

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT in CALIFORNIA

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## Introduction

Many terms refer to the involvement of the public in civic and political life. Defined broadly, *civic engagement* means people connecting with their community and their government. Civic engagement encompasses voting, volunteering as a local Little League coach, attending neighborhood or community-wide meetings, helping to build a community playground, speaking at a city council meeting, joining a city or county clean-up effort, becoming a member of a neighborhood watch group or local commission – and much more.

For the purposes of this paper civic engagement is considered from three perspectives: voting, interaction with government, and non-governmental engagement.

## History

A long-term trend from the mid-1960s onward has involved everyday citizens finding their voice and reshaping how elected officials and public agencies govern. This corresponds with critiques of science and engineering as the sole purview of agency experts, public sector failures to meet social goals, the establishment of myriad non-government organizations, and the development of the internet (and later social media) as a vehicle for expanding and speeding communication. Activists, planners, public administrators, and scholars have characterized branches of this trend in various ways, ranging from participatory action research through citizen science, deliberative democracy, public participation, and more.

Civic engagement is one manifestation of this trend that focuses on the broad involvement of not only representative stakeholders, but people and communities from all walks of life, including those with little or no experience with public policy. It combines values of inclusion, participation, transparency, and local knowledge, with processes and practices that foster dialogue, mutual understanding, creativity, and collective problem-solving while respecting individual autonomy and difference.

The recent Great Recession amplified the importance of civic engagement, given the heightened scrutiny and concern about governance that accompanied the slimming of public agency budgets and dictates to “do more with less.” President Obama’s 2009 Open Government Directive ascribed to civic engagement the highest level of importance. More recently civic engagement has

become part of the 2016 election cycle, with Carly Fiorina’s call for instant e-plebiscites and better presidential use of the public input gathered through smartphones. Speaking broadly, civic engagement has contributed to a renaissance of American democracy and helped to improve and legitimate public policy decision-making throughout the nation.

## **Three Facets of Civic Engagement**

We think about civic engagement as comprising at least three broad categories: voting behavior, engagement with government, and non-governmental interaction. We recognize that there are many different approaches to these concepts, and offer the following descriptions as illustrative, rather than as definitive.

### **I. Voting Behavior**

This aspect of civic engagement gets considerable attention. Voting is, of course, critical to the functioning of representative democracy. Through voting, citizens select the people who will represent them in government. They also engage in direct democracy through ballot initiatives and propositions.

Concerns about voter behavior generally take three forms. A primary concern is low voter turnout, which weakens the voice of citizens heard by elected officials. This, by extension, can weaken the legitimacy of the democratic system itself. The U.S. consistently registers some of the lowest turnout rates among the world’s established democracies. Currently, the U.S. eligible voter turnout (turnout of adult citizens) ranks 31st of 34 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, most of who are highly developed democracies<sup>1</sup>.

Over the past two decades, California voter turnout has steadily declined. California has moved from outperforming U.S. turnout rates to now falling into the bottom twenty percent of all states with regard to turnout. In the November 2014 general election, California achieved a record low statewide turnout for a general election, only 31% of eligible voters turned out in the election. According to the UC Davis California Civic Engagement Project, the turnout of historically underrepresented groups was much lower. Only 17.3% of eligible Latinos and 18.4% of eligible Asian-Americans voted. Our state’s youth were even less represented. Just over 8% of Californians

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<sup>1</sup>Desilver, Drew, “U.S. voter turnout trails most developed countries,” *Pew Research Center* 6, May 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/06/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/>

age 18-24 who are eligible to vote did so, translating to only 285,000 of the nearly 3 and a half million eligible youth voting in the November 2015 general election<sup>2</sup>.

Second, and independent of the overall number of people voting, are concerns that California's electorate is not representative. That is, the demographic makeup of the actual electorate does not accurately represent the underlying population. This can lead to skewed representation in government and, perhaps, policies that don't reflect the interests of the people. In California (and many other states), the voting population tends to be older, wealthier, and whiter than the underlying population. A third concern is that many voters lack the knowledge needed to cast informed votes. Numerous surveys illustrate a significant lack of understanding about basic governmental policies (such as taxation and broad expenditure categories), and about candidates' positions on public policy issues. Without a basic grasp of such information, it is difficult for voters to cast informed, rational votes. This also makes them susceptible to being misled or manipulated by unscrupulous political campaigns.

