understand the objectives they are expected to meet. The Civic Learning Practices support this through Inquiry and the Inquiry Arc of learning (C3), which establishes a clear framework for inquiry-based learning and strategies that help students wrestle with the complexity of issues, their relationship to history, and the relevance in their communities. This approach encourages students to engage deeply with civics content, fostering critical thinking and curiosity while clearly understanding the learning outcomes they are working towards.

- **Student-Centered Engagement**

The *Curriculum Framework* advocates for student-centered engagement, where students actively participate in their learning. The Civic Learning Practices deepen this commitment by emphasizing student voice, choices, and leadership throughout classroom instruction, especially through civic action projects. Dialogue and deliberation of difficult or controversial topics and conducting simulations and role-playing of democratic processes also help teachers build learning environments that promote collaborative and reflective learning. These practices place students at the center of their learning, actively engaging their democratic participation authentically.

- **Academic Discourse**

Encouraging academic discourse is a practice in the *Curriculum Framework* that promotes critical thinking and communication skills. The Civic Learning Practices align with this through their emphasis on showing complexity and engaging in dialogue and deliberation. By questioning, analyzing, and critiquing government, politics, and history through varied perspectives and ideas, students are engaged in rich academic discourse that deepens their understanding of civics.

- **Formative Assessment**

The *Curriculum Framework* highlights the importance of formative assessment in monitoring student progress and informing instruction. The Civic Learning Practices complement this through the integration of community-connected, relevant learning experiences, such as civic action and experiential learning, and provide strategies and suggestions to support student-driven formative assessment during civic action projects. These experiences provide opportunities for formative assessment, allowing educators to assess students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in real-world contexts.

The High-Quality Instructional Practices help ensure that civics education in Rhode Island is both high-quality and standards aligned. By integrating foundational and supporting Civic Learning Practices with the emphasis on assets-based stance, clear learning goals, student-centered engagement, academic discourse, and formative assessment, the Civic Learning Practices support educators in delivering civics education that is engaging, relevant, and impactful.

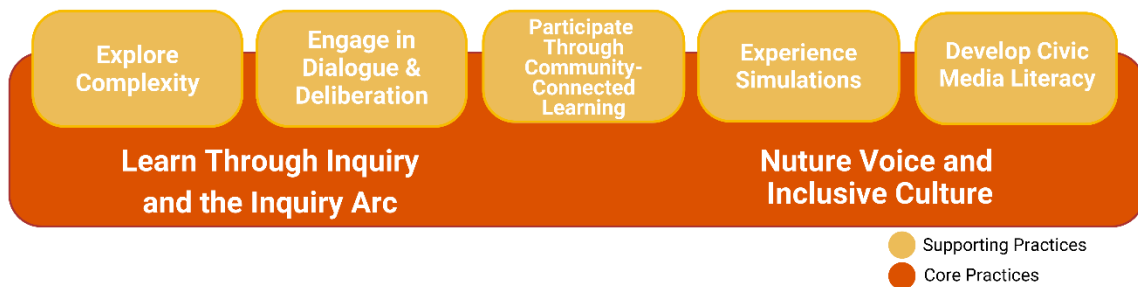
Part 3: Guidance, Instructional Tools, and Resources

This section provides specific guidance and tools to support educators in implementing the Civic Learning Practices to empower students with the competencies needed for effective civic engagement in the 21st century.

Each Civic Learning Practice includes key strategies and carefully curated resources to support implementation. Guidance is offered as a roadmap to help teachers and schools enact the vision of the *Rhode Island Social Studies Framework*. Educating for civic life today is an evolving field, and educators need support in ensuring content and strategies are timely and responsive to a changing world. Therefore, new resources and professional learning opportunities will be added regularly. We invite school leaders, teachers, and students to share resources they find helpful and examples of their students' civic learning in action by contacting socialstudies@ride.ri.gov.

Civic Learning Practices - Descriptions and Resources

Figure 3: Rhode Island Civic Learning Practices



Core Practice #1 - Learn Through Inquiry and the Inquiry Arc

Core Practice #2 - Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture

Supporting Practice #1 - Explore Complexity

Supporting Practice #2 - Engage in Dialogue and Deliberation

Supporting Practice #3 - Participate through Community-Connected, Relevant Learning Experiences

Supporting Practice #4 - Experience Simulations

Supporting Practice #5 - Develop Civic Media Literacy

Core Instructional Practices and Resources

Core Practice #1 - Learn Through Inquiry and the Inquiry Arc

At the heart of powerful civics instruction is the practice of inquiry - a student-driven learning process of asking meaningful questions, investigating to find answers, and drawing evidence-based conclusions.

Inquiry - a Vital Shift for Social Studies and Civics Education

The inquiry method cultivates a habit of questioning and critical analysis, essential for informed civic participation. By engaging in inquiry, students develop the skills to investigate complex issues, weigh evidence, and make reasoned decisions – abilities crucial for both understanding the complexities of democracy and for being an informed, active participant:

1. *Engagement with Real-World Issues:* Inquiry allows students to engage with real-world issues and questions that matter to them. This relevance to their own lives increases engagement and motivation to learn.
2. *Development of Critical Thinking Skills:* Through the process of inquiry, students develop critical thinking skills as they evaluate sources, analyze information, and make evidence-based conclusions.
3. *Preparation for Active Citizenship:* Inquiry-based learning in civics prepares students for active citizenship. It equips them with the skills to ask important questions, seek out information, and take informed action on civic issues.
4. *Fostering of Lifelong Learning:* Inquiry encourages a mindset of curiosity and continuous learning, which is essential for the ongoing responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.

The Importance of Inquiry Across Grade Levels

Inquiry-based learning is a powerful pedagogical approach that can benefit students from kindergarten through high school. While the specific strategies and depth of inquiry may vary, the fundamental process of students exploring questions, conducting research, analyzing sources, and communicating conclusions develops critical thinking abilities essential for success in school and life.

While the nature of inquiry evolves across grade levels, this student-centered approach to learning promotes critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication abilities that will benefit learners throughout their academic and professional lives. Inquiry equips students to navigate an increasingly complex world by giving them the tools to actively construct knowledge and understand multiple perspectives on the issues they will encounter.

In addition, engaging students in inquiry-based learning from the earliest stages of their education lays the foundation for more complex, student-led civics projects. This progressive skill-building allows students to gradually take ownership of their learning, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent research abilities. As students advance through the grades, they become increasingly equipped to tackle more sophisticated inquiry-based projects, such as those focused on civic engagement and community problem-solving. By the time they reach middle and high school, students who have consistently engaged in inquiry-based learning are well-prepared to undertake robust, student-led civics projects that demonstrate their ability to investigate complex issues, propose solutions, and actively participate in their communities.

Elementary School: In the elementary grades, inquiry nurtures students' innate curiosity about the world around them. Young learners have a natural inclination to ask "why?" about everything they observe and experience. Inquiry capitalizes on this sense of wonder by posing questions that pique their interests and having them investigate answers through hands-on activities, read-alouds, multimedia resources, and discussions. Inquiry in the early years builds crucial background knowledge while fostering habits of inquiry that will serve students well as they advance through their education. Even at this foundational stage, students can begin practicing inquiry skills like:

- Asking good questions
- Making careful observations
- Gathering and evaluating sources
- Drawing and explaining conclusions
- Sharing findings through writing, speaking, or creating

Middle School: As students move into the middle grades, their cognitive abilities allow them to engage in more sophisticated inquiry. They can wrestle with more complex questions that get at the core of academic disciplines. Inquiry enables deeper exploration into topics across the curriculum, from scientific processes and historical events to literary analysis and current issues. Specific inquiry skills that become paramount in these years include:

- Formulating focused research questions
- Evaluating source credibility and recognizing bias
- Synthesizing information from multiple sources
- Constructing evidence-based arguments
- Considering multiple perspectives on issues

Inquiry-based learning capitalizes on the increasing independence of middle school students. As they take more ownership over their learning process, they build self-directed skills that prepare them for the rigors of high school and beyond.

High School: In high school, inquiry skills are vital for success across the academic content areas. Whether analyzing primary sources in a history course or researching policy proposals for a civics project, students must draw upon the inquiry practices they have been developing. Ultimately, the inquiry process in high school aims to mirror the work of scholars, researchers, and professionals in various fields. By mastering these skills, students become college and career ready, poised to tackle complex questions and challenges they will face as engaged citizens. At this level, inquiry should emphasize:

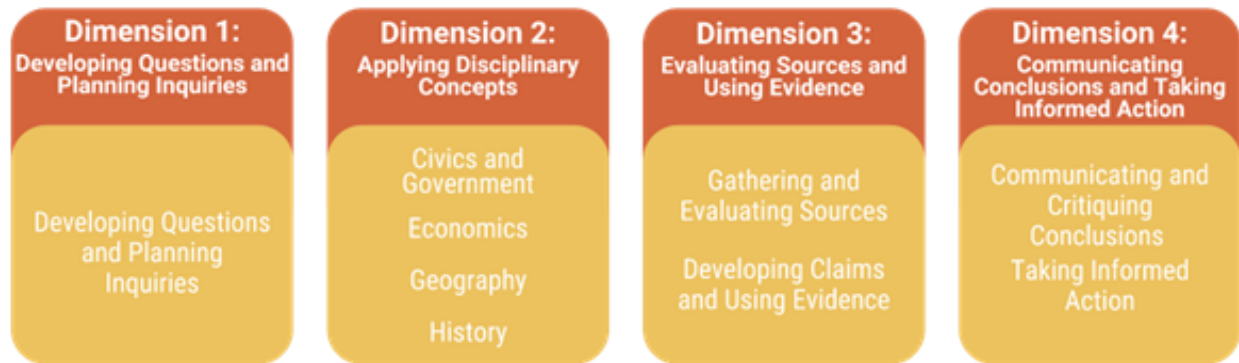
- Identifying and framing researchable problems/questions
- Locating and evaluating credible, relevant sources
- Collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data
- Developing and critiquing arguments/theories
- Communicating findings through written, multimedia, or oral presentations

The Inquiry Arc: A Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies

The Inquiry Arc, drawn from the [College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework](#), provides a structure for engaging students in rigorous inquiry that builds their critical thinking, problem solving, and participatory skills to become active and informed citizens. It consists of four interlocking dimensions as demonstrated in Table 1.

Implementing inquiry through the Arc requires a shift towards student-centered, active learning. Teachers provide scaffolding and model the inquiry process, gradually transferring ownership to students. While challenging, this approach equips students with the skills to explore civic issues, evaluate information, and engage in democratic processes throughout their lives. By centering inquiry in civics instruction, classrooms empower students to be curious, critical thinkers and active citizens who can navigate and shape our democratic society. The Inquiry Arc offers a powerful framework for making this vision a reality.

Table 1: Components of the C3 Inquiry Arc of Learning



Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

The inquiry process begins with compelling questions that spark students' curiosities about civics, government, and social problems. Effective compelling questions are open-ended, arguable, and relevant to students' lives. Compelling questions are built into the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* and can be used to support the inquiry process. Here are some examples from the *Standards*:

- Are all communities the same? (Grade 1, Inquiry Topic 5)
- Is it possible to ever know the whole truth about the past? (Grade 6, Inquiry Topic 2)
- Does a free press support a democratic government? (Grade 8, Inquiry Topic 7)
- Is protest patriotic? (High School Civics, Inquiry Topic 7)

Supporting questions then guide students in investigating the issues and ideas underlying the compelling question. Teachers can develop supporting questions, or better yet, coach students to formulate their own.

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools, Rhode Island Anchor Standards

Table 2: Rhode Island Anchor Standards and Disciplinary Concepts

Civics and Government	History	Geography	Economics
Power	Change/Continuity	Human, Physical, and Environmental Interactions	Scarcity/Abundance
Rules and Laws	Historical Perspectives	Human Systems and Populations	Producers/Consumers
Rights and Responsibilities	Individuals/Groups	The World in Spatial Terms	Economics/Government

As students explore compelling questions, they apply concepts and tools from the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history. This disciplinary knowledge provides crucial lenses for analyzing civic issues and making reasoned decisions. As students explore these questions, they engage with key civics concepts and tools, such as analyzing primary sources, examining multiple perspectives, and understanding democratic processes. Table 2 aligns Rhode Island’s Anchor Standards with the disciplinary concepts of the *C3 Framework*.

Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

A critical component of inquiry is evaluating sources and using evidence to develop claims. Students must learn to carefully analyze sources like government documents, speeches, news articles, and data visualizations for credibility, bias, and perspective. They then synthesize relevant evidence from trustworthy sources to support their conclusions about the compelling question.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

The inquiry process culminates with students communicating their conclusions and taking informed action. This can take various forms, from essays and multimedia presentations to civic action projects, policy proposals, or advocacy campaigns. By extending their learning into the real world, students practice the skills of civic participation and work to improve their communities. Learn more about Taking Informed Action and how K-12 teachers can integrate into their social studies course in [Part 4](#) of this guidance.

Types of Inquiry - Supporting and Cultivating Inquiry and Civic Skills

Inquiry can range from structured to open inquiry, depending on the teacher’s experience with inquiry, class size, time allotted for the project, and student readiness level. For example, 6th grade students might experience more teacher-supported inquiries while high school students might be more ready for self-directed, open inquiries. Either way, it is important that teachers scaffold students' skills toward increasingly independent inquiries.

There are three ways teachers can modify and differentiate the inquiry learning experience, structured, guided, and open:

Figure 4: Types of Student Inquiry

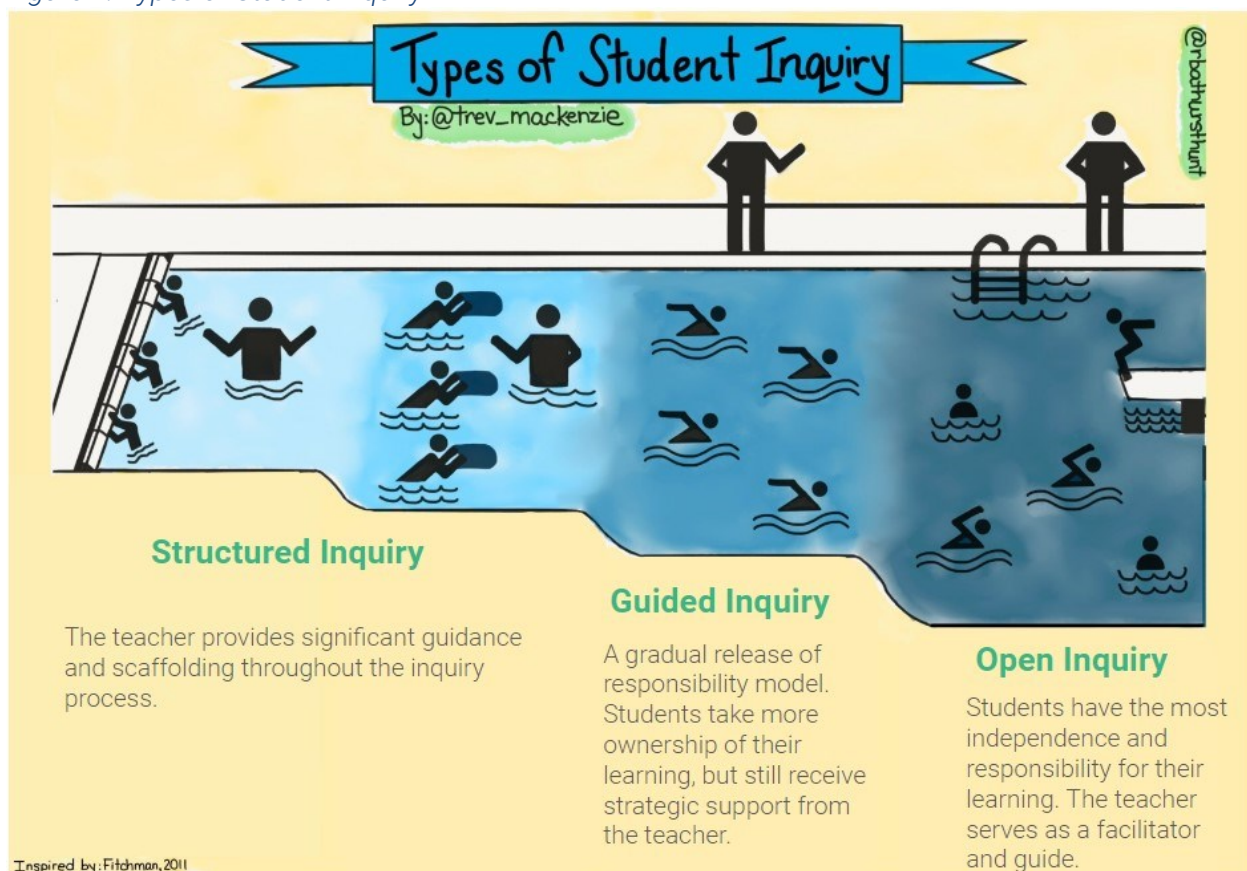


Image adapted from Trevor MacKenzie’s [Types of Student Inquiry sketchnote](#).

STRUCTURED INQUIRY

In a structured inquiry, the teacher provides significant guidance and scaffolding throughout the inquiry process. Key elements of structured inquiry include:

- The teacher selects the compelling question that will drive the inquiry, possibly using one provided through the *Social Studies Standards* for the topic of study.

