

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Civic Engagement: Levels of Participation

Civic engagement isn't one-size-fits-all. We all start at different points and can keep growing in ways that fit our interests, time, and courage. This framework outlines twelve levels of engagement, from small daily actions to sustained leadership. Where are you now, and what's one small step forward? Wherever you are, you're part of the movement for democracy and justice. *For further info, contact [Mark Benson](#)*

Civic Action by Level of Participation

☐ **1. Vote in every election.**

2. Entry-Level Connection

- ☐ Research candidates and ballot measures before voting.
- ☐ Watch in-depth news programs, podcasts, or documentaries on democracy and justice.
- ☐ Talk with friends and family about current issues.
- ☐ Correct misinformation politely when you encounter it.

3. Personal Investment and Voice

- ☐ Read books and history on democracy and movements for justice.
- ☐ Share fact-checked articles.
- ☐ Bank or invest with institutions that avoid funding injustice.
- ☐ Sign petitions supporting democracy or justice.
- ☐ Donate small amounts to democracy-supporting organizations.
- ☐ Write or call your representatives to share your views.
- ☐ Display a lawn sign, button, or bumper sticker.

4. Individual Engagement

- ☐ Attend a candidate forum or debate.
- ☐ Attend a live lecture, panel, or teach-in.
- ☐ Participate in online town halls or Q&A sessions.
- ☐ Sit in on a school board or city council meeting.
- ☐ Join a community film screening or book club on democracy.
- ☐ Attend a protest, march, or rally.

5. Boycott/Buycott Engagement

- ☐ Reduce reliance on corporate media; follow independent outlets.
- ☐ Subscribe to independent or local journalism.
- ☐ Shop at businesses with fair labor and inclusion policies.
- ☐ Support artists, writers, and filmmakers who raise awareness about social issues.

6. First Steps in Advocacy (Testing the Waters)

- ☐ Volunteer for a one-time event (tabling, canvassing, phone banking).
- ☐ Collect signatures for a local ballot initiative.
- ☐ Help voter registration or get-out-the-vote efforts.
- ☐ Provide rides to polling stations.
- ☐ Write to corporations asking for ethical or inclusive practices.
- ☐ Speak up during Q