Improving voter activity can take a variety of forms. Many groups advocate for making the registration and voting processes easier, including same-day registration, relaxed eligibility criteria, or longer voting hours (perhaps extending to multiple days). Reforms such as these must of course be considered alongside concerns with the integrity of the voting system, ensuring that elections are not susceptible to fraud or error. Balancing these different concerns is a key issue in discussions about the state's electoral system.

Other efforts to improve voting outcomes focus on making information available to voters. These include nonpartisan websites with information on candidates and issues, public forums and debates, official voter information from the Secretary of State, regulations and laws requiring disclosures about campaign advertising and funding, and more.

## II. Engagement with Government

Civic engagement involves a number of other ways that residents connect with their government in addition to voting. These include attending or speaking at city council meeting or other public forums, writing or speaking to government officials, engaging a public health officer tabling at a community event, etc. A broad range of methods exists through which members of the public become more informed about and/or influence public decisions. Further differentiation of public

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<sup>2</sup> Romero, Mindy, "California's New Political Realities: The impact of the youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape," Policy Brief Issue 9 and 10, *UC Davis Center for Regional Change*, Jan. 2015.

[http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2\\_of\\_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf](http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf)

<http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/ccep/ucdavisceppolicybrief10>

engagement with government is provided below in order to help officials consider the best approach (or approaches) that might be considered, given the issue, policy or controversy at hand.

### **Public Information/Outreach**<sup>3</sup>

Public Information and outreach is characterized by one-way government communication to residents and other members of the community to inform them about a public problem, issue or policy matter. Examples of public outreach could include: an article on a city, county, or special district website describing the agency's current budget situation; a city mailing to neighborhood residents about a planned housing complex; or a presentation by a county health department to a community group about mental health policies.

### **Public Consultation**

Public consultation generally includes instances when officials ask for the individual views or recommendations of residents about public actions and decisions, and when there is generally little or no discussion to add additional knowledge and insight and promote an exchange of viewpoints.

Examples of public consultation include typical public hearings and council or board comment periods, as well as resident surveys and polls. A public meeting that is mainly focused on asking for information on "raw" individual opinions and recommendations about budget recommendations would fit in this category.

### **Public Participation/Deliberation**

Public participation and deliberation refers to those processes through which participants receive new information on a relevant public issue, and through discussion and deliberation collectively prioritize or agree on ideas and/or recommendations intended to inform the decisions of officials.

Examples of deliberation include community conversations that provide information on the budget and the budget process and ask participants to discuss community priorities, confront real trade-offs, and craft their collective recommendations. Alternatively, it can include the development of a representative group of residents who draw on community input and suggest elements and ideas for a general plan update.

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<sup>3</sup> These examples of engagement are adapted from: Institute for Local Government. *What Is Public Engagement and Why Should I Do It?* Mar 2015. [http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1\\_ilg\\_what\\_is\\_public\\_engagement\\_and\\_why\\_should\\_i\\_do\\_it\\_mar\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1_ilg_what_is_public_engagement_and_why_should_i_do_it_mar_2015.pdf)

### Sustained Public Problem Solving

Sustained public problem solving occurs through the work of place-based committees or task forces, often with multi-sector membership, that address public problems through collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring and/or assessment over an extended period of time.

Examples of sustained public problem solving enhanced via engagement are community benefit agreements among cities, neighborhood groups and developers, ensuring that new residential and commercial construction projects coincide with the needs of existing businesses and residents.

Consortium members believe strongly that policy design and implementation is best realized through the continuing involvement of engaged citizens. When such policy innovation becomes reality, it requires active observation by street-level participants and then communication back to elected and appointed officials. The process is iterative. More and more, this kind of ongoing involvement is what makes public-policy work most successful.