- The teacher provides a collection of curated sources for students to examine in order to build their content knowledge and gather evidence.
- The teacher designs the learning activities, such as specific document analysis templates, graphic organizers, or discussion protocols for students to use.
- Students may have some choice within the structure, such as selecting from a set of sub-questions to investigate or choosing how to present their conclusions.
- The final student product is often predetermined, such as an argumentative essay or structured debate.

Why Use Structured Inquiry?

Structured inquiry is best for students and/or teachers new to inquiry-based learning, as it allows students to develop the necessary skills and processes while receiving ample support. It works well when the inquiry needs to be completed in a shorter time frame, such as a single lesson or two. An example of structured inquiry might be having students explore the compelling question “Was freedom afforded to everyone after the American Revolution?” (Grade 4, Inquiry Topic 4) with a curated set of primary sources and a teacher-provided graphic organizer.

GUIDED INQUIRY

Guided inquiry follows a gradual release of responsibility model. Students take more ownership of their learning, but still receive strategic support from the teacher. Features of guided inquiry include:

- The teacher selects a compelling question, but students may decide which supporting questions to investigate.
- Students are more independent in identifying and analyzing relevant sources, but the teacher provides some curated resources as a starting point.
- Students have more choice in how to conduct their research, such as deciding between examining documents, conducting surveys, or analyzing data.
- The teacher provides tools such as inquiry charts or research guides, but students have flexibility in how to use them.
- Students have more voice and choice in how to present their conclusions, such as by writing a letter to an elected official or creating a website.

Guided inquiry is effective for building students' research and investigation skills. It requires more time than structured inquiry but allows for deeper learning. Guided inquiries often span two weeks or more. An example could be students exploring the compelling question “Was North

America a land of opportunity for everyone?" (Grade 5, Inquiry Topic 2) by generating their own supporting questions, conducting independent research with teacher-provided scaffolds, and creating a podcast to share their conclusions.

Why Use Guided Inquiry?

Guided Inquiry might be helpful with students who are less experienced in inquiry-based learning, as it provides some structure but also plenty of self-directed experience. This method might be most common in middle school classrooms, as it is useful for developing students' research and problem-solving skills while still providing some level of scaffolding.

In addition, Guided Inquiry could be a helpful method if the inquiry includes complex and nuanced issues connected to the topic, guest speakers or field experiences, and time constraints that make it difficult to ensure students have the information and space needed to make meaning and deepen their investigation on their own.

OPEN INQUIRY

In an open inquiry, students have the most independence and responsibility for their learning. The teacher serves as a facilitator and guide, but students drive the inquiry process. Aspects of open inquiry include:

- Students generate a compelling question based on their own interests and curiosities.
- Students are responsible for locating and evaluating relevant sources and information.
- Students develop their own research plans and strategies, with the teacher providing feedback and guidance as needed.
- Students may work collaboratively and seek feedback from peers and experts beyond the classroom.
- Students decide how to share their conclusions with an authentic audience, such as by writing an op-ed, creating a documentary, or presenting to a community group.

Open inquiry allows students to pursue their passions and develop strong independent research and critical thinking skills. It requires significant time and strong student skills and may be a project spanning weeks or months. For example, students could develop their own compelling questions, conduct a full inquiry cycle, and present their policy recommendations to the city council.

Why Use Open Inquiry?

Open Inquiry represents the pinnacle of student-driven learning, offering an environment where students are given the autonomy to pose their own questions, conduct investigations, and derive

conclusions independently. This approach should be the approach teachers aspire for because it:

- Ensures learning and experience is personal and meaningful to students.
- Empowers students to take ownership of their learning by allowing them to pose their own questions, conduct independent investigations, and derive conclusions, fostering deep engagement and intrinsic motivation.
- Cultivates critical thinking, problem-solving, and research skills, which are vital for academic success and highly valued in the workforce.
- Promotes resilience, adaptability, and effective communication, preparing students to navigate complex, real-world challenges.
- Develops a sense of agency and responsibility, which are crucial components of civic readiness.
- Equips students with the confidence to actively participate in democratic processes, advocate for their communities, and address societal issues.

This method might be most common in middle and high school classrooms where students will have more experience with inquiry-based learning, collaborative project management, and action research. RIDE encourages teachers to use this method for the student-led civics project required by legislation ([RIGL §16-22-2](#)), called the “Civics Capstone Project” in [Part 4](#) of this document.

Across all three types of inquiry, the teacher's role is to provide the appropriate level of support and scaffolding while gradually releasing responsibility to students. The type of inquiry used may vary based on students' grade level and experience, the time available, and the complexity of the content. By engaging in these different inquiry models over their K-12 education, students develop critical thinking skills and take ownership of their learning, preparing them for college, career, and civic life.

Inquiry Instructional Frameworks and Tools:

- The [NCSS C3 Framework](#) includes forming compelling questions, investigating these questions using evidence, developing conclusions, and taking informed action and provides guidance on using the Inquiry Arc in social studies education. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- The Educating for American Democracy Roadmap names Inquiry as the [Primary Mode for Learning](#) that, “embraces these rigorous inquiries as a way to advance students’ historical and civic knowledge, and to connect that knowledge to themselves and their communities.” *For kindergarten through high school.*

- [Harnessing Students' Curiosity to Drive Learning](#) outlines an inquiry-based model that calls on students to develop questions to investigate and connect to other content. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding](#) is a book by Jay McTighe, Grant Wiggins (available for purchase) that provides resources and suggestions for strengthening essential questions, an essential component of inquiry. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [What are Essential Questions?](#) Is an article by Leslie Owen Wilson that contains thorough resources with rich examples of essential questions. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Inquiry-Based Learning: Developing Student-Driven Questions](#) by the Wildwood IB World Magnet School uses the inquiry-based model to put students in charge of their learning, with lessons that stem from student questions and harness the power of curiosity. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- The [Instructional Strategy: QFT, Question Formulation Technique](#) is an article outlining how to stimulate and sustain inquiry through student-driven questions. *For Kindergarten through high school.*
- The [Question Formulation Technique](#) is a powerful strategy that teaches students how to ask their own questions and evaluate the role, purpose, and quality of questions. This strategy should be used throughout an inquiry. *For kindergarten through high school.*

Inquiry Curricular Resources

- [C3 Teacher Inquiries](#) contains social studies inquiries teachers can use with students for grades K-12. The inquiries are aligned to the [C3 social studies](#) inquiry standards and the resources can be printed or shared digitally. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [IllinoisCivics.org](#) provides inquiry-based civics and history lesson plans with guidance and resources that can be printed or shared digitally. The lessons can be used for students grades 6-12. (Some lessons have materials available in other languages, click on the lesson plan and scroll down to the "differentiation" section for the links). *For middle and high school.*
- [Digital Inquiry Group's Document-Based Lessons](#) include document-based history and civics lessons for Grades 6-12. Each lesson is driven by a question that students explore through analyzing multiple primary sources. The lessons are aligned to the C3 social studies inquiry standards. The resources can be printed or shared digitally. (Some lessons are [available in Spanish](#)). *For middle and high school.*

- [InquirEd Inquiry Journeys](#) are curricula available for purchase for K-5 and 6-8 classrooms. A free trial unit is available. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Open Social Studies](#) is a free and open-source inquiry-based and literacy-focused K-6 social studies curriculum developed by Boston University. *For kindergarten through grade 6.*

Core Practice #2 - Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture

When teachers nurture student voice and an inclusive culture, they intentionally create an environment where all students feel safe, respected, and affirmed in sharing their voices, perspectives, and lived experiences. This practice positions students as knowledgeable individuals whose identities and ideas deserve to be amplified. Simultaneously, it fosters an inclusive classroom community that encourages risk-taking, provides affirmation, and cultivates a sense of belonging.

Amplifying student voice develops crucial skills for civic participation, discourse, advocacy, and leadership central to robust democracies. When students feel their voices are valued, they build confidence expressing views, asking questions, challenging ideas, and seeing themselves as agents of change - all key civic dispositions students need to effectively participate in society.

Connecting learning to students' lived realities also makes civics education more authentic, relevant, and empowering. Demonstrating their identities and experiences matter – it increases investment, motivation and self-efficacy around civic engagement. Nurturing an inclusive classroom culture allows students to internalize civic values like appreciation for diversity and diverse views, equality, and justice. Students learn how to engage across difference, voice perspectives, and recognize value in an inclusive democratic society.

This practice directly supports the *Rhode Island Social Studies Framework's* vision of designing learning that "engages all students in meaningful grade-level work" and promotes "cross-cultural understanding and inclusiveness." It cultivates the inquiry mindsets, social-emotional skills, and civic dispositions outlined in the *Curriculum Framework* holistically, making it a practice that should be core to everyday instruction.

Strategies

- *Student Surveys and Feedback Forms*: Regularly gather student input through anonymous surveys or feedback forms about what is working well in the classroom and what could be improved. Use this data to make changes and show students their voices are valued.
- *Classroom Meetings*: Hold regular classroom meetings where students can voice concerns, make suggestions, and collectively decide on solutions for improving the learning environment. Make a routine day where the class discusses what is working, and not working, about the classroom culture.
- *Student Representatives*: Elect or rotate student representatives who can bring classmates' ideas to meetings with teachers and administrators about the classroom set-up and policies.

- *Choice in Classroom Rules/Norms*: Rather than imposing all rules, have students collaboratively build the classroom rules/norms/constitution and decide on logical consequences for not following them.
- *Student-Led Conferences*: Have students lead parent-teacher conferences by sharing their work samples, reflecting on their growth, and suggesting ways the classroom can support their learning.

Instructional Tools:

- [Let's Go There: Making a Case for Race, Ethnicity and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education](#) is a report that outlines the new approach to civic learning that centers students' lived experiences and civic knowledge assets they already bring to the classroom. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Simple Ways to Promote Student Voice in the Classroom](#) is an article by Edutopia that outlines a strategy for giving students some say over what happens in class to promote engagement and a strong sense of community. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Cultivating a Pedagogy of Student Voice](#) by Shane Safir outlines instructional strategies to create more dynamic, holistic, and equitable classrooms. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- Facing History's [Power, Agency, and Voice](#) is a text set designed for students in grades 11-12. It includes lesson plans and multi-genre texts for a 1–2 week unit exploring the essential question, "How do I empower myself to speak up and take action on behalf of myself and others?" *For grades 11 and 12.*
- [Elevating Student Voice in Education](#) is a Center for American Progress report that outlines strategies to increase authentic student voice in education at the school, district, and state levels. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Toolkit For "Own Your Voice"](#) is a three-part activity for grades 8–12 that engages students in an interview with Maria Hinojosa and asks them to conduct their own interviews that amplify "voice" and tell untold stories. *For grades 8 to high school.*
- [The Student Voice Toolkit](#) by the Search Institute includes research, tools, and resources to support educators in developing and refining student voice practices in K-12 classrooms and schools so that they can more effectively involve students in classroom and school decision-making. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Creating an Inclusive Classroom](#) from Edutopia outlines strategies for talking about race to foster safety and unity in a multicultural classroom. *For kindergarten through high school.*

- [Inclusive and Equity-Minded Teaching Practices](#) includes a rich collection of resources and strategies curated by University of Illinois at Chicago aimed at helping teachers answer the question, “How do you build courses and classroom spaces that are inclusive, equitable, accessible, and where students feel a sense of belonging?” *Applicable to kindergarten through high school.*

Supporting Instructional Practices and Resources

Supporting Practice #1 - Explore Complexity

Educators should ensure curricular content reflects the diverse identities and experiences of students and the rich, complex, and intersectional tapestry of our nation's history. Educators introduce multiple voices and ideas by developing questions and planning inquiries, applying disciplinary tools and concepts, selecting primary and secondary sources, leveraging local and student lived experiences, oral histories, etc.

What it is: This practice involves teaching students to understand and grapple with the complexity of government, politics, and history. It includes exploring different perspectives and ideas, and questioning and analyzing these elements critically.

Importance: Understanding complexity prepares students for the realities of a pluralistic society and democratic governance where issues are complex and require consideration of multiple viewpoints. This ability to grasp nuance and engage with diverse perspectives is vital for participating in democratic processes and for fostering an inclusive, informed society.

Resources:

- [Hexagonal Thinking](#) is a method for considering the connections between ideas and finding the nuances in those connections. *For later elementary to high school.*
- *The EAD Roadmap* and *EAD Pedagogy Companion* provide support to districts to implement the civics instruction with [resources](#), a [pedagogy guide](#), and vertically aligned [themes for inquiry](#). These resources can help teachers leverage critical, complex historical inquiry with a civics disciplinary lens. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [The Constitute Project](#) is an online tool that allows students to compare and contrast the structure of the US Constitution with those of other constitutions from around the world - helping students to do a comparative analysis that explores policy, governance, and values. *Applicable to high school.*
- [Constitution U.S.A.](#) is a PBS series that investigates where the U.S. Constitution lives, how it works and how it doesn't, how it unites and divides us. These resources will help ground social studies and civics learning in the complexity of our democracy, rights, and justice. Includes essential questions and resources related to federalism, rights, equality, separation of powers, amendments, and other current and societal issues. *Applicable to high school.*

Content Enrichment:

- [NYC Current Issues and Events](#) is a web page that offers resources for families to build context on current issues and events at home and to deepen the learning students are engaged with in class. *For third grade through high school.*
- [Learning for Justice: Student Texts](#) is a searchable library of short texts that offers a diverse mix of stories and perspectives, including perspectives on disability. Includes informational and literary nonfiction texts, literature, photographs, political cartoons, interviews, infographics and more. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- The [Smithsonian](#) and the [Library of Congress](#) both have free classroom materials and professional development to help teachers effectively use primary sources from the Library's vast digital collections in their teaching. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- [Facing History and Ourselves: Student Texts 6-12](#) provides resources and lesson plans for middle and high school that help educators engage students in complex issues of history, politics, and society, including issues around disability. Some are free, some available for purchase. *For middle and high school.*
- [Landmarkcases.org](#) is a teacher- and student-friendly website that includes middle and high school level resources and activities around 17 cases very often mentioned in social studies standards. *For middle and high school.*
- [Legaltimelines.org](#) is a free, teacher- and student-friendly website that includes themed timelines on legal history, plus more than 40 document-based "inquiry packs." *For middle and high school.*
- [Gale In Context: Middle School & High School](#) is a fee for service site that provides content that supports social studies instruction for grades 6 to 12. *For middle and high school.*
- [Educating for American Democracy Roadmap Disability History and Civics Extension](#) presents a framework and questions to guide both the inclusion of students with disabilities in civics and of a narrative of people with disabilities across American history and civic life as an extension to the [Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#). *For kindergarten to high school.*
- [Emerging America](#) publishes a number of curriculum units, lesson plans, and primary source sets that support the engagement of students of all abilities. Resources include disability history curriculum and lessons that support multilingual learners. *For kindergarten to high school.*

Supporting Practice #2 - Engage in Dialogue and Deliberation

Engaging in dialogue and deliberation about difficult or controversial topics involves teaching students to respectfully discuss and consider different viewpoints. This practice fosters critical thinking, empathy, and the ability to engage in civil discourse. Facilitating student dialogue provides an opportunity to investigate and deliberate essential questions on topics facing their families and community. This authentic practice builds content knowledge, civic skills, and dispositions.

What it is: This method focuses on teaching students to engage in mutually respectful and productive discussions about difficult or controversial topics. It emphasizes listening to different viewpoints, articulating one's own thoughts clearly, and deliberating in a constructive manner to promote mutual understanding and consensus on solutions that are for the betterment of the common good.

Importance: Dialogue and deliberation skills are foundational for a functioning democracy. They allow individuals to engage in civic discourse, understand opposing viewpoints, and work towards consensus or mutually respectful disagreement. These skills are crucial for democratic decision-making and for maintaining a civil society.

Deliberation Content:

- [National Issues Forum](#) provides issue guides to promote deep inquiry on essential questions facing our communities. *For middle and high school.*
- [ProCon.org](#) has over 90 debate topics complete with pro and con arguments featuring quotes and statistics from experts, historical information, and other pertinent research. *For middle and high school.*
- "[Discussed Politics in Polarized Times: How Structure Can Help](#)" is a NCSS article from Dr. Paula McAvoy outlines how providing students with thoughtful structure and norms for political discussions encourages them to productively disagree and to work towards understanding different viewpoints. *For middle and high school.*
- [Street Law, Inc.](#) has classroom-ready resources reviewed by legal experts & educators designed for meaningful and relevant dialogue and deliberation through simulations. E.g. [Teaching About the Supreme Court](#) includes case summaries from hundreds of SCOTUS cases (past and present), lessons about SCOTUS and how it operates, and strategies to pair case summary with activities. *Grade 4 to high school.*
- [Leadership Rhode Island](#) offers Clifton Strengths training for school faculty and staff to help them keep the perspectives of colleagues in mind when having difficult

conversations. This may benefit school culture and serve as a model to use with students. They also host [dinner conversations](#) with trained facilitators that teachers may find interest in.

Deliberation Instructional Strategies:

- These Educating4Democracy [series of videos](#) explore the purpose, promise, and strategy of controversial issue engagement in the classroom: [The Importance of High Quality Discussions](#), [Structured Academic Controversy](#), and [Student-Centered Discussion and Deliberation](#). *For middle and high school.*
- [Let's Talk](#) from Learning for Justice offers classroom-ready strategies you can use to plan discussions and facilitate conversations with your students. This resource includes suggestions and modifications for the early grades. Kindergarten through high school.
- This [Difficult Dialogues Guide](#) by Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching provides strategies for managing and facilitating difficult discussions in the classroom. *For middle and high school.*
- [Street Law, Inc. Resource Library](#): Classroom-Ready Resources designed for meaningful and relevant dialogue and deliberation: *Fourth grade through high school.*
 - [Deliberations](#) (aka Structured Academic Controversy (SAC)) include PPT and handouts for conducting any SAC, plus elementary middle and high school level topic readings. There are also some resources on further integrating SEL components into deliberations. *Fourth grade through high school.*
 - Four [Strategy Overview Videos](#) videos that provide short overviews of strategies. *Fourth grade through high school.*
- [The Deliberative Classroom](#) by the Association for Citizenship Teaching offers lesson plans and guidance for facilitating deliberative discussions on controversial issues. *For middle and high school.*
- [LivingRoom Conversations](#) has resource pages, conversation topics, conversations for schools, and Teen Talks. *Kindergarten through high school.*
- The Center for Civic Education has a [Civil Discourse: An American Legacy Toolkit](#) program with modular lesson plans that support learning of the country's constitutional principles and history to lay the groundwork for engagement in civil discourse on different topics. *For middle and high school.*

Supporting Practice #3 - Participate through Community-Connected, Relevant Learning Experiences

In order to fully prepare young people to participate in civic life, learning should be contextualized within content, situations, and processes that are connected to their communities and lived experiences. This practice helps classrooms come alive, ensuring what students are learning is relevant to them and their families, and that the classroom bridges students to the community through learning.

What it is: This approach links classroom learning with real-world community issues. It involves students in civic action, experiential learning, and projects that impact local challenges or contribute positively to their community.

Importance: Community-connected learning grounds academic content in real-world contexts, making learning relevant and engaging. It cultivates a sense of civic responsibility and community engagement. This approach helps students see the impact of civic action, understand their role in society, and develop a commitment to contributing positively to their communities and democracy – but most importantly, it connects our young people as key stakeholders in community improvement. Students today are civic actors and solution designers on issues that are currently impacting our communities.

Suggestions for Community Inclusion and Involvement

Community engagement enriches the learning experience of students and deepens the connection between schools and the wider community. Here are some guidance and suggestions for projects that can facilitate this integration:

Identifying Community Needs

- *Community Surveys:* Have students design and conduct surveys to identify community issues or needs. This can be done through face-to-face interviews, online surveys, or community forums.
- *Partner with Local Organizations:* Collaborate with local non-profits, civic groups, or government agencies to identify areas where student projects can make a real impact.

Engagement Strategies

- *Involve Community Experts:* Bring in local experts or community leaders to speak to students, provide guidance, or mentor students throughout the project.

- *Host Community Events:* Host events like fairs, exhibitions, or town hall meetings where students can present their projects and engage with community members.
- *Incorporate Service Learning into Projects:* Integrate service learning where students volunteer their time to support local organizations or initiatives, combining direct service with academic learning.
- *Include Impact Assessment:* Include components where students assess and present the impact of their projects, such as pre- and post-project surveys or community feedback.
- *Require Community Connections in Reflective Journals:* If students are maintaining journals documenting their experiences and challenges, ask them to include new learning and experiences connected to their community, thus encouraging independent engagement.
- *Showcase Project Portfolios:* Students can create portfolios showcasing their work, which can be shared with the community and future classes.
- *Utilize Social Media:* Utilize social media platforms to raise awareness, document progress, and engage with the community.
- *Utilize Digital Mapping:* Engage in projects that involve mapping community resources, assets, or issues using digital tools like [GIS software](#).

When working with community partners, consider their capacity and help coordinate students before reaching out. For example, if you have three groups of students in different classes interested in working with the same community partner, coordinate the groups so that the community partner is not overwhelmed with separate requests. It is also important to remember to have students follow-up with their community partners when finishing up a project. Teachers may also need to consider ways to support and maintain relationships with community partners over the course of several school years.

Resources:

The following tools are curated as suggestions for ways teachers can enrich content and instruction through authentic and relevant connections. These selections offer choices and ideas to implement this practice, with optional resources.

Communicate conclusions and take action through writing in civic contexts:

Students should have opportunities to communicate their thinking and show learning through contexts that are relevant and applicable to civic life.

- The National Writing Project created the [Civically Engaged Writing Analysis Continuum](#) (CEWAC) that supports instruction and assessment of civic writing. These definitions identify goals for students as they produce thoughtful, high-quality civic writing. *For middle and high school.*

- Students can employ a variety of mediums to communicate conclusions that are applicable in our media dominant world: [Infographics](#), [Photo Essays](#), [Podcasts](#), [Oral presentations](#), [TikTok Videos](#), [Magazine Cover](#), [Blog](#), invite and hold a [town meeting](#) with a community leader, etc. *Fourth grade through high school.*

Local civic leaders and organizations:

Tap into local organizations and leaders to enrich and deepen learning and action. Teachers can help connect students with local civic leaders and organizations pertinent to the issues they are passionate about or exploring in class.

- Engaging with the [Rhode Island Secretary of State's Office](#), particularly during events like National Voter Registration Day, can offer students practical insights into the electoral process and the importance of voter registration. This office often participates in community events that promote civic awareness and could serve as a valuable resource for educational partnerships. They also offer the [Civic Leadership Awards](#) and the [Civic Leadership Summit](#). *For kindergarten to high school.*
- Partner with local nonprofits and other civic organizations for collaborative events that allow students to engage in community service and learn about the impact of nonprofit work on local challenges. The State of Rhode Island's Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion lists its [partner organizations](#) and groups that are working on issues and topics that students care about.
- [The Swearer Center](#) at Brown University partners with a wide range of entities (nonprofit organizations, local educational agencies, state/local government agencies, etc.) and will 'match' these entities with the institutional resources/stakeholders that are best positioned to collaborate with them to advance their work. "Our goal is to facilitate partnerships between the Greater Providence community and Brown University that are focused on community development and social change."
- [The Southern Rhode Island Volunteers](#) has a list of community partners that accepts the responsibility for assignment and supervision of a volunteer through Southern Rhode Island Volunteers.
- Both the [Rhode Island Black Business Association](#) and [Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#) help grow the state's economy through small businesses. These organizations can be valuable partners for schools in promoting entrepreneurship education and community engagement.
- The [Rhode Island Department of Health](#) promotes health education, wellness programs, and public health initiatives among students and staff.

- As part of the local education system, the [Rhode Island Department of Education](#) collaborates with schools on various initiatives, enhancing educational outcomes and community involvement.
- The United Way of Rhode Island brings together civic organizations to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders. In particular, the [Alliance for Nonprofit Impact](#) and [Volunteer Center](#) connect to organizations addressing every issue area.
- [Leadership Rhode Island](#) engages and connects people through shared experiences that positively transform individuals, organizations, and communities. They have over 3,000 alumni representing the private, public, and nonprofit sectors and each city and state across Rhode Island that they can connect students with. They also offer training and consulting services as well as a variety of programs for different age groups. Clifton Strengths training and community engagement opportunities are available for schools as well.

Electoral Engagement and Voter Education:

Electoral engagement and voter education in Rhode Island classrooms can be effectively facilitated through a combination of curriculum integration, practical exercises, and collaboration with local resources. The goal is to not only teach about voting, but have students experience the electoral process authentically:

- The [Rhode Island Board of Elections](#) provides essential information on voter registration, upcoming elections, and voting procedures. This resource is crucial for educating students on how to register to vote and the importance of participating in elections.
- The [Rhode Island Secretary of State](#) has an extensive page devoted to voter registration and education. They also offer high schools the option to [borrow voting machines](#) for use in student government elections.
- [Common Cause Rhode Island](#) focuses on defending voting rights and ensuring that elections are accessible and fair. Their Election Protection program can provide students with volunteer opportunities to engage directly in safeguarding the voting process.
- The [RI Chapter of the League of Women Voters](#) has lots of opportunities to collaborate on voter engagement with students, as well as other community events throughout the year.
- [Disability Rights Rhode Island](#) provides training and education for multiple topics pertinent to the rights of and protection for individuals with disabilities including voting rights and registration.

Community Forums and Discussions:

- Organize events where students can interact with local leaders, such as town hall meetings or Q&A sessions with civic officials. These forums can provide a platform for students to express their views and learn more about the governmental process and community issues directly from the decision-makers. [Visible Network Labs](#) has a “Guide designed to be your go-to resource, offering insights, tools, and actionable plans at every stage of the community engagement lifecycle.”
- The [Rhode Island Secretary of State’s Open Government Center](#) offers extensive information on voting, finding and attending public meetings, testifying at a General Assembly committee meeting (including a testimony template), accessing public records, and finding contact information for Rhode Island’s government officials.

Taking Informed Action: Civic Action Projects

- Civic Action Projects are an important practice that is essential to effective civics instruction. [Part 4](#) of this guide explores this instructional strategy in detail, providing resources and guidance for implementation.

Supporting Practice #4 - Experience Simulations

Conducting simulations of democratic processes involves having students experience actual democratic processes and activities, so that they better understand the workings of democratic institutions and develop the skills they need to participate meaningfully and effectively.

What it is: This practice involves engaging students in simulations and role-playing activities that mimic democratic processes like elections, legislative sessions, or court trials.

Importance: These activities provide practical, experiential learning opportunities that deepen understanding of democratic institutions and processes. Participating in simulations helps students grasp the complexities and responsibilities of civic roles, fostering a deeper appreciation for democratic principles, and encouraging active participation in civic life. It allows students to experience civics in a supportive environment, building their participatory knowledge, skills, and dispositions. We encourage simulations that have students take on roles of civic actors in mock trials, legislative hearings, or town halls, not personas or perspectives that could cause trauma or harm to others. [Choosing the Right Simulation](#) from the Constitutional Rights Foundation gives a thumbnail description of the various simulations of democratic processes to consider.

Instructional Resources:

- [Street Law, Inc.](#)'s free resource library has hundreds of materials for a rich civics classroom, including: Scotus Materials, Deliberations, Mock Trials, Lessons, Moot Courts, Strategies, as well as Instructional videos and texts.
 - There are four [Strategy Overview Videos](#) that provide short overviews of strategies.
 - Simulations: [Mock Trial](#) (For high school) and the [Simulations, "Rule of Law for All" lesson set](#) (For middle and high school) including a school board hearing on student dress code and a city council hearing on minimum wage.
 - [Simulation lessons and tools](#) for upper elementary (fourth through eighth grade).
- There are also [Simulation and Deliberation Resources](#) available for purchase. Also, [Street Law](#) will work with school districts to create customized professional development using their resources and strategies. *Currently for high school (with future developments for earlier grades).*
- [Powers of the Presidency](#) is an Annenberg Learner Media lesson explores the "many hats" worn by the president of the United States. *For middle and high school.*

- [Teach Democracy](#) Civic Scenarios and Simulations provides lessons, units, and content that require students to examine an issue from an assigned perspective. *For middle and high school.*
- The Center for Civic Education’s program [We the People](#) is a complimentary curriculum for students covering history and principles of constitutional democracy in the United States. We the People culminates with simulated congressional hearings where students testify before a panel of judges acting as members of Congress. *For elementary, middle, and high school.*
- Harvard’s [Case Method Project](#) curriculum includes documents, or “cases,” which present students with historically rich narratives about real-world problems faced by decision-makers that then invite students to engage in rigorous, evidence-based discussion and debate to come to their own decisions. *For high school.*

Elections and Voting Simulation Resources:

Teaching about voting and elections through simulation is a proven practice in developing knowledge, skill, and habits important for citizenship:

- The [Rhode Island Department of State](#) partners with Rhode Island high schools to provide students with the opportunity to vote for student government leaders and referenda questions using Rhode Island’s official voting machines. *For high school.*
- [Voting and Voices from Learning for Justice](#) has a curated collection featuring their best resources for civics education with a focus on elections and voting. Includes posters for students of all ages, along with videos, lessons, texts and student tasks. *For kindergarten through high school.*
- IllinoisCivics.org [has created a toolkit](#) of elections-focused resources and lesson plans. Some are specific to Illinois, but most apply to Rhode Island student contexts. *For middle and high school.*
- iCivics has many simulation units including [Elections and Voting](#) which is an introduction to the electoral process; [Congressional Committees](#) which helps students discover the different types of congressional committees and their responsibilities; [Cast Your Vote](#) has students discover what it takes to become an informed voter; and [Win the White House](#) challenges students to build a presidential campaign. *For grades 5 to high school.*
- Rock the Vote’s [Democracy Class](#) is a free, nonpartisan curriculum that educates high school students about the importance and history of voting and pre-registers and registers them to vote. *For high school.*

Supporting Practice #5 - Develop Civic Media Literacy

We are increasingly living in a media-dominant, disinformation rich world, making Civic Media Literacy now a non-negotiable and critically essential for responsible citizenship and governance. Journalism and media are both pillars of our democracy and necessary for an informed and engaged public and a thriving democracy.

What it is: Developing Civic Media Literacy involves teaching students to critically assess media content, understand its impact on public opinion and democracy, recognize bias and misinformation, and construct media for civic purposes.

Importance: In the age of information overload and widespread misinformation, media literacy is essential for democratic engagement. It equips students with the skills to discern credible information, understand the media's role in shaping public discourse, and participate in democracy with an informed perspective through mediums that are readily available and used for participation in civic life.

Resources:

Powerful Media Consumers:

- University of Rhode Island's Media Education Lab has a wide variety of [resources available](#), and a nationally recognized [summer institute for educators](#). *For kindergarten to high school.*
- [Learning for Justice Media Literacy Resources](#) is a collection to help learn about and teach the skills necessary to be discerning about the information around us. *For kindergarten to high school.*
- [The Civic Education Research Group](#) hosts a series of videos to promote youth media literacy. *For middle to high school.*
- The [News Literacy Project](#) and [The Sift](#) weekly newsletter provide lessons and explore current examples of misinformation, general media popular culture topics, and societal trends and issues – timely content that can be integrated into K12 social studies inquiries. *For kindergarten to high school.*
- [Civic Online Reasoning](#) offers free lessons and assessments that help you teach students to evaluate online information that affects them, their communities, and the world. *For middle and high school.*

- [Facing History and Ourselves' Journalism in a Digital Age](#) (For high school) helps students to explore the changing landscape of journalism in the digital age and to consider their roles as creators and consumers of news using the documentary film Reporter. And [Assessing How the Media and Information Landscape Impacts Democracy](#) takes a broader look at the impact. *For middle to high school.*
- NewseumEd's [Media Literacy Booster Pack](#) is a collection of free resources to tackle pressing challenges, from recognizing bias and propaganda to leveraging roles as a media contributor. Register for a free account to access. *For middle through high school.*
- [iCivics Newsably](#) is a fictional social media site created by iCivics focused on critical news and information consumption. Register for a free account to access. *For middle and high school.*

Powerful Media Producers:

- [Common Sense Education](#) offers free lessons for teaching students digital citizenship and building young peoples' capacities as thoughtful media creators. The site also shares its picks of the [best tech-creation tools](#) out there and they have [resources in Spanish](#). *For kindergarten to high school.*
- The [Digital Civics Toolkit](#) is a collection of resources for educators to support youth to explore, recognize, and take seriously the civic potential of digital life. *For middle and high school.*
- [PBS News](#) StoryMaker hosts a series of lesson plans that cover the basics of local community journalism, storytelling, scripting and video editing. *For middle and high school.*
- The [Youth Media-Making Toolkit](#) from CIRCLE promotes youth voice, voting, and democratic participation through media creation. Lessons guide teens to plan, make, and share diverse media about voting and civic engagement. And check out their [Student Reporting Labs](#) for youth-generated content. *For middle and high school.*
- [KQED – Above the Noise](#) is a YouTube series for youth, dives deep into the research behind the issues affecting their daily lives. The series investigates controversial subject matter to help young viewers draw informed conclusions, while inspiring media literacy and civic engagement. *For middle and high school.*
- [KQED Youth Media Challenge](#) has free, ready-to-use lesson plans, videos and resources that promote youth voice and help students practice media making, media literacy and civic engagement. *For middle and high school.*

- [Using Pop Culture to Drive Social Change](#) is a MacArthur Foundation article that highlights the role of digital-first social justice organizations that use technology and popular culture as tools for civic action. *For middle and high school.*
- [Pop Culture and Power: Teaching Media Literacy for Social Justice](#) by Dawn H. Currie And Deirdre M. Kelly. *For kindergarten through high school.*

Part 4 - Civic Action Projects

Introduction

Civic action projects are project-based learning experiences that empower students to be proactive members of their community, fostering a sense of responsibility and citizenship. They provide opportunities for students to apply their classroom learning and lived experiences to real-world contexts that are meaningful and relevant to their lives and families.