### A Spectrum for Considering Appropriate Engagement

The International Association of Public Practitioners (IAP2) has developed a spectrum of public engagement that is a common reference point for gauging the role of the public in a given decision.



# IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



**Public participation goal**

#### **Inform**

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

#### **Consult**

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

#### **Involve**

To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

#### **Collaborate**

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

#### **Empower**

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

### III. Non-Governmental Interaction

Civic engagement can also involve connections among citizens through non-governmental organizations and activities. Examples include neighborhood organizations, fraternal organizations and clubs, charity activities, churches and other religious institutions, etc. This type of civic engagement is perhaps less robust today than it was in earlier decades. The decline in connectedness within our communities was explored in depth in Robert Putnam's bestselling book, *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), among other sources.

Strong connections among residents and between groups within the society are critical to creating a broad and diverse sense of "community." Engagement of this sort increases awareness of shared interests, fosters empathy, strengthens trust, and otherwise facilitates a healthy civil society.

By definition, government does not have a direct role in connecting residents through non-governmental organizations and activities. However, there are opportunities for the Legislature and other government entities to promote a stronger civil society. For example, public school curriculum can help students to better understand shared interests and to appreciate diversity. Local governments can promote awareness of local nongovernmental organizations, and can provide them with a role in communicating the needs of local residents to decision makers. Government-funded civic institutions, such as parks and libraries, can be supported in their work of bringing residents together.

### IV. Why is Public Engagement Important?

State agencies, departments, cities, counties and special districts throughout California are applying a variety of public engagement strategies and approaches to address issues ranging from land use and budgeting to climate change and public safety. Other common issue areas for civic engagement in California include community policing, health care provision improvement, environmental justice, and local zoning councils. People who conduct and participate in such engagement opportunities report a wide range of benefits that can result from the successful deepening of civic engagement among residents. These include the following potential outcomes.

#### *Better identification of the public's values, ideas and recommendations*<sup>4</sup>.

Elections help identify voter preferences, and communication with individual constituents provide additional information to officials about resident views on various topics. However gaps often remain in understanding the public's views and preferences on proposed public agency actions and decisions. This can especially be the case for residents or populations that tend to participate less frequently or when simple "pro" or "con" views don't help solve the problem at hand. Good

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<sup>4</sup> These tips adapted from: Institute for Local Government. What Is Public Engagement and Why Should I Do It? Mar 2015. [http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1\\_ilg\\_what\\_is\\_public\\_engagement\\_and\\_why\\_should\\_i\\_do\\_it\\_mar\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/1_ilg_what_is_public_engagement_and_why_should_i_do_it_mar_2015.pdf)

public engagement can provide more nuanced and collective views about an issue by a broader spectrum of residents.

#### ***Residents who are better informed about issues and about local agencies***

Most residents do not regularly follow local policy matters carefully. Whereas a relatively small number may do so, most community members are not familiar, for instance, with the ins and outs of a local agency budget and budget process, or knowledgeable about planning for a new general plan, open space use, or affordable housing. Good public engagement can present opportunities for residents to better understand an issue and its impacts and to see local agency challenges as their challenges as well.

#### ***Improved agency decision - making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes***

Members of the public have information about their community's history and needs. They also have a sense of the kind of place where they and their families want to live. They can add new voices and new ideas to enrich thinking and planning on topics that concern them. This kind of knowledge, integrated appropriately into decision making, helps ensure that public decisions are optimal for the community and best fit current conditions and needs.

#### ***Increased community buy-in and support, with less contentiousness***

Public engagement by residents and others can generate more support for the final decisions reached by decision makers. Put simply, participation helps generate ownership. Involved residents who have helped to shape a proposed policy, project or program will better understand the issue itself and the reasons for the decisions that are made. Good communications about the public's involvement in a local decision can increase the support of the broader community as well.

#### ***More frequent civil discussions and decision making***

Earlier, informed and facilitated deliberation by residents will frequently offer a better chance for more civil and reasoned conversations and problem solving than public hearings and other less collaborative opportunities for public input.