These projects align with the [Rhode Island Social Studies Standards](#), the [Readiness-Based Secondary Regulations](#), and [legislative mandates](#) that require the integration of civic education in the curriculum, ensuring students are well-equipped for civic participation. In addition, the [C3 Inquiry Arc of Learning](#), as described in [Part 3](#) starting on page 17¹⁵ culminates in Taking Informed Action. Civic action projects will help students close their inquiries with learning experiences that contextualize and apply their learning meaningfully and authentically.

Ultimately, projects should be student-led and offer the opportunity for students to research, reflect, and make decisions on their own and in groups with little teacher-directed learning. However, students may need more experience with inquiry, participatory research, and civic knowledge to ensure their learning and understanding of the issue is rich and complex.

To support Rhode Island’s teachers and schools in shifting to student-driven civic learning experiences, the guidance offered here leverages a spectrum of student voice and inquiry in classroom civic learning. The student voice spectrum, as outlined by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), emphasizes a gradual release of responsibility to foster student autonomy and agency. As it applies to inquiry learning and civic action projects, students and teachers new to inquiry and civic action may need more structured and guided learning experiences, including scaffolding of skills, etc., before engaging in student-led, open inquiry. Recall the swimming graphic “Figure 4: Types of Student Inquiry” from Part 3 on page 19. **RIDE recommends that students experience multiple civic action project experiences in social studies, throughout K-12 education, and varied across the spectrum of student voice, in order to build the skills necessary to take the lead.**

Figure 5: Student Autonomy in Inquiry - Spectrum of Student Voice and Decision-Making



Figure adapted from Toshalis and Nakkula Student Voice Spectrum

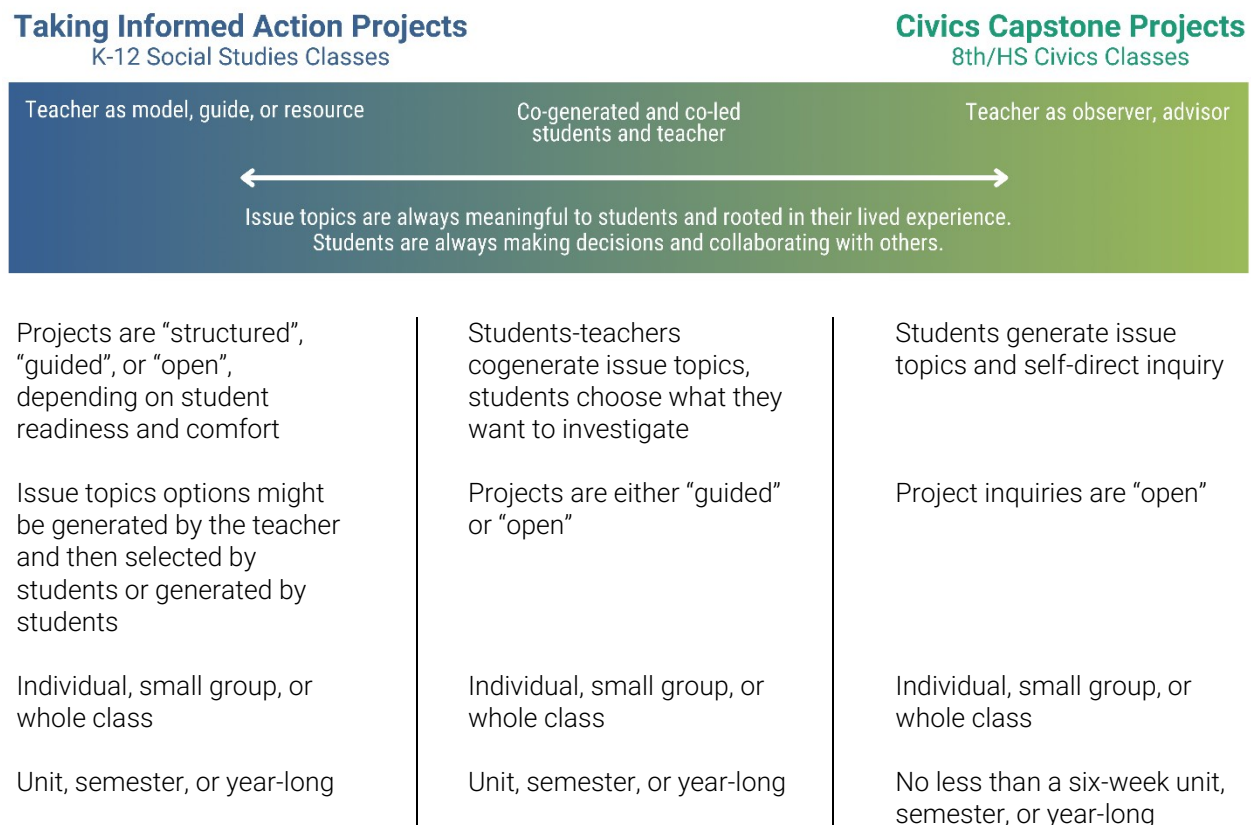
¹⁵ Refer to “Table 1: Components of the C3 Inquiry Arc of Learning”)

This scaffolded approach to civic skill development culminates in the middle or high school student-led civics project required by legislation ([§16-22-2](#)). This project experience falls entirely on the student-led side of the spectrum, enabling students to lead initiatives, design and implement projects, and reflect on their impact.

K-12 Civic Action: Taking Informed Action Projects and Civics Capstone Projects

In Rhode Island, there are two distinct types of civic action projects that students will engage with throughout their K-12 education. The first are "Taking Informed Action Projects," as articulated by the C3 Inquiry Arc framework, which culminate the inquiry process across all grade levels. These projects serve as a summative assessment, allowing students to apply their learning in social, political, environmental, or economic contexts. The second type are "Civics Capstone Projects," which are more comprehensive, student-led projects that RIDE recommends acts as the student-led civics project as outlined in legislation ([RIGL §16-22-2](#)) to be completed in middle or high school as a graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2028. Civics Capstone Projects represent a culmination of the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions students will have developed since kindergarten, requiring them to identify a community issue, conduct research, and implement a solution.

Figure 6: Taking Informed Action Projects and Civics Capstone Projects on the Student Inquiry Spectrum



Taking Informed Action Projects

Taking Informed Action Projects are integrated into the inquiry process from kindergarten to high school. These projects are designed to be the culminating activity of an inquiry unit, where students apply what they have learned to address real-world issues. The process involves understanding an issue, assessing its importance, and taking informed action to share their learning in a real-world context in a grade appropriate manner.

Purpose: The goal of Taking Informed Action Projects is to provide students with regular opportunities to engage in civic action, thereby building their skills and dispositions as active citizens. By participating in these projects throughout their academic careers, students develop a deeper understanding of civic issues and the confidence to take action.

Inquiry Model: Taking Informed Action Projects can follow structured, guided, or open inquiry in a manner appropriate to student skill, grade level, and time available.

Classroom Project Size: These can be completed in a small group, with the whole class, or as individual projects.

Timeline: These can be completed within a unit of study, or as semester-long or full school year projects.

Civics Capstone Projects

Civics Capstone Projects are required for graduation beginning with the class of 2028 and are to take place in either middle or high school. These projects are more comprehensive and student-driven, serving as a culmination of the civic skills and knowledge students have developed throughout their education.¹⁶

Purpose: The Civics Capstone Project aims to synthesize students' learning and experiences in civic education, demonstrating their ability to lead self-directed civic action projects. These projects require students to identify a community issue, conduct thorough research, and implement a solution, showcasing their readiness for active citizenship.

Inquiry Model: Civics Capstone Projects should be open inquiry. The goal is for students to have experienced Taking Informed Action Projects to build their skillset before attempting the Civics Capstone Project required for graduation.

Classroom Project Size: These can be completed in a small group, with the whole class, or as individual projects.

¹⁶ Refer to the [Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#) pages 36 and 41 for RIDE's recommendations on when to incorporate the Civics Capstone project requirement.

Timeline: These can be completed within a unit of study, or as semester-long or full school year projects. Teachers should give ample time for rigorous student-led research, design, and implementation of action. To do so, we recommend a minimum of six weeks in which students are able to design and lead their own investigation.

Rationale and Legislative Requirements

The specific focus on civic action projects in Rhode Island, as outlined by the [Rhode Island Civic Readiness Task Force](#) and supported by legislative actions, centers on the implementation of the 2021 Civic Literacy Act ([RIGL §16-22-2](#)) and the updated [Readiness-Based Secondary Regulations](#). Through these actions, every school district in Rhode Island is required to provide one student-led civics project for students during either middle or high school and every student is required to complete a project before graduation beginning with the class of 2028. This requirement underscores the state's commitment to ensuring that students are actively involved in civic engagement and have practical experiences in the democratic process.

The rationale behind this requirement is to foster a deep understanding of civic responsibilities among students and to engage them in real-world applications of their civic knowledge. By participating in student-led civics projects, students gain hands-on experience in addressing community issues, understanding governance, and contributing to civic life. These projects are designed not only to enhance academic learning but also to cultivate skills in leadership, problem-solving, and collaboration. These skills along with skills such as professional writing, critical thinking, organization, communication, etc. are also applicable to students' future careers. Of note, LEAs (Local Education Agencies) can opt to allow a high school Civics Capstone Project to fulfill a students' performance-based diploma assessment requirement (refer to pages 6-7 of this document - Overview of Civics Proficiency Requirement for Graduation).

Civics Capstone Implementation Considerations:

In the early years of shifting to the new *Social Studies Standards* in Rhode Island, students entering 8th grade or taking a High School civics course might not have enough experience in inquiry-based learning or civic reasoning to feel prepared for independent, self-directed projects. If this is the case, teachers should plan to engage students in multiple structured and guided inquiries with Informed Action earlier in the year, leading to a self-directed Capstone Project in the fourth quarter. This scaffolded support will provide students the guided inquiry experience early on, gaining necessary skills for research, collaborative problem-solving, and power-analysis strategies to lead their own projects. This also prepares 8th grade students for more rigorous and complex independent project experiences in high school. This same strategy may prove useful in supporting students who have moved to Rhode Island during high school who also may have not had experience with inquiry-based learning as designed through the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards*.

Alignment and Coherence

By integrating Taking Informed Action projects throughout K-12 education and culminating with Civics Capstone Projects in grade 8 and/or high school, LEAs can create a coherent and aligned scope of civic action and learning. This approach ensures that students are continuously building their civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, preparing them to be active and informed citizens. For example:

- *Early Grades (K-5)*: Focus on structured inquiry projects to introduce students to civic issues and basic research skills. Encourage and support students who show interest in self-directed projects, fostering their curiosity and initiative.
- *Middle Grades (6-8)*: Transition to guided inquiry projects to develop more advanced research and problem-solving skills. Provide opportunities for students to take more ownership of their projects, gradually increasing their independence.
- *High School (9-12)*: Emphasize open inquiry projects to foster independence and deeper engagement with civic issues. Support students in designing and leading their own projects, ensuring they have the skills and confidence to take meaningful action.

This progression helps students gradually take on more responsibility and complexity in their civic action projects, ensuring they are well-prepared for the Civics Capstone Project and beyond. By encouraging self-directed projects at all grade levels, teachers can nurture students' curiosity and initiative, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

By experiencing both Taking Informed Action Projects consistently throughout their academic careers, as well as the self-directed Civics Capstone Project, students in Rhode Island will be well-prepared for active and engaged citizenship.

Goals of Civic Action Projects

Overall, the recommendation that civic action projects be incorporated into curriculum from kindergarten to high school is a strategic effort to integrate civic learning into the educational experience of students, thereby preparing them to be informed and active participants in their communities and American democracy. The focus on student-led projects specifically aims to encourage active, experiential learning where students take the lead in identifying, planning, and executing projects that have real impact on their communities.

The overarching goals of student-led civic projects are first to benefit students by developing their dispositions, skills, and civic knowledge and second to benefit the community by offering youth perspective, ideas, and investment. Students cultivate a comprehensive understanding of civic engagement, encompassing a deepening of civic knowledge, development of essential civic skills, and nurturing of proactive civic dispositions and values. These projects aim to immerse students in the intricacies of participation in democratic systems and processes thereby

enhancing their understanding of civic rights and responsibilities and their ability to act as informed and engaged citizens.

Civic action projects are designed to foster research, critical analysis, effective communication, solution-design, and collaborative problem-solving skills – all vital for active citizenship. Emphasizing inquiry and inclusivity, students will actively seek out diverse perspectives and understanding of complex issues. Additionally, they aim to encourage youth to offer fresh insights and innovative solutions to community issues, thus benefiting both the students and the broader community. This holistic approach not only equips students with the tools for effective civic participation but also ensures their contributions bring new energy and perspectives to community development, bridging generational gaps and enriching the community's problem-solving capacity.

Civic Action Projects & Service Learning Projects

Service Learning is an important instructional practice that has been long established in Rhode Island’s schools. It is important to distinguish the key differences between service learning and civic action projects, and where they intersect.

Community service learning [{RIGL §16-22-21}](#) and civic action projects are both inquiry-driven experiential education strategies that aim to enhance youth civic engagement and benefit the community. Educators guide students in community service learning to apply what they are learning in the classroom to address genuine community needs, most often through direct service with an outside community organization. Similar to civic action projects, community service learning may aim to understand the root causes of the issue, and engage with civic, political, and institutional systems to create change. Since many school districts and classroom teachers have established service learning programs, it is useful to consider how these two education strategies overlap and complement each other to develop civic knowledge, character, and skills.

Table 3: Service Learning and Civic Action Projects

	Community Service Learning	Civic Action Projects
Focus	Providing service to meet community needs, often with a partner organization. The emphasis is on helping, serving, or providing resources to communities or individuals, often through direct action, or by awareness building, advocacy, or philanthropy.	Focused on engaging in the democratic process and civic engagement. Also understanding and participating in civic and political processes.
Learning Objective	Students reflect on their service experience and consider broader social issues, analyzing the impact of their actions on themselves and the	Develop deeper understanding of civic responsibilities, governance structures, and issues. Students learn about advocacy, public policy, and how to influence policy or

	community. Objectives include social, personal, and interpersonal development.	bring about systemic change.
Community Engagement	Interaction with the community is typically in the form of student investigation or community research that may or may not occur before providing service or assistance. The nature of the interaction is from the student to the community.	Interaction includes engagement with others by building nuanced understanding of civic issues through activities like interviews, surveys, dialogue, deliberation and advocacy.
Outcome	Primary goal is to make an impact on important issues or needs through a service that benefits the community or a specific group within the community, and to foster students' personal and social growth.	The primary goal is to foster the civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions young people need to actively and productively participate in democracy and impact their communities and world.

Service learning experiences on their own are not sufficient nor should be a substitute for the Civics Capstone Project, however, service learning can contribute to civic action projects in these ways:

As a civic catalyst, service learning can inspire students to take the next step towards civic engagement. Service learning naturally fosters a deep understanding of community needs and the societal structures that influence those needs. Through this process, students often become aware of larger systemic issues that require not just immediate direct service but also longer-term, systemic change. This awareness can motivate students to transition from direct service to service activities such as building awareness of important issues and advocating for public policies that address the root causes of the issues they have encountered. Thus, service learning becomes a civic action project.

As a civic action project enrichment experience, service learning projects can also serve as a foundational experience as part of civic action project research. A service learning experience can be built into the inquiry process, providing the practical experience and insight needed to identify and understand complex community issues. Because civic action projects typically involve engaging with policy, advocacy, and broader community mobilization efforts to foster systemic change, a service experience can deepen understanding and desire to enact broader societal impact.

As students' informed action, as students plan an informed action, they may choose to join others who are working on the problem, including through community service if there is a rationale for service as a solution. Community service delivers a natural ending to civic projects and can be implemented within the time constraint of a school calendar. Doing good for others and the community provides students an immediate sense of accomplishment in addressing their research topic.

Table 4: Classroom Examples, Service Learning with Civic Action Projects

<p>Service learning experience leading to civic action</p>	<p>After learning about local plant life and invasive species, 8th grade students participate in a day of service at their local park doing cleanup and environmental stewardship activities.</p>	<p>They were surprised at the amount of trash they found, and how little protected space there was for native plant life to grow. This led students to advocate for more trash cans in the park and a protected prairie area in the park that would also serve as a habitat for local wildlife.</p>
<p>Service as civic action project enrichment</p>	<p>A group of HS Civics students chose food insecurity as their issue for their civic action project after noticing the increased number of unhoused people living in the park near their school.</p>	<p>As part of their research, they spent a Saturday at the local shelter helping to organize donated food and clothing, and cleaning common areas. They also spent time talking to shelter staff and volunteers about the problem - which is how they learned there was a lack of access to free mental health services in the area after the local hospital lost its funding. This caused them to shift and narrow their research focus and action ideas.</p>
<p>Service as the informed action</p>	<p>Students concerned about community safety survey peers and neighbors. Walking home from school rises as a significant concern.</p>	<p>While students discuss funding for more crossing guards with additional responsibilities, they plan for their action: a demonstration of volunteer-led walking school buses to show how a different approach would improve the feelings of safety.</p>

Service Learning Resources:

- [ServeRI](#), the state commission for national and community service, hosts a variety of youth service learning resources and partnerships.
- [Youth Service America](#) is a leading global nonprofit that activates young people, ages 5-25, to find their voice, take action, and acquire powerful civic and 21st Century skills as they solve problems facing their communities. The YSA Knowledge Center has a variety of resources and training to prepare both youth and educators.
- The [Swearer Center](#) at Brown University is also a resource for service learning pedagogy.

The Student Experience: Instructional Elements and Project Phases

Civic action projects are comprehensive, rigorous educational experiences that involve students in active learning about and engagement with real-world issues. In this guide, teachers have access to varied frameworks and tools that take different approaches to facilitating classroom civic action projects. However, there are fundamental instructional elements and process components that all students should experience in order to ensure a holistic, culturally responsive and sustaining student-centered learning experience.

The instructional guidance for projects includes information and resources for the phases of civic action projects, and facilitation using the Civic Learning Practices can support teachers' efforts to ensure powerful learning experiences and outcomes for students.

What kind of learning experiences do Civic Action Projects entail?

By leveraging the Civic Learning Practices (Core Practices (CP) and Supporting Practices (SP)) in Civic Action Project design and facilitation, teachers can ensure meaningful and impactful learning for all students. Included in this guidebook you will find frameworks and resources to support the implementation of both Taking Informed Action Projects and Civics Capstone Projects.

Inquiry Driven Project Phases, Design, and Implementation

The project phases are aligned to the C3 Inquiry Arc of Learning, tailored to include the key components of civic inquiry and action. Civic Action Projects are inquiry-driven and focused on a community or societal issue that is relevant to students' lived experience. The issue topic sets the direction of the student-driven inquiry, deepens and extends learning from their coursework, and provides pathways of connection and action to students' lives and communities.

Participating in inquiry-driven projects will help students develop critical thinking and questioning skills, enabling them to pose and investigate complex questions. Being real-world problem and systems-focused, students will cultivate a deep understanding of the issue through dialogue, deliberation, and research that includes community-based participatory action research like surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

No matter the curriculum or resources teachers use, there is a general roadmap for the progression of civic action projects, from inception to conclusion, that is inquiry-driven and aligned to [Core Practice #1 - Learn through the Inquiry Arc](#) and [Core Practice #2 - Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture](#).

The civics project phases are:

- Phase 1 - Reinforce a Supportive Community
- Phase 2 - Develop Questions & Plan Inquiry
- Phase 3 - Conduct Research

Phase 4 - Analyze & Draw Conclusions

Phase 5 - Identify Solutions and Plan for Action

Phase 6 - Implement and Reflect

To ensure culturally responsive inquiry, help students identify and choose issues, and incorporate inquiry topics that reflect the histories, values, and perspectives of diverse cultures. Encouraging students to explore issues relevant to their own and others' cultural backgrounds and promoting questions that challenge implicit bias will foster a deeper understanding and celebration of cultural identity and the civic intersections.

Along with the guidance and information provided here, teachers will find instructional resources and frameworks to support implementation of these phases in the Civic Action Project [Resources for Teachers](#) section.

The Civic Action Project Phases:

Phase 1: Reinforce a Supportive Community

Students engage in meaningful discussions to establish classroom norms, agreements, and ways of working together. This can also be in the form of a class constitution so that students have the experience of creating and amending a constitution much like the country's *Constitution*. This supportive culture is essential as students will be exploring issues that they are passionate about and may have personal or emotional connections to. The teacher facilitates the creation of a safe, inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and students feel comfortable sharing their experiences and ideas.

Phase 2: Develop Questions & Plan Inquiry

Students identify topics of interest for their inquiry projects. The teacher provides guidance on generating compelling questions that drive the inquiry process. Students plan their research by identifying key subtopics, determining what information they need, and strategizing how they will gather it. The level of student autonomy in topic selection and inquiry planning depends on factors such as available time, student and teacher experience with inquiry, and curricular requirements. Refer to the [Project Topic Selection and Curricular Integration](#) section.

Phase 3: Conduct Research

In this key phase, students engage in extensive research to deepen their understanding of the issue. They investigate the historical, social, economic, and political factors contributing to the problem and seek out perspectives from those most impacted by it. Students use a variety of credible sources, such as academic articles, government reports, news media, and interviews with experts or community members. Throughout the research process, students participate in dialogic and deliberative activities to process, synthesize, and make meaning of the information they collect.

Phase 4: Analyze & Draw Conclusions

Students analyze the information gathered during their research to identify patterns, trends, and key insights. They evaluate the credibility and relevance of their sources and draw evidence-based conclusions about the nature of the problem and potential solutions. Students communicate their findings and conclusions through authentic assessments such as reflective essays, argumentative papers, deliberations, or presentations. These products should demonstrate students' growth in knowledge, critical thinking, and civic engagement. Students reflect on their personal learning journey and the implications of their findings for themselves and their community. After reflecting on their conclusions and solutions, students identify their action(s).

Phase 5: Identify Solutions and Plan for Action

Based on their research and analysis, students develop a plan of action to address the issue. They consider various strategies, such as raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, or collaborating with community organizations. Students assess the feasibility and potential impact of each approach and determine the most effective course of action. The teacher provides guidance on action planning and supports students in identifying resources and community partners. While taking action is encouraged, it may extend beyond the scope of the academic project. The focus is on developing a well-informed, realistic action plan. For project completion purposes, it is recommended that teachers assign completion grades for identifying and developing a plan of action. Teachers should encourage students to take the action and support the action, but the impact or outcome should not influence their grade.

Phase 6: Implement and Reflect

In the culminating phase, students implement their action plan to the extent possible within the project timeline. This may involve creating informational materials, delivering presentations to stakeholders, leading community service, or engaging in acts of civic participation such as petitions or peaceful demonstrations. Throughout the implementation process, students reflect on challenges, successes, and personal growth. The project concludes with a celebration and reflection event where students share their experiences, key learnings, and the impact of their actions. This event may involve the class, school community, or wider public, depending on students' preferences and the nature of their projects. The teacher facilitates a reflective discussion on how the project has influenced students' civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and sense of empowerment.

Scaffolding Inquiry from Kindergarten to High School

The previous section outlined the key phases of civic action projects, from establishing a supportive classroom community to implementing solutions and reflecting on learning. Within this project framework, teachers have flexibility in how much guidance and structure they provide, depending on students' age, experience with inquiry, and readiness. This section will explore three main approaches to inquiry - structured, guided, and open - and how they can be applied within the civic action project phases in order to meet students' needs.

In a **structured inquiry**, the teacher provides direction throughout the process, determining initial questions, curating resources, and designing learning activities and assessments. **Guided inquiry** involves more of a partnership, with the teacher co-developing parameters and giving students increasing choice in their specific questions, information sources, and final products. **Open inquiry** represents the most student-directed approach, with learners taking the lead in all aspects of the project, from initial questioning to researching to designing solutions, with the teacher serving as a facilitator. (Refer again to Figure 4: Types of Student Inquiry).

Determining the appropriate level of inquiry depends on factors like students' prior experience with project-based learning, their skills in research and critical thinking, the complexity of the topic, and the time available. In many cases, teachers may utilize a combination or progression of approaches, providing more structure at the beginning and gradually releasing responsibility as students gain competence and confidence. In all cases, students should be leading, deciding, and collaborating, and teachers' instruction and facilitation goals and decisions should always aspire to student autonomy and agency.

The descriptions in this section illustrate how structured, guided, and open inquiry can be implemented within the phases of a civic action project, providing options for tailoring the process to your students' needs. (Please also refer to [Part 3, Types of Inquiry](#) for more information and resources).

Table 5: Types of Inquiry in Civic Action Projects, Grades K-12

Structured Inquiry	Taking Informed Action Projects only	Most suitable for early grades, and for students with little to no experience in inquiry or project-based learning.
Guided Inquiry	Taking Informed Action Projects only	A combination of structured and open where teachers and students are co-designers and partners in inquiry. A helpful approach when the issue focus is complex, or if time is limited.
Open Inquiry	Civics Capstone Projects & Taking Informed Action Projects	Students design and lead the project independently. The student-led Civics Capstone Project required for graduation should follow this method.

Structured Inquiry in Civic Action Projects:

In a structured inquiry, civic action project learning experiences are more structured and curated by the teacher. Here's how *structured inquiry* could unfold in a civic action project:

Reinforce a Supportive Community The teacher facilitates discussions on classroom norms and agreements. They focus on creating a safe space for discussing potentially sensitive issues.

Develop Questions & Plan Inquiry The teacher provides compelling questions related to a civic issue meaningful to students that will drive the inquiry, students select one topic or are broken into groups based on the topic they choose.

Conduct Research The teacher provides a curated set of sources (articles, videos, data sets, etc.) for students to examine and build their content knowledge.

Analyze & Draw Conclusions Students work in groups to read, analyze and discuss the curated sources. The teacher designs structured activities and protocols to guide students through the analysis of the provided sources. This may include graphic organizers, document analysis templates, or discussion protocols that help students extract relevant information and evidence.

Identify Solutions and Plan for Action Based on their analysis, students explore potential solutions or action plans, provided by the teacher, to address the civic issue or problem, and discuss the benefits and challenges to all. The teacher may provide a limited set of options or criteria for students to consider. For example, the teacher determines a specific action or product that students will create to share their findings and proposed solutions. This could be a presentation, a letter to a local official, or a community awareness campaign.

Implement and Reflect While the teacher develops the structure for a final action that is authentic, it allows for students' decisions and learning to be elevated. For example, a teacher might invite a stakeholder or leader that has power to make a change, like a principal or elected official, to the class to hear student proposals and discuss options for change. Students reflect on their learning experience, the impact of their action, and the civic skills they developed throughout the structured inquiry process.

The Structured Inquiry option is helpful as a starting point for students who are new to inquiry and/or project-based learning. The significant teacher guidance ensures all students can successfully engage in the process. This approach can be particularly useful for introducing students to inquiry-based learning or when working within tighter time constraints.

By providing both guided inquiry and structured inquiry options, teachers can tailor the level of support and autonomy based on their students' needs, grade level, and the complexity of the civic issue being explored.

Guided Inquiry in Civic Action Projects

In a guided inquiry approach, students take on more responsibility in driving the investigation, while still receiving strategic guidance and support from the teacher. Here's how *guided inquiry* could unfold in a civic action project:

- Reinforce a Supportive Community** The teacher and students collaboratively discuss and establish classroom norms and agreements with an emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive environment for exploring issues.
- Develop Questions & Plan Inquiry** Students work collaboratively to generate their own supporting questions that will guide their inquiry into the larger issue. These questions should help them understand different facets and perspectives related to the compelling question. The teacher and students might co-generate issue(s) to explore, but students lead their own investigation with the teacher's support as co-learner.
- Conduct Research** With the teacher's guidance, students identify relevant sources and information to investigate the supporting questions. This may involve examining documents, conducting surveys or interviews, analyzing data, or consulting with community experts and stakeholders. Teachers also support by bringing in resources, suggesting speakers, or taking the time to structure discussions or reading when they see students need additional support or guidance.
- Analyze & Draw Conclusions** Students share their research findings within small groups or as a class. The teacher facilitates discussions, provides feedback, and offers strategies to help students analyze the information from multiple angles. The teacher might provide coaching or advice as needed, or help students collaborate better by providing structured small group activities or reflection that help them to improve how they are working together.
- Identify Solutions and Plan for Action** Drawing from their analysis, students propose potential solutions or action plans to address the civic issue or problem. The teacher provides frameworks and criteria to help students evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of their proposed solutions.
- Implement and Reflect** Students implement their action plan, which could involve organizing awareness campaigns, advocating for policy changes, or initiating community projects. The teacher supports students in their action, reflecting on their experiences, assessing the outcomes, and considering next steps.

Guided inquiry builds on the foundation of structured inquiry but provides more opportunities for student autonomy and decision-making. It is well-suited for developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills and helping them see themselves as capable civic actors. The teacher's role shifts to being more of a co-learner and coach, providing guidance and feedback as students drive their own learning. Guided inquiry prepares students for the more independent civic action projects.

This method would be helpful in developing students' project skills in the first semester of the 8th grade and high school civics courses, leading up to a Civics Capstone Project in the second semester, as it is useful for developing students' research and problem-solving skills while still supporting student autonomy.

Open Inquiry in Civic Action Projects

Open inquiry is an approach that empowers students to take the lead in identifying, investigating, and addressing civic issues that matter to them. In an open inquiry civic action project, students have the autonomy to formulate their own compelling questions, design their research methods, and determine the course of action they will take to create positive change. Here's how *open inquiry* could unfold in a civic action project:

Reinforce a Supportive & Collaborative Community

Students take the lead in discussing and establishing classroom norms and agreements. There is a strong emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive space for exploring personally meaningful issues.

Develop Questions & Plan Inquiry

Students take ownership of their learning by conducting independent research and investigations. They identify relevant sources, collect data through surveys, interviews, or observations, and analyze their findings to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

Conduct Research

With the teacher's guidance, students identify relevant sources and information to investigate the supporting questions. This may involve examining documents, conducting surveys or interviews, analyzing data, or consulting with community experts and stakeholders. Teachers also support by bringing in resources, suggesting speakers, or taking the time to structure discussions or reading when they see students need additional support or guidance.

Analyze & Draw Conclusions

Students work in teams or as a class to share their research findings, engage in discussions, and collectively analyze the data they have gathered. This collaborative process allows them to explore different perspectives and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Identify Solutions and Plan for Action

Based on their research and analysis, students design potential solutions or action plans to address the identified issue. They consider various strategies, evaluate their feasibility, and determine the most effective course of action.

Implement and Reflect

Students implement their action plan, which may involve organizing awareness campaigns, advocating for policy changes, or initiating community projects. Throughout the process, they reflect on their experiences, evaluate the impact of their actions, and make adjustments as needed.

Open inquiry is particularly well-suited for the Civics Capstone Project, as it aligns with the goal of fostering self-directed civic engagement and preparing students for active citizenship. By allowing students to take the lead in identifying and addressing real-world issues, the Civics Capstone Project empowers them to develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration.

However, it's important to note that open inquiry should not be limited to the Civics Capstone Project or high school students alone. Students at all grade levels can benefit from opportunities for self-directed learning and inquiry, provided they receive appropriate scaffolding and support from their teachers.

In the early grades, teachers can introduce open and structured inquiry projects that gradually release responsibility to students. As students progress through the school year and grade levels, they will take on more autonomy in selecting topics, designing investigations, and implementing solutions.

By incorporating open inquiry across grade levels, educators can cultivate a culture of curiosity, inquiry, and civic engagement from an early age. This approach not only prepares students for the Civics Capstone Project but also equips them with the skills and dispositions necessary for lifelong civic participation and responsible citizenship.

Resources:

- [YPP Action Frame](#) and [the Ten Questions](#) offer support throughout the inquiry process.
- Learn more about types of inquiry to action in social studies, with curriculum examples at [C3 Teachers](#).
- [Bringing Inquiry-Based Learning Into Your Class](#) is a four-step approach to using a powerful model that increases student agency in learning. By Trevor MacKenzie.

Strengthening Projects through the Civic Learning Practices - Key Elements of Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Project Design

Designing civic action projects that are culturally responsive and inclusive is essential for engaging all students and fostering a sense of belonging. By intentionally integrating key Civic Learning Practices into the inquiry process, teachers can create projects that elevate student voice, explore complex issues from diverse perspectives, and connect learning to students' lived experiences and communities.

Four practices are particularly critical for ensuring projects are culturally responsive and inclusive:

- Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture ([Core Practice #2](#))
- Explore Complexity ([Supporting Practice #1](#))
- Engage in Dialogue and Deliberation ([Supporting Practice #2](#))
- Participate through Community-Connected Learning ([Supporting Practice #3](#))

By thoughtfully incorporating these practices, teachers can design civic action projects that not only develop students' civic knowledge and skills but also affirm their identities, build inclusive learning environments, and prepare them to be active, empathetic citizens in our diverse

democracy.

Nurture Voice and Inclusive Culture (CP2) in Civic Action Projects:

Integrating student voice and choice is a natural fit with an inquiry-driven approach to civic action projects. By inviting students to pursue projects that are meaningful to them, whether the topic is selected by students themselves or the teacher, educators foster a sense of agency and ownership over learning. This increases motivation and engagement while also strengthening students' decision-making skills as they make informed choices about their learning paths and group project management.

In a civic action project, student voice and choice can take many forms beyond just choosing their own topics:

- Choice: Providing students options to demonstrate their knowledge, learning, and growth
- Voice: Providing space for students to express their thoughts, feelings, values, and beliefs about the issue being explored or the project facilitation in the classroom
- Both Voice and Choice: Identifying solutions to issues, choosing the audience that needs to hear their perspective, and voicing their views to decision-makers

By centering student voice and choice, teachers inherently invite a broader range of perspectives and experiences into the learning process. Students feel valued and are more likely to share their unique viewpoints, reflecting on how hearing other perspectives shapes their own understanding. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also positions the teacher as a co-learner throughout the process.

Reflective and metacognitive practices are essential components of student voice and choice. Throughout a project, students should have ample opportunities to reflect on their own thinking and learning processes, promoting self-awareness and the ability to evaluate and adapt their strategies. This is crucial for their development as autonomous, lifelong learners.

Teachers can integrate reflection into the daily learning process, encouraging students to regularly consider and analyze their thinking. This helps students feel their own progress in real-time and models the importance of being open to changing one's mind or strategy. Reflection should occur individually, in groups, and as a whole class to build an inclusive learning community.