#### ***Faster project implementation with less need to revisit again***

Making public decisions is one thing; successfully implementing these decisions is often something else altogether. Increased community buy-in, and the potential for broad agreement on a decision, are important contributors to faster implementation. For instance, a cross section of the community, city, or county may come together to work on a vision or plan that includes a collective sense of what downtown building height limits should be. If this is adopted by the local agency and guides planning and development over time, the issue will be less likely to reoccur repeatedly as an issue for the community and for local officials. In general, good public engagement reduces the need for unnecessary decision-making "do-over."

### *More trust in each other and in government*

Whatever their differences, people who work together on common problems usually have more appreciation of the problem and of each other. Many forms of public engagement provide opportunity to get behind peoples' statements and understand the reasons for what they think and say. This helps enhance understanding and respect among the participants. It also inspires confidence that problems can be solved – which promotes more cooperation over time. Whether called social capital, community building, civic pride or good citizenship, such experiences help build stronger communities, cities and counties—and states.

### *Higher rates of community participation and leadership development*

Engaging the public in new ways offers additional opportunities for people to take part in the civic and political life of their community. This may include community members who have traditionally participated less than others. These are avenues not only for contributing to local decisions but for residents to gain knowledge, experience and confidence in the workings of their local government. These are future neighborhood volunteers, civic and community leaders, commissioners, and elected officials. In whatever role they choose, these are individuals who will be more prepared and more qualified as informed residents, involved citizens and future leaders

## **Conclusion**

In California, the growing popularity of civic engagement efforts builds on a historical premium placed on direct democracy, exemplified through the state's fondness for voter recalls, referenda, and ballot initiatives. At the same time, strategic civic engagement processes can provide for more sustained, thoughtful, and durable public involvement in the development and implementation of policy, and governance of society. If designed and resourced adequately, civic engagement processes can mobilize citizens to overcome conflict and tailor efforts to their neighborhoods, sustainably manage common-pool resources, develop budgets to fund priority needs, and conduct innumerable other activities. These go beyond merely providing input to larger political structures, and involve taking active and direct roles, responsibility, and accountability for improving the way people live. With the capacity to involve even hard-to-reach audiences; promote respectful yet difficult and sensitive conversations; and broaden definitions of what's important, what must be done, and how it can be done, civic engagement efforts will continue to grow and diversify in California.



## ABOUT THE CA CONSORTIUM ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The California Consortium on Public Engagement is a statewide coalition of organizations promoting participation in civic life. Members believe the ongoing public engagement among all Californians is necessary for boosting the health of our state's democracy. Consortium members are committed to promoting policies and practices that increase and improve Californian's engagement with civic life, government, and society.

Members, in alphabetical order, include:

**California Center of Civic Participation's** mission is to empower youth to be vital participants in decision-making processes at all levels. Traditional and non-traditional youth are included, regardless of their academic position. Located in Sacramento, our primary programs are Capitol Focus and the Policy Leadership Program. Participants are informed about the history of an issue, they consider the positions of all stakeholders, they understand all points of view, and they have discussed the issue with youth and adults who have different opinions. After they have engaged in this layered, multi-partisan approach, they decide how to act on that issue now and over time. The Center's programs are supported by Foundations, Corporations and Associations. Voting registration is only a partial result. As a result of our programs youth do surveys, interviews, assessments, mapping, project design and implementation, develop and promote policy, press and social media, grant-making, evaluate programs and campaigns, serve on committees and coalitions, and serve in leadership positions. Hundreds of adults engage in the youth efforts, stimulating the democratic process. Contact: Jim Muldavin, Executive Director, [muldavin@californiacenter.org](mailto:muldavin@californiacenter.org).

**California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP)** was established at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change to inform public dialogue on representative governance in California. The CCEP is engaging in pioneering research to identify disparities in civic participation across place and population. It is well positioned to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in California to reduce disparities in state and regional patterns of well-being and opportunity. Key audiences include public officials, advocacy groups, political researchers and communities themselves. To learn about the CCEP's national and state advisory committee, or review the extensive coverage of the CCEP's work in California's media, visit: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ccep>. Contact: Mindy Romero, Director, [msromero@ucdavis.edu](mailto:msromero@ucdavis.edu).