To ensure a culturally responsive focus, educators should foster reflective practices that encourage students to explore their own cultural identities and biases in relation to the issue they are investigating. By acknowledging that ways of knowing and learning can be influenced by

culture and building in opportunities for students to share their own and their families' ways of learning, teachers create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Through participating in reflective and metacognitive routines throughout a project, students improve self-awareness of their learning processes, strengths, and areas for growth. They also cultivate a habit of reflection that encourages lifelong learning and adaptability while strengthening their ability to set goals and adapt strategies as needed.

Resources:

- [Driving Engagement Through Voice and Choice](#) includes ideas on how to bring personalized learning into your classroom. By Emelina Minero.
- [Elevating Student Voice in Education](#) is a report that outlines strategies to increase authentic student voice in education at the school, district, and state levels.
- [How to Foster Metacognitive Skills for Independent Learning](#) by Edutopia provides suggested foundational practices for all classrooms.
- [Project Zero's Thinking Routine Toolbox](#) highlights a variety of thinking routines - a set of questions or a brief sequence of steps used to scaffold and support student thinking.

Important note on trauma-informed instruction:

When facilitating civic action projects, it is essential for teachers to be trauma-informed and responsive to the diverse experiences and needs of their students. Engaging in projects that address real-world issues may surface or exacerbate trauma for some students, as these topics can be deeply personal and emotionally charged. Teachers should prioritize creating a safe, supportive classroom environment where students feel validated and empowered. This includes being mindful of potential triggers, providing opportunities for student choice and voice, and offering differentiated support based on individual needs. Educators should also be prepared to connect students with additional resources or co-plan from the start with school counselors, special educators, or community mental health services, when needs are known in advance through a student's IEP, 504, or MTSS data. By adopting a trauma-informed lens and proactively implementing trauma-responsive practices, teachers can ensure that civic action projects are a meaningful, inclusive, and empowering experience for all learners.

Resources:

- The Rhode Island Department of Education has recently published [Trauma-Informed Schools Implementation Plan and Supporting Material](#) and [Rhode Island Trauma-Informed Schools Final Report: An Addendum to the Implementation Plan and Supporting Materials](#). See the first part of the Implementation Plan to better understand trauma and its impact and the role of schools.
- The U.S. Department of Education released a collection of resources on [Trauma-Informed Care](#).
- The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has a [Trauma-Informed Teacher Tip Guide](#) and other related materials.
- Edutopia has a short article on [The How and Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching](#).

Explore Complexity in Civic Action Projects (SP1):

Taking an analytical and systems-focused approach encourages students to examine civic issues from multiple angles, consider root causes and systemic factors, and grapple with the nuances and complexities of real-world challenges. This practice helps students develop critical thinking skills and avoid oversimplifications or single narratives.

Analytical & Systems-Focused Thinking

In analytical, systems-focused thinking, students engage with real-world problems by looking beyond the readily apparent symptoms to investigate the underlying causes and contributing factors. They consider how institutions, policies, social norms, and power structures interact to create and perpetuate inequities. By examining the interconnectedness of political, economic, and social systems, students develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues and the potential levers for change.

Culturally Responsive Focus

Exploring complexity through a culturally responsive lens involves examining how systemic factors impact different cultural groups and communities. Students should be encouraged to consider the historical context of issues, recognizing how past policies and practices have contributed to present-day disparities. By analyzing issues from societal, economic, and political perspectives, students can better understand how systems advantage some groups while disadvantaging others.

Culturally responsive civic education empowers students to identify and challenge systemic inequities, rather than focusing solely on addressing surface-level symptoms. This approach fosters a sense of agency and builds students' confidence in their ability to affect meaningful change. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to explore solutions that target root

causes and work towards dismantling oppressive systems.

Benefits for Student Civic Development

Through systems analysis, students develop a strategic approach to problem-solving that recognizes the complexity of real-world challenges. They learn to think critically about the relationships between different components of a system and how changes in one area may have unintended consequences in another. This holistic perspective prepares students to be effective agents of change, equipped to navigate the intricacies of civic life.

Exploring complexity also cultivates important dispositions such as open-mindedness, perspective-taking, and the ability to engage with ambiguity. By grappling with multiple viewpoints and competing priorities, students develop the skills necessary for productive civic discourse and collaborative problem-solving. They learn to approach issues with nuance and to resist the temptation of simple solutions to complex problems.

Ultimately, by engaging in analytical and systems-focused thinking, students become more informed, discerning, and empathetic civic actors, prepared to tackle the multifaceted challenges facing their communities and the world at large.

By incorporating these tools and techniques, educators can scaffold students' ability to explore the nuances and complexities of civic issues. These resources encourage learners to examine problems through multiple lenses, analyze root causes, consider diverse stakeholder perspectives, and engage in systems thinking - all essential skills for effectively addressing real-world challenges. The variety of visual mapping techniques, discussion protocols, and analytical frameworks accommodates diverse learning skills and promotes a multidimensional approach to understanding and addressing civic issues.

Resources:

Systems Thinking Tools and Frameworks:

1. [Hexagonal Thinking](#) is a method for considering the connections between ideas and finding the nuances in those connections.
2. [Connection Circles](#) is a visual tool for mapping out the interconnections and relationships between different elements of a system or issue. Refer to this [5th grade classroom example](#).
3. The [Iceberg Model](#) helps students examine the events, patterns, underlying structures, and mental models that contribute to a complex problem.
4. [Causal Loop Diagrams](#) allow students to map out the feedback loops and circular causality in a system, seeing how different factors influence each other.
5. [Six Thinking Hats](#): Edward de Bono's framework for looking at decisions from multiple perspectives - factual, emotional, cautious, positive, creative, and big picture.

Root Cause Analysis Techniques:

6. The 5 Why Activity is an easy-to-use root cause analysis tool. Here [is a resource](#) from Vanderbilt University, and refer to this [Before you do the 5 Why's Activity](#): a modified version of a traditional root cause analysis activity.
7. [The Problem Tree activity](#) from WE day has students look at symptoms and root causes.
8. [Affinity Diagrams](#) help students to gather large amounts of data, organize it into groups based on natural relationships, and identify root causes.

Engage in Dialogue and Deliberation During Civic Action Projects (SP2):

Including varied and diverse perspectives throughout the inquiry process is essential for culturally responsive learning. Making space for students to engage in meaningful dialogue and deliberation with one another and with community members allows them to consider different viewpoints, build empathy and understanding, and collaboratively construct knowledge.

Effective, non-partisan civic action projects emphasize the importance of incorporating multiple viewpoints and experiences into learning, enriching students' understanding by exposing them to a wide range of ideas, perspectives, beliefs, and values. This approach ensures a more holistic and inclusive inquiry experience, allowing for richer and more nuanced understanding of the issue at hand.

Seeking out diverse perspectives can take many forms in a civic action project:

- *Qualitative Research Methods*: Students can conduct focus groups, surveys, and interviews to gather information and appreciate the stories of those most proximate to the issue. Teachers or students might invite guest speakers, individuals, and groups that are issue-experts and/or have personal experience and investment in the topic.
- *Dialogue and Deliberation*: Throughout the project, students should regularly participate in structured dialogue and deliberation in small groups or as a whole class. These discussions provide opportunities to share information, formulate new questions, and make meaning of both what they have learned and their own lived experiences.
- *Examining Multiple Sources*: Students should be encouraged to seek out and analyze a variety of sources that present different perspectives on the issue, including news articles, opinion pieces, academic research, and primary sources from diverse authors and communities.
- *Community Engagement*: Collaborating with community members and organizations can expose students to a range of viewpoints and experiences beyond the classroom. This

might involve attending community events, volunteering, participating in local forums, or partnering with advocacy groups working on the issue.

In addition to exposing students to varied perspectives, culturally responsive civic action projects support the development of cross-cultural competence by working to understand, navigate, and respect social, cultural, and political differences. This experience helps students:

- Gain a multifaceted understanding of the issue within cultural contexts
- Develop empathy and intercultural communication skills
- Enhance critical thinking by evaluating and synthesizing diverse information and arguments while working to find solutions for the common good

By intentionally seeking out and engaging with diverse perspectives, students learn to appreciate the complexity of civic issues and the importance of considering multiple viewpoints in the pursuit of equitable solutions. They develop the skills and dispositions necessary for effective civic participation in a pluralistic democracy, including open-mindedness, perspective-taking, and the ability to find common ground across differences.

Ultimately, incorporating dialogue and deliberation with varied and diverse perspectives prepares students to be culturally competent, empathetic, and critically engaged civic actors, equipped to navigate and contribute to an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Resources:

- The University of Kansas offers a free [Community Tool Box](#) with a variety of resources to support methods of community research like [focus groups](#).
- [Better Evaluation](#) offers a wealth of ideas and resources that focus on ways to collect and/or retrieve information.
- [National Issues Forums Institute \(NIFI\) Issue Guides](#) produces issue guides on a wide range of public issues that can serve as a starting point for deliberative discussions. The guides provide a balanced overview of the issue, present three or four approaches to addressing the problem, and include discussion questions.
- [Facing History and Ourselves: Fostering Civil Discourse](#) is a guide that provides strategies and resources to help teachers prepare students to engage in respectful and productive discussions on sensitive topics. It includes tips for creating a reflective classroom community and establishing a safe space for dialogue.

- [Living Room Conversations](#) is an organization that provides a simple model for facilitating structured conversations among people with differing views. Their website includes conversation guides on various topics that teachers could adapt for classroom use.
- [AllSides for Schools](#) is a resource provides tools to help students build skills in news literacy, bias awareness, critical thinking, and civil dialogue. It includes lesson plans and classroom activities centered around current events.
- [Everyday Democracy Resources](#) provides discussion guides, how-to handbooks, and training to help communities organize dialogues on various public issues. While geared toward community settings, many of the resources could be adapted for classroom use.
- The [Teaching Channel: Educating for Democracy Deep Dive](#) video series, a collaboration between Teaching Channel and the Civic Engagement Research Group, explores key themes in civic education, including strategies for facilitating discussions of controversial issues.

Participate through Community Connected Learning in Civic Action Projects (SP3):

Ensuring projects are relevant, authentic, and public within the contexts of students' lived experiences and communities is key to culturally responsive design. When students see their identities, cultures, and community assets reflected in their learning, they are more likely to feel valued, engaged, and empowered to take action.

Deeply Connected to Students' Lived Experience:

To create meaningful learning experiences that resonate with learners, teachers should prioritize understanding their students' backgrounds, interests, and cultures. Here are some strategies to ensure project topics are always relevant to students:

- *Get to know your students:* At the beginning of the school year or semester, gather information about students' hobbies, family backgrounds, cultural traditions, and personal experiences through interest inventories, surveys, or one-on-one conversations. Use this knowledge to inform project topic selection and design.
- *Incorporate student voice and choice:* Involve students in the project topic selection process by encouraging them to propose topics that relate to their interests, experiences, or community issues they care about. Provide a structured framework for students to pitch their ideas, such as a project proposal template or a class brainstorming session.
- *Connect projects to real-world issues:* Select project topics that address authentic, real-world problems or challenges that students can relate to. If using a structured or guided inquiry approach, ask students to identify issues in their lives connected to the concepts

and themes of your inquiry unit. Use those connections to draft action project issues for students to choose from.

- *Leverage community resources:* Reach out to students' family and community members, organizations, or local businesses to share their perspectives. Invite speakers who can share experiences and expertise on topics that resonate with students' backgrounds and interests.
- *Integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies:* Design projects to celebrate and incorporate students' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. Encourage students to explore their family histories, traditions, and heritage during research, such as documenting oral histories.
- *Regularly gather student feedback:* Throughout the project, solicit student feedback on the relevance and engagement of the topic. Use this feedback to make adjustments and ensure the project remains meaningful to students.
- *Offer choice within structure:* Provide students with choices throughout the project. For example, if focusing on a historical event, allow students to explore different aspects based on their interests, such as the impact on various communities or the role of technology.

Making Projects Public and Authentic:

During civic action projects, students engage with real-world problems and audiences, making learning relevant and applicable beyond the classroom. Whenever possible, learning experiences should be genuine rather than simulated, better preparing students to meaningfully participate in society. Some ways to make projects public and authentic include:

- Inviting other teachers or administrators to sit in on class deliberations and share their own experiences or questions on the topic.
- Having students invite community and family members or elected officials to a town-hall where they can share their research and solicit other perspectives.
- Rather than assigning students to write a letter or paper outlining their concerns and solutions, ask them to identify individuals or groups that would benefit from hearing the information or have power to address the issue. Have them determine the best method of communicating the information, such as presenting to a board, requesting a meeting, sending an email, or attending a board meeting.

- Facilitating opportunities for students to engage with and present their work to diverse audiences, including community members. Students' work, opinions, ideas, and experiences are valuable to the community and society. Make youth perspectives public and visible through exhibitions, digital portfolios, or community presentations.

By participating in authentic and public experiences, students draw clear connections from their learning and academic content to their lived experience. They gain experience presenting to authentic audiences, enhancing communication and public speaking skills, and develop a sense of civic responsibility and confidence to contribute to their community and society.

Resources:

- [Youth Participatory Action Research: A Guidebook and Curriculum](#) is designed for high school educators who want to implement a course dedicated to student inquiry and leadership. Includes resources to assist in organizing events, presenting to the public, etc.
- The [National Education Association \(NEA\) - Fundamentals of Organizing Toolkit](#) provides a comprehensive overview of organizing principles, including identifying issues, building leadership, and developing community power. It includes practical tools for organizing campaigns and community support.
- The [Collective Action Toolkit](#) (in [Spanish too](#)) has many activities you can use with students throughout the inquiry process.
- The Center for Innovative Teaching at the University of Indiana provides various examples of [authentic assessments](#) that can be used as both formative and summative assessments during a project.

Types of Civic Action

In their influential article "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" (2024), education scholars Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne outline three visions of citizenship that are often embodied in civic education programs: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen.¹⁷ Each conception suggests different ways that students might take civic action.

The personally responsible citizen focuses on individual acts of responsibility such as volunteering, donating to charity, and obeying laws. The participatory citizen actively takes part in civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels. This might involve organizing a petition drive, speaking at a town hall meeting, or volunteering with a community organization to solve a problem. The justice-oriented citizen critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes and seek out and address areas of injustice.

Importantly, these three categories are not mutually exclusive, and well-designed civic action projects can incorporate elements of all of them. The key is being intentional about the vision of citizenship educators wish to advance and ensuring students have opportunities to experience a range of civic actions. Some additional examples of civic actions students might take, organized by the "Three Kinds of Citizens" framework, include:

Personally Responsible Citizen:

- Volunteer at a local charity or community organization
- Donate to a cause or fundraiser
- Encourage others to obey laws and be responsible community members

Participatory Citizen:

- Write and distribute a petition on a community issue
- Organize a town hall meeting or community forum
- Create candidate information guides focused on issues identified by students
- Join a coalition with community organizations, other schools, or groups within a school

Justice-Oriented Citizen:

- Conduct a survey on a social issue and administer it to relevant audiences
- Organize focus groups to gain insights into community perspectives on an issue
- Create videos or podcasts that document untold stories and perspectives
- Make a policy recommendation or write a new policy to address a systemic issue
- Practice engaging and improving online discussions to elevate marginalized voices
- Bring people together for collaborative and recurring community service projects to

¹⁷ Remember the definition of "Citizen" throughout this document refers to anyone who is an active and responsible participant in society. Refer to footnote #1 for more information.

address unmet needs

By engaging in a range of civic actions that span the "Three Kinds of Citizens," students can develop their sense of agency, civic identity, and commitment to the common good. Educators play a vital role in equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective civic actors and creating scaffolded opportunities for them to take action as personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizens.

In addition to using the "Three Kinds of Citizen" to help students identify types of action, refer to The Civic Engagement Research Group (CERG) [Core Practices of Participatory Politics](#): This framework outlines key practices for youth civic engagement, including investigation and research, dialogue and feedback, production and circulation, and mobilization for change. It could help guide the design of student-led civic action projects.

The "Core Practices of Participatory Politics" framework categorizes types of civic actions into four main buckets or practices:

- *Investigation and Research*: This involves actively seeking out, gathering, and analyzing information about issues of public concern from a variety of sources. Examples include conducting surveys, forming observation committees, organizing focus groups, and identifying pertinent documents to collect and analyze.
- *Dialogue and Feedback*: This practice involves voicing one's own perspectives and engaging in dialogues on issues of public concern. Examples include inviting issue experts for discussions, practicing engaging in online discussions, and making policy recommendations.
- *Production and Circulation*: This practice involves producing and sharing new information to introduce different perspectives and gain traction for change. Examples include developing media campaigns, creating candidate information guides, and creating videos or podcasts that document untold stories.
- *Mobilizing for Change*: The ultimate goal of participatory politics, this practice involves persuading and recruiting others to take action. Examples include building collaborative relationships with stakeholders, writing and distributing petitions, organizing town hall meetings, and building coalitions with community organizations.

When students consider actions from the lens of this framework, they consider actions that range from learning about issues (Investigation and Research), discussing issues and potential solutions (Dialogue and Feedback), raising awareness (Production and Circulation), to directly pushing for change (Mobilizing for Change). This framework provides a useful way to think about the different types of civic actions students can take in their projects.

Project Implementation Suggestions

Classroom Project Size

In guiding students through civic action projects, teachers can choose to implement individual, small group, or whole class projects, each offering unique learning opportunities and challenges. There are various factors that will impact how teachers and schools decide to facilitate student-led projects. The key is to align the project's scale with educational goals, time and capacity, available resources, and student assets and needs. These factors might include class size, time of year, or course content considerations. Guiding students through civic action projects of varying sizes requires distinct approaches and considerations. Here are some guidelines and suggestions for each:

Small Group Projects:

Small group projects (3-6 students) encourage collaboration, division of labor, and development of teamwork skills. They also allow students to tackle more complex issues by combining diverse skills and perspectives. If teachers have large or multiple sections of classes, small group or whole class projects are recommended. Suggested strategies include:

- Spend time offering collaboration options and suggested division of tasks. Teachers can help in forming groups based on complementary skills and interests and offer coaching in effective teamwork and communication.
- Help groups define clear roles for each member, ensuring a balanced distribution of tasks and accountability.
- Help them establish clear norms and agreements as a team, so as to build a stronger community and address any disagreements productively.
- Introduce digital tools for their collaboration and communication, such as shared online documents, project management software, or communication platforms. Encourage students to create check-ins and establish deadlines together.
- Offer resources and tools specific to each student's project focus, such as specialized research materials or contacts with subject matter experts.
- Allow students to adjust their project's scope based on progress and challenges encountered, ensuring the project remains manageable.

Whole Class Projects:

Whole class projects encourage consensus building and can have a significant impact. They encourage skills of coordination, teamwork, large-scale planning, and often address broader school or community issues. Whole class projects also offer opportunities to distribute

leadership and establish cooperative learning structures that afford deeper learning into more complex topics. Whole class projects will take more structured planning for students to work across sub-teams. Suggested strategies include:

- Focus on a unifying issue that can encompass various root causes. Students can then be divided into sub-teams, each handling different aspects of the project.
- Have each sub-group complete the same project stage (e.g. research, solution design), and establish whole class deliberations where groups share their findings, and as a class they work towards mutual understanding and shared decision-making, ensuring cohesion and communication.
- Assign a group responsible for community engagement – students that identify and recruit community members, experts, and elected officials that have insight to offer, and organize class panel discussions offering a broader perspective and deeper learning.
- Appoint student leaders (or teachers take on the role themselves) to coordinate activities across different sub-groups.
- Leverage relationships with community organizations or experts to provide support, resources, or mentorship for large-scale projects.

Individual Projects:

Individual projects allow students to explore issues they are personally passionate about. They foster independence, personal accountability, and can be tailored to individual student strengths and interests. Students will need individualized support from the teacher to ensure the project scope is manageable for one person. There are parameters that can help ensure all students get the individualized support and guidance they will need for a meaningful project experience while still finding opportunities to collaborate with peers. Some strategies include:

- Group students by topic or issue and arrange weekly check-in meetings so students can come together to share research findings, project plans, and get feedback.
- Create a visible timeline for the students to keep track of their efforts and build in whole-class sharing and reflection so individual projects are still getting collaborative support.
- Set regular meetings with individual students to monitor progress, provide feedback, and address challenges.
- Offer resources and tools specific to each student's project focus, such as specialized research materials or contacts with subject matter experts.

- Allow students to adjust their project's scope based on progress and challenges encountered, ensuring the project remains manageable.

Additional Recommendations for Teachers:

- *Be Responsive and Flexible to Scale:* Help students understand how to scale their projects. An individual project can start small and potentially grow into a group or class project. Or conversely, you might need to help students understand some constraints that might impact their solution design such as funds, time, or other barriers.
- *Be Tuned In To Skills Development:* Each project size offers different learning opportunities. Individual projects can foster independence and self-reliance, small group projects can enhance teamwork and communication skills, and whole class projects can teach students about large-scale project management and community engagement.
- *Differentiate and Personalize Assessment:* Tailor assessment methods to the project size. Individual projects can have more personalized feedback, while group and class projects may require assessment of both the group's output and individual contributions.
- *Support Community Involvement:* Especially for larger projects, help students in reaching out to and involving community members or organizations.

Project Topic Selection and Curricular Integration

With any project, it is very important that the issue is relevant to students' lived experience, and that the learning extends and deepens course standards as outlined in the *Rhode Island Social Studies Standards* and learning objectives. Project topics might be selected by the teacher or by students, depending on the length of time available and students' experience in inquiry-driven learning. Regardless, all topics for projects should be selected with the goal of ensuring it is an issue relevant to the students and/or their community and family, that students engage in meaningful investigation of the issue, consider diverse perspectives, and have opportunity to take action. As noted earlier in this document, teachers and students should be working toward gaining experience for open inquiry and student-selected topics. Topics for the Civics Capstone Projects should be student selected.

Student-generated and selected topics:

Supporting student-generated and selected issue topics for projects can be done in small or large groups. Educators can facilitate brainstorming sessions that encourage students to identify issues they are passionate about, drawing from personal interests, current events, or community needs. Providing students with tools and frameworks for issue selection, such as criteria for feasibility, relevance, and scope, can help them refine their choices into viable project topics. Below are two examples of what this process might look like:

Identifying an issue activity: Brainstorming Issues

Students gather in groups and brainstorm a list of issues in three columns: issues they are personally invested in; issues they have observed in their school or community; issues today that are connected to a unit theme, topic, or compelling question previously studied.

Students write their brainstormed lists on the board, adding a checkmark to any issues that are repeated. Then check if there are any standouts that the class might collectively want to pursue, or establish different groups if there are more than one common issue. The teacher structures activities like the [Question Formulation Technique](#) to help them narrow the topic further. To close the activity, students lobby for their preferred topics, and present arguments to the classmates before everyone votes for their preferred topic.

The most voted topic is selected as the class inquiry project. Or, teachers can have students take part in a [consensus-building activity](#) for the final selection of their issue. Consensus-building is an important civic skill that students need to learn to engage in their community with others who may have different perspectives.

Identifying an issue: Community Survey to Issue Selection

Students conduct a survey or engage in community interviews in their school or local community to identify issues that matter to the people living there. They then review the data and use similar strategies to the ones outlined above to select the final issue.

Choice within Structure - Teacher-generated and selected topics:

Choose a topic from classroom content or themes. No matter the grade level, this can be done by leveraging social studies compelling questions from units of study to provide a solid foundation for unit, semester, or year-long civic action projects. Compelling questions stimulate critical thinking and help students connect their projects to other social studies disciplines such as history, geography, economics, or sociology. Compelling questions can spark interest, help students identify or connect to issues they care about, and deepen understanding of issue complexity. As with any civic action project, students should ultimately choose the final topic. Teachers can present multiple options for students to choose from, or start with one topic, and narrow it together so that students are deeply engaged in and understand the relevance of the topic to their lives and future.

The compelling questions provided in the [Rhode Island Social Studies Standards](#) open up avenues for deep exploration and civic action. Here are examples of how students might extend their social studies learning through civic action projects related to these questions, using the Core Practices of Participatory Politics.

Grade 8 Compelling Question Examples:

Inquiry Topic 1: *How do you know you have rights?*

Students' Rights Project: Students research, analyze, and deliberate their rights by reading the school or district code of conduct and any other communication about rights and responsibilities. Students might also interview peers and teachers to understand the degree in which the community knows their rights. Using this information, students decide what might be needed, either an awareness campaign or they find some amendments to student rights that are needed. Then students decide an appropriate action, whether it be to *inform, join others, or change policy.*

Advocating for Rights Panel: As a “mobilizing change” by *creating awareness* action, students invite guest speakers to participate in a panel for the community to educate them on the most effective and sustaining ways to advocate for and uphold their rights.

Inquiry Topic 6: *Why should individuals participate in government?*

Electoral Process and Voter Registration Drives: After doing research to better understand voter turnout rates in their community and the reasons why members either vote or don't vote, students work to increase turnout through voter registration drives, and strengthen the electoral process in their community by organizing town hall discussions or debates on topics and issues they care about and invite elected officials.

Local Government Engagement Projects: After students attend city council meetings or interview local officials about their roles, students decide to create awareness by educating community members on ways they can participate to improve representation and local government responsiveness.

Inquiry Topic 7: *Does a free press support a democratic government?*

Student-Run Local News Audit: Students evaluate local school or community newspapers, blogs, or podcasts to understand how well informed the community is on issues they care about, exploring firsthand the role of the press in democracy and how it affects their community. Then they use what they have learned to advocate for more relevant and responsive media coverage directly to their media outlets.

Media Literacy Workshops: Once they better understand their local media landscape, students decide appropriate actions to address the issues or needs uncovered through the research. For example, they might find community members do not know how to identify reliable information on the internet, so they decide to conduct adult workshops on news credibility and sourcing. After learning how to critically evaluate news sources, students run their own

workshops for adults, strengthening their understanding of the importance of a free press in maintaining an informed electorate.

High School Civics Compelling Question Examples:

Inquiry Topic #1: *What does it mean to be a citizen?*

Citizenship Investigation: Students conduct surveys and interviews with young people and adults to find out what the average person knows or understands about the role of the citizen in their community and how to make change. Then they use that information to design actions to increase understanding and participation of the community on rights and responsibilities of citizens, including discussions on civic duties, voting, and service.

Citizenship Stories Project: After their inquiry unit on the compelling question and interviewing family members, students conclude that their community has many powerful stories and perspectives about citizenship and what it means to participate in civic society but is largely unaware or disconnected from local civic action. To generate awareness and positive civic connections, students interview varied members of their community to compile stories into a book or presentation that explores the meaning of citizenship. Interviews should include a diverse representation to show the varied perspectives of the community. Aspen Institute's [WEASK program](#) is a good example.

Inquiry Topic 3: *Did the Bill of Rights "fix" the Constitution?*

Rights in Action Campaign: Students choose a right from the *Bill of Rights*, research its impact on society, and interview young people and adults in their community to assess their degree of understanding and their perspective. Then, to organize their community, students create a campaign to educate their peers and community about its importance and ways those rights might be threatened, then invite them to a community meeting to discuss the issues and collect suggested actions for improving.

Inquiry Topic 5: *Is partisanship inevitable?*

Bipartisan Project Teams: A class participates in student-selected project topics, and the teacher asks student teams to consider party perspectives on their issue and include bipartisan cooperation as part of their solution design, reflecting on the challenges and benefits of working across party lines. From there students decide appropriate actions to build bridges across party divides in their community through dialogue.

Partisanship and Policy Tracking Project: Students choose one or more policies to track at the local or federal level – listen to deliberations, and track votes along party lines. Students then decide how to educate the community on how partisanship might currently affect policy making and include strategies for calling for bipartisanship and dialogue.

Scope and Timeline Suggestions

When implementing civic action projects in the classroom, teachers need to consider the project's scope and the timeline for implementation. The duration of these projects can vary, typically organized as a unit of study, over a semester, or throughout a full school year. Each timeline has its considerations and structures:

- Unit Projects (3-6 weeks): Example - A short-term recycling program or social issue awareness campaign.
- Semester Projects (2-6 months): Example - A semester-long investigation into a local issue that includes policy analysis and action.
- Full-Year Projects (Academic Year): Example - A year-long investigation into a complex local issue that includes varied root causes and multiple actions.

Unit of Study (3-6 weeks):

These are short-term projects that can be integrated into a specific unit of study. These projects often extend learning within an existing unit of study - for example, exploring contemporary voter rights issues after a unit on women's suffrage.

Considerations:

- Choose a project with at least one clear, achievable action that aligns with the unit's learning objectives. There may be other actions students identify and want to take, however having a clear outcome in mind will help ensure you stay within your established timeline. These actions should always be closely aligned to the levers of change. For example, if students are creating awareness or lobbying for a change in policy, they would need to identify, 1) Who has the power to enact change on the problem, and 2) What is the best way to communicate with them? This might be speaking at a city council meeting, or asking for a meeting if they are accessible, or writing an email or letter – but it should be directed to the person/people that have power to enact change.
- These projects require a more intensive focus over a shorter period, often requiring daily attention. Consider having research ready for students to read, root causes for them to deliberate, and guest speakers lined up so students can get to the complexity of the issue with enough time for solution-design.
- Remember that to give ample time for rigorous student-led research, design, and implementation of action, Civics Capstone Projects should be no shorter than a six-week unit of study.

Final Presentation: Taking final actions within a shorter time frame can be challenging. Regardless of what type of action(s) the students might decide to take, consider requiring students to share their key findings and solutions to key stakeholders they identify. For example: students can make a final presentation to the local school board or a governing committee; present an environmental audit of the school or community with policy recommendations to the principal or city council; create civic responsibility or voting awareness videos designed for target audiences based on previous voter turnout data.

Semester-long Project (2-6 months):

These are more extensive projects that span an entire semester, allowing for deeper exploration and engagement and encourage integration with current course curriculum. These require thorough planning and a clear timeline with milestones that can be interwoven throughout the semester, between or interwoven into other units of study. In order to seamlessly integrate the project with the broader curriculum to reinforce learning outcomes, consider leveraging compelling questions and socio-political issues from your units as a lens to explore and discuss the project-issues:

- **Project Kickoff:** Begin the semester by introducing the project. Explain its goals, relevance to the curriculum, and expected outcomes. Engage students in brainstorming potential topics based on their interests and curriculum links.
- **Reinforce learning through curricular integration:** Identify compelling questions or socio-political issues in your existing units of study that align with the project. For example, if one of your units covers economic systems, students could examine local economic inequalities as their project topic.
- **Dedicate time to teaching research methodologies.** Students should learn how to gather, analyze, and synthesize information relevant to their project. Focus specifically on action-research methods like surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
- **Schedule regular sessions to monitor progress.** These can be individual or group meetings where students discuss challenges, successes, and next steps.
- **Break down the project into manageable tasks with clear deadlines.** Milestones could include completing research, developing a project plan, implementing a part of the project, and preparing a presentation.
- **Schedule time throughout the semester for connecting with the community** through field trips, guest speakers, community hearings, or panel discussions. Encourage students to connect with local organizations, experts, or community leaders relevant to their project.

- Model reflection and adapt as a class: Incorporate reflective exercises for students to consider what they are learning and how they might need to adapt their approach. Reflection journals or group discussions can facilitate this process.

Final Presentation: Towards the end of the semester, organize a showcase where students present their projects. This could be an in-class presentation, a school-wide event, or even a digital showcase on a platform accessible to the school community. One important component could be that students invite key stakeholders that have power to address the issue.

Full School Year Project (Academic Year):

In a full-year project, the emphasis is on sustained engagement, deeper exploration, and the development of a more nuanced understanding of the issue. The extended timeline allows for richer, more impactful learning experiences as students have the time to truly immerse themselves in the project and see the real-world impacts of their work and build connections between their project and other course content. Along with the strategies used for semester-long projects, teachers should consider:

- *A phased approach:* Divide the project into distinct phases – research, solution-design, planning, implementation, evaluation – each with its own set of goals and timelines.
- *Deeper integration with curriculum:* Look for multiple points of integration with various units of study throughout the year. Consider working with colleagues to build coherence across courses. For example, a project on environmental sustainability could be linked to science units on ecology, social studies units on government policy, math units on data analysis, or even an English Language Development course lesson focused on language use by environmental agencies.
- *Continuous learning, reflection, and adaptation:* Since the project spans a full year, there is more room for students to learn from early phases and adapt their approach. Regular reflection sessions can facilitate this learning process.
 - *Progress-monitoring is key:* Implement periodic check-ins and discussion to track progress and help students make necessary adjustments.
 - *Long-term Milestones and Checkpoints:* Establish long-term milestones that align with the school calendar, such as completing initial research by the end of the first quarter, implementing a solution by the end of the second semester, etc.
 - *Portfolio Development:* Help students maintain a portfolio throughout the year, documenting their learning journey, project developments, reflections and learning growth, challenges, and successes.

- *Sustained Community Engagement:* Plan for ongoing interaction with community partners, which could include regular volunteer work, internships, or long-term collaborations with local organizations.
- *Thoughtful political engagement:* Plan ahead by working with local elected officials' teams to connect students to their representatives on the issue(s) and related policy. This can be done in person or virtually. Check if there are any committees or policy hearings on the issue planned that students can attend or view.
- *Cross-year Collaboration:* If possible, involve different year groups in the project. For example, older students could mentor younger ones, or different classes could take on different aspects of the same project. If current students choose a community issue similar to a previous class's project, current students could interview the former students as "community experts" who hold knowledge about the issue.

Final Presentation and Reflection: A year-long project might culminate in a comprehensive presentation or exhibition at the end of the year that is connected to an action. For example, students can organize their own town-hall meeting or committee hearing that includes stakeholders that have power to make change on an issue. The final presentation could also include students participating in a local or state-wide Civics Day event where they share their learning with members of the community and other student groups to celebrate their work together. This final phase should include significant reflection on the entire process, learning outcomes, and the project's impact.