**California Forward** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, bipartisan organization, launched in 2008, with a vision for governance reforms to break the partisan gridlock, fortify fiscal management, and rebuild the relationship among the state and local governments - as prerequisites to better outcomes. From its earliest days, CA Forward articulated four imperatives: 1) Improve government performance; 2) move government closer to the people; 3) invest in the future, and: 4) promote a viable, inclusive

and responsive democracy. Contact: James Mayer, President and CEO, [jim@cafwd.org](mailto:jim@cafwd.org) and Phillip Ung, Director of Public Affairs, [phillip@cafwd.org](mailto:phillip@cafwd.org).

**Center for California Studies** is a public education, public service, and applied research unit of California State University. Founded in 1982, the Center works to bridge academia and government in the service of strengthening California's democracy. While the Center is perhaps best known for its award-winning Capital Fellows Program, it also carries out a robust agenda in the area of civic engagement. This includes LegiSchool, which promotes civic engagement among high school students, sponsorship of voter information forums and resources, and various other activities. Contact: Steve Boilard, Executive Director, [steve.boilard@csus.edu](mailto:steve.boilard@csus.edu).

**Center for Collaborative Policy's** mission is to build the capacity of public agencies, stakeholder groups, and the public throughout California to use collaborative strategies to improve policy outcomes. In many ways, civic engagement mirrors and complements the staple work of the Center, which often relies on formal stakeholder representatives to prepare materials that then are shared with diverse publics for review and improvement. Processes that emphasize civic engagement allows for more people to voice concerns, identify priorities, and contribute to solving complex problems that involve numerous communities and sectors of society. Exemplary large-scale civic engagement processes facilitated by the Center include the California 2010 Census, California Citizens Redistricting Commission, California Department of Transportation's California Transportation Plan 2040, California Department of Pesticide Regulation's Workshops on Pesticide Use Near Schools, California Department of Water Resources' California Water Plan Update 2013, California Coastal Conservancy's South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration Project, and the US Forest Service's National Planning Rule. Contact: Adam Sutkus, Executive Director, [asutkus@ccp.csus.edu](mailto:asutkus@ccp.csus.edu) and Grace Person, Associate Mediator, [gperson@ccp.csus.edu](mailto:gperson@ccp.csus.edu).

**Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement at UC Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy** (GSPP) focuses on preparing current and future leaders to successfully engage people of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints in the resolution of public policy issues. Effective policy dialogue is hampered when civility is lacking and when participation is dominated by only a few entrenched stakeholders. Through research, teaching, fellowships/internships and public events, the Center aims for students and the wider public to learn about the range of deep beliefs and values which drive human social behavior. Under the leadership of Dean Henry E. Brady (Faculty Director), Professor Larry A. Rosenthal (Program Director), Chancellor's Professor Robert B. Reich (Senior Fellow), and a volunteer advisory board, the Center sponsors programs and events on the UC Berkeley campus and beyond. The Center was founded by the Cal Class of '68 to advance the legacy and aspirations characterizing the spirit of their class and their time at Berkeley. Their vision and leadership represent an exciting innovation in alumni participation at the University. Contact: Larry A. Rosenthal, Program Director, [lar@berkeley.edu](mailto:lar@berkeley.edu).

***Civic Learning Initiative*** in the division of Community Engagement at Cal State San Marcos seeks to demonstrate our civic responsibility and to inspire our communities to take action. CSU San Marcos is part of a movement among institutions of higher learning that share a commitment to make civic and democratic learning for all students a top national priority. The CSUSM Civic Learning Initiative includes three centerpieces: The American Democracy Project, a national multi-campus initiative focused on public higher education's role in preparing the next generation of informed, engaged citizens for our democracy; Democracy in Action, a university-city partnership to help move city projects forward and raise students' awareness about and appreciation for local government; and the Town Hall Meeting, a public forum that provides students an arena in which to discuss current policy issues with other students, faculty, administrators, and community members. At Cal State San Marcos, we are committed to building a stronger and more vibrant community by connecting university knowledge with community knowledge in mutually beneficial ways. In all of our work, we emphasize university-community partnerships that are collaborative, participatory, empowering, systemic, and transformative. Contact: Dr. Kimber Quinney, Faculty Director/Member, [kquinney@csusm.edu](mailto:kquinney@csusm.edu).