Assessment Strategies

Assessment in civic action projects should be multifaceted, reflecting the complexity and diverse objectives of these investigations, and focus on the process rather than the outcome. Process-focused assessment emphasizes the value of the learning journey and the development of skills over the final product or result of a project. This approach is particularly important in civic action projects, where the goal is to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and engagement among students. Process-focused assessments will include:

- *Continuous Reflection and Self-Assessment:* Rubrics are used for reflection and self-assessment, progress-monitoring along the way. Assessments include reflective practices such as journals and portfolios that encourage students to document their journey, reflections, and any revisions made along the way, focusing on their learning process and project evolution. Include self-assessment throughout the project to encourage students to reflect on their own learning and contributions, focusing on understanding the issue, growth in perspectives, teamwork, and time management. What

is also important here is that these continuous processes will help students make adjustments to their project plan as they learn new information and gain perspective.

- *Peer and Community Engagement:* Integrate peer assessment and community feedback to enrich the learning experience and validate the project's relevance and impact. Celebrate learning growth through peer feedback sessions, promoting constructive criticism and diverse perspectives. Additionally, involve community members or partners in providing feedback on the project along the way, during research or solution-design stages, rather than reserving only for the final presentation. This dual approach fosters a collaborative learning environment and connects the classroom with the broader community.
- *Assessment by the Teacher:* Civic Action Projects provide ample opportunities for teachers to access student work and learning. Research can be assessed for the variety of sources used and media literacy. Writing skills, oral presentation skills, persuasiveness, using evidence to support an argument, teamwork, and research skills can all be assessed through teacher observation and through student artifacts such as writing pieces, presentations, exhibits/posters, journals, etc. Teachers should remember that they are assessing the process and student learning, not whether students followed through on an action or if their action was successful.

Resources:

- [Rhode Island Civic Action Project Rubrics](#) is a tool designed by EngagEd Collective Consultancy for the Rhode Island Department of Education. The tool includes single-point rubrics for Taking Informed Action and Civics Capstone Projects.
- [Action Research Reflection](#) is a resource to support student self-reflection, individual and group, throughout the project (Generation Citizen - may need to request access).
- This [Communicate and Collaborate Rubric](#) is a useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection as it related to their group engagement and for formative assessments (Generation Citizen).
- This [Self-Reflection Rubric](#) is a useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection and for formative assessments (Generation Citizen).
- [Writing Assignment: Persuasive Argument for Our Community Issue](#) is a resource for supporting students in crafting a persuasive argument. Useful as an in-class formative assessment (Generation Citizen).

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- [Project-Based Assessment: Evaluating Student Learning Through Projects](#) is a resource for assessing student projects.
 - [Formative Assessment in Project-Based Learning](#) is an Edutopia article in which a teacher discusses the kinds of data teachers should collect to document student learning, as well as how and when to collect it.
 - [Demonstrating Authentic and Rigorous Learning in PBL](#) is an article that outlines ways to ensure students create relevant artifacts by designing intentional self-assessment opportunities and by having students present to authentic public audiences.
 - [Oakland Unified School District](#) requires all high school seniors to complete a yearlong Graduate Capstone Project where they choose a topic, conduct original research, write a paper, and present their findings orally.
 - The New York State Education Department offers students a [Civic Readiness Capstone project](#) to demonstrate their readiness to make a positive difference in the public life of their communities through the applied combination of civic knowledge, skills and actions, mindset, and experiences. Includes measures that are helpful in assessing projects.

Requirements to Ensure Inclusive, Responsive, and Engaging Projects

Creating a supportive learning environment is an ongoing process that requires attention to the emotional, social, and academic needs of students. By implementing these strategies, teachers can foster a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning and personal growth.

Incorporating responsive, tiered teaching into civic action projects is vital for ensuring that all students feel valued, understood, and supported and that all students have ample opportunities for both academic and social growth. Here are some strategies to achieve this:

The report “Let’s Go There: Race, Ethnicity, and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education” (2018) describes a “Lived Civics” approach to instruction that serves as a foundation for building culturally responsive social studies courses. Consider using the “Lived Civics” framework to ensure civic action projects deeply resonate with students.

1. Students' funds of knowledge, skills, and experiences with the political and civic world that surrounds them are seen as assets in the classroom and fundamental to the learning experience:
 - a. Teachers include student-generated issues and themes that are inclusive of the diverse cultural backgrounds (gender, religion, ability, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, sexual orientation) of the students. This would include both exploring issues that directly impact their communities and seeking out and understanding different perspectives.
2. Students and educators are both experts and learners, each offering unique knowledge, skills, and perspective valuable to the civic co-learning experience:
 - a. Inquiry is the foundation for a co-learning civics project. Depending on the teacher’s and/or students’ skills and comfort levels, the project might be a structured inquiry (teacher selected topic with guided investigation) or student-led inquiry (student selected topics and led investigation). In both cases, both teacher and students work together to learn, share perspectives, and consider the valid lived experiences of students, and how they relate to the issue.
3. Classroom culture and learning signals to students that their personal and community-based knowledge is valuable:
 - a. During projects, teachers clearly communicate that what is most valuable is the exploration and interrogation connected to student knowledge and experience. It is clear to students that this is valuable and has a prioritized role in the learning process. Another way to do this is to invite family and community perspectives to the classroom learning regularly, and make space for critical, reflective questions that interrogate cultural norms or dominant narratives about social issues.

4. Acknowledge, analyze, and affirm the privilege and multiple identities that are brought to the classroom:
 - a. This would include teachers focusing learning on issues that are important to students that they might not have experience with. It also includes teachers actively engaging in ongoing self-reflection to better understand their own perspectives, biases, and how these may impact their teaching – and understand how learning from and with their students shapes their own growth.

Resources:

Here is an additional resource for enriching your civics project instruction through culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy:

- [Critical Practices for Social Justice Education](#) is a resource to support K-12 educators in growing their understanding of social justice principles and integrating them into their practice. Formerly titled [Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education](#), this revised edition is informed by the current social and political landscape and acknowledges the ways educators have been challenged by increased political scrutiny, censorship and debate about what can be taught in schools.

Supporting Multilingual Learners

Teachers and schools should make the necessary modifications and adjustments to ensure every student completes a civic action project. Multilingual Learners (MLLs) are not a homogenous group – they bring distinctively unique strengths, experiences, and cultural and linguistic assets that enrich the learning and community experiences in every classroom. These students also face distinct challenges, and educators must adapt their approaches to ensure MLLs can fully participate in civics projects. This adaptation involves providing tailored support and modifications to accommodate language learning needs, ensuring MLLs can engage meaningfully with project content and contribute valuable perspectives based on their unique backgrounds and experiences:

- *Know Who Your Students Are and What They Bring*: Ensure students know you care about them as individuals, value their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and that you want to understand their learning needs and preferences. Familiarize yourself with their cultural and linguistic strengths. Use WIDA Can Do descriptors to determine the level of scaffolds and supports MLLs need ([grades 6-8](#), [grades 9-12](#)).

- Newcomer MLLs, those who recently moved to the United States from other countries, may have little understanding of U.S.-specific civics topics. They may need either support with learning and exploring these topics, or an opportunity to choose a civics topic not specific to Rhode Island and/or the United States.
- Newcomer MLLs in the upper grades will not have the same culmination of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions as students who have been exposed to civics education in the United States since kindergarten. They will, however, have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they acquired in their countries, and that can be used as an asset to their continued civics education here.
- Keep in mind that some students might be hesitant to interact with government officials due to concerns about their own or their family's immigration status.
- *Provide Language-Sensitive Materials:* Provide project materials in the students' native languages whenever possible. This includes original materials written in their native languages and translated texts, resources, and instructions. Support students in transferring their knowledge and support their English development even when using materials in their native language.
- *Allow Use of Native Language:* Encourage students to conduct research and initial discussions in their native language. This approach ensures they can fully engage with the content. Support students in transferring knowledge gained in their native language into English with language supports.
- *Scaffold Instructions:* Break down instructions into smaller, manageable steps and use clear, simple language. This helps ensure that language barriers do not impede understanding of the project requirements. Provide supports for project materials that are only available in English. Differentiate scaffolds and supports to MLLs' English language proficiency levels - a student at Level 4 does not need the same scaffolds as a student at Level 1. Refer to pages 11-14 of RIDE's [High Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive](#) for more scaffolding practices.
- *Scaffold Participation:* Provide linguistic support during the research process of a project. Offer language scaffolds and supports so that MLLs can participate in group and classroom work and discussions equally.
- *Utilize Visual Aids and Multimedia Resources:* Incorporate visual aids, infographics, and multimedia resources that can make content more accessible to students who are still developing proficiency in the language of instruction.

- *Provide Bilingual Support:* Utilize bilingual aids or peer support systems where students who are proficient in multiple languages can assist their peers in understanding and completing tasks. [Harvard's Project Zero](#) has trilingual English/Spanish/Portuguese resources and thinking routines.
- *Provide more frequent check-ins for civic action projects:* Provide more frequent check-ins especially for MLLs at Levels 1 and 2 and particularly with language-heavy aspects of a civic action project.
- *Use the practices outlined in RIDE's [High Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive](#):* Make academic discourse the center of instruction, promote disciplinary literacy in every content area, provide culturally responsive and sustaining education, and align instruction to the WIDA ELD Standards.

For additional resources on supporting multilingual learners visit the [Rhode Island Department of Education website](#).

Supporting Differently-Abled Students (DAS)

While numerous studies have shown that powerful civic action projects are an important experience for young people, critical to preparing them to be informed and engaged citizens, these benefits are not equitably distributed amongst all students. This is particularly true for students with disabilities who are more likely to be excluded¹⁸. Educators are tasked with creating an inclusive environment that respects and leverages the varied assets each student brings. This commitment involves designing projects that are accessible to students with diverse learning needs, including those with disabilities, ensuring every student can engage in a meaningful way. Differentiation and scaffolding are key to providing the necessary support, allowing for a range of learning skills and abilities.

Supporting students with interactive facilitated planning, organization, time management, and other areas related to executive functioning can better maintain student engagement and rigor than simply shortening the length of a paper or duration of a presentation. Skillful facilitation provides precise scaffolds based on student data that help them truly engage with planning, organization and time management that stretches their growth and does not create a situation of talking at the student which could leave them feeling overwhelmed or less confident in their abilities.

¹⁸ Bueso, Leah (202s). Civic Equity for Students with Disabilities. Teachers College Record, v124 n1 p62-86. Retrieved from [ERIC](#).

Emerging America and the Learning Disabilities Association of America has published a [Disability History and Civics Extension](#) to the [2021 Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#). The extension offers particular approaches to infuse Disability History across the curriculum and to more effectively include students with disabilities.

Here are some specific strategies and examples of accommodations or modifications to better support multilingual learners and differently-abled students in civic action projects:

- *Know Who Your Students Are and What They Bring:* Ensure students know you care about them as individuals, and that you want to understand their learning needs and preferences. Encourage them to seek help when needed and to use strategies that work best for them. Engage families for input and feedback. Understand students' IEPs and 504 plans.
- *Utilize Flexible Grouping:* Create diverse groups that allow students to work with peers who have different strengths and learning skills. This encourages peer learning and support.
- *Offer Choice in Project Topics and Roles:* Offer students choices in selecting project topics and roles within the project. This allows them to engage in areas where they feel most confident and interested.
- *Use Customized Learning Aids:* Use customized learning aids and tools, such as speech-to-text software for students with writing challenges or audio recordings for students with visual impairments or reading disabilities.
- *Provide Individualized Support:* Provide additional one-on-one support or small group instruction for students who need extra help. This could include extra time for assignments, modified tasks, or alternative assessments designed in collaboration with a student's special education teacher(s) and related service providers and in consideration of a student's IEP.
 - Some students may need additional scaffolding for organization, planning, sustained effort and attention, and decision making when working on civic action projects.
 - Some students may require a longer on-ramp, additional scaffolds, and adult facilitation to achieve the requirements of a student-led Capstone experience without diminishing rigor.
- *Provide more frequent check-ins for civic action projects:* Provide more frequent check-ins during the process of a civic action project.

- *Offer Choice in Assessment and Flexible Deadlines:* Offer flexibility in timelines for students who might need more time due to learning differences or other challenges. Allow them choice in the ways in which they show learning outcomes and growth.

Resources for Teachers - Civic Action Projects: Partners, Frameworks, and Toolkits

The following resources and partners have been curated to support project implementation; however, the list is not exhaustive as there are a variety of resources available to support authentic student-led civic action projects. Please note, some resources are free while others are available for purchase, as noted below:

[C3 Inquiry, Action Project](#): This inquiry leads students through an investigation of how they can make an impact on their community. By investigating the compelling question, students examine an issue that is important to them, assess what can be done to help with the issue, plan ways they can take action on their issue, and evaluate potential challenges. By completing this inquiry, students begin to understand ways in which they can be citizens and take informed action in meaningful ways. Free for educators.

[Digital Civics Toolkit](#): The Digital Civics Toolkit is a collection of free resources for educators to support youth to explore, recognize, and take seriously the civic potentials of digital life. The Toolkit explores a range of civic opportunities and dilemmas via five modules focused on: Exploring Community Issues, Investigation, Dialogue, Voice, and Action. Free for educators.

[Democratic Knowledge Project | Harvard](#): A robust website that includes vast free resources to support integrating civics action across the curriculum. Refer to this free [Student-led Civics Project Workbook \(primarily for grade 8\)](#) with resources and this [8th grade teacher example](#). Free for educators.

[Design for Change, USA](#): Design for Change USA is a valuable resource for supporting civic action projects through design thinking, particularly in the elementary and early grades. This organization empowers students and educators to engage in social change projects, providing them with tools and methodologies to address and solve societal problems. Some resources are available through their website. A free account is required to access more.

[Earth Force](#): The Earth Force Process is a research-based model to implement Environmental Action Civics. It provides a framework for project-based teaching and learning that can be readily adapted to any age group or topic area, as well as to a range of timeframes for working with students. It is a series of six steps that, taken in sequence, guide you and your students to a civic action project that meets a real community environmental need, is of interest to your students, aligns with your curricular goals, and is feasible to conduct.

[Emerging America](#): Emerging America has assembled this list of disability advocacy groups that students can use as resources for student-led civics projects that focus on disability rights. Free for educators.

[Generation Citizen](#): Generation Citizen specializes in project-based civics education, equipping and inspiring young people to transform democracy. They provide resources and toolkits for educators to implement real-world civics education in schools. Their programs are designed to empower youth to take action and effect policy change through engagement with local government and community leaders. You can learn more about their programs and how to get involved at the link above.

[iCivics](#): Civics Project Workbooks - iCivics has created student workbooks and supporting teachers' guides to seamlessly integrate civics projects into existing social studies classes. Both iCivics offerings, Civics Projects and Local and State Government will inspire students to understand basic principles of government including its structure, function, and role in their lives. Available for purchase [here](#).

[Local Civics](#): Local Civics offers free webinars on various civic education topics, including civic action projects. They also offer supplemental curricular resources for purchase.

[Mikva Challenge](#): Mikva Challenge focuses on empowering youth to be active, informed citizens who contribute to a just and equitable society. The organization offers various programs and resources that facilitate real-life democratic activities for youth. This can include opportunities for students to engage in civics action, where they learn about and participate in the democratic process. They also offer Action Civics curricula for purchase. To learn more, visit their website at the link above.

[NE Basecamp](#): NE Basecamp, a local nonprofit based in Pawtucket, RI, collaborates with districts to develop a Project-Based Learning (PBL) driven civics course that incorporates a capstone project, partnering students with community organizations to propose real-world solutions. NE Basecamp offers consulting, embedded coaching, and professional learning services to educators, ensuring successful integration of the new Civics curriculum in schools and districts. For more information and pricing options, please visit their [website](#) or email info@nebasecamp.org.

[Project Citizen](#): Project Citizen is a program of the Center for Civic Education. Their curriculum and resources guide students through working through problems in their community and identifying solutions in the form of policy that require government involvement. They offer some free resources in English and Spanish [on their website here](#).

[Supporting Readiness through Vital Civic Empowerment \(SRVCE\)](#): SRVCE is a free online civics curriculum that blends inquiry-based civic learning, media literacy education, and exploration of public service careers to prepare high school students to be active citizens and thrive in the workforce.

[WE Day Virtual Learning Center](#): A [free resource library](#) designed to help teachers build their capacity in the classroom and support their students. With a focus on service-learning, trauma-informed practice and well-being, it includes everything from curriculum and lesson plans to professional development tools.

[Youth Participatory Action Research \(YPAR\) Hub](#): YPAR is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles. This hub features an expansive curriculum and free resources to enrich YPAR projects. The free resources are divided by categories - Getting Started, Investigating a Problem, and Strategizing for Action, and may be useful to use as lessons for the student-led civics project. Free for educators.

[Youth Service Knowledge Center](#): The Youth Service Knowledge Center from Youth Service America offers a number of free resources for all ages including a Semester of Service Toolkit for developing a project. The resources are free, but you must supply your name and email address to receive access. Free for educators.

Other resources local to Rhode Island include:

[Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition](#): The *Coalition* hosts free Civic Learning Week programming every March for teachers, students, and the community.

[Time to Advocate](#): Time to Advocate offers free animated explainer videos and multimedia content on various civic education topics.

Also see “Local civic leaders and organizations” listed under [Supporting Practice #3](#) starting on page 34.

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