***Civcity*** is a national initiative providing training and support to community leaders to strengthen relationships across societal divides. The word "Civcity" describes a culture of deliberately engaging in relationships of respect and empathy with others who are different. As Civcity grows, a culture moves from an insider/outsider mindset to a "we all belong" mindset. People work, think, and co-create with others, and differences become springboards to strengthen bonds, ground social trust, and spark creative solutions. Civcity's scaling-up model is based on utilizing place-based civic networks in communities. Its first regional project, beginning in early 2016, is addressing the "have/have-not" divide in San Francisco and Silicon Valley. Contact: Malka Kopell, Co-Founder, [malka.kopell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:malka.kopell@sbcglobal.net).

***Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership*** is based at Pepperdine School of Public Policy promotes more participatory policy-making through training and consulting with public sector officials, along with providing grant support through our annual Public Engagement Grant Program. The Institute is advised by a network of local government officials from throughout California. Based at a policy school, we also act as a liaison to graduate students and the local government "world" through our ICMA Student Chapter and our annual "City Manager in Residence" program along with offering coursework in public engagement. Contact: Pete Peterson, Executive Director, [pete.n.peterson@pepperdine.edu](mailto:pete.n.peterson@pepperdine.edu) and Ashley Trim, Assistant Director, [ashley.trim@pepperdine.edu](mailto:ashley.trim@pepperdine.edu).

***Institute for Local Government*** (ILG) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, established in 1955, that is the nonpartisan education and research affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association. The Institute's purpose is to use education and research to support good government at the local level through the dissemination of materials and other resources that are accessible, actionable and ready to use. The Institute's Public Engagement Program was established in January, 2005 and has ten years of experience offering, among other services: extensive written and online public engagement resources; a multitude of conference sessions, training programs and webinars on various public engagement topics for local officials in California; and selected place-based assistance to specific communities. The Public Engagement Program's programmatic focus has included work on general public engagement principles, effective practices, process design and evaluation, as well on various issue-specific public engagement strategies such as budgeting and land use. Significant attention has also been paid to immigrant-related engagement and citizenship. Contact: Sarah Rubin, Public Engagement Program, [srubin@ca-ilg.org](mailto:srubin@ca-ilg.org).

***UC Davis Extension Collaboration Center, UC Davis Extension*** was launched in 1990; the Collaboration Center builds professionals' capacity to resolve conflicts and facilitates long-lasting public policy solutions that serve the people and needs of California and beyond. Thousands of leaders in communities, universities, government agencies and the private sector have participated in courses and services through the Collaboration Center, which has been recognized for high education standards, expert instructors and consultants, and outstanding client service. Contact: Tara Zagofsky. Ph.D, [tzagofsky@ucdavis.edu](mailto:tzagofsky@ucdavis.edu).

***Village Square Sacramento*** is a project of Valley Vision - an independent social enterprise headquartered in Sacramento whose work is making our communities the most livable in the country - and The Village Square - devoted to building a vibrant and constructive civic conversation across political, racial, economic and cultural divides. In the era of the 24-hour news cycle, we spend little time discussing the things that matter with our neighbors, and seem to have forgotten the value of a civic dialogue that involves divergent viewpoints. We've replaced the historical wisdom of the old-fashioned neighborly town hall - a basic building block of American democracy since our founding - with televised shouting that builds divisiveness and hardens negative attitudes towards those with whom we disagree. Our highly ideological and segmented civic environment is hardly the best way to build strong communities and solve local, state and national problems on a footing of sound thinking informed by reliable data. This dysfunction has serious consequences, as democratic institutions – at all levels of governance – depend on uneasy relationships of trust between people with profound disagreement. Contact: Jodi Mulligan, Project Leader, [Jodi.mulligan@valleyvision.org](mailto:Jodi.mulligan@valleyvision.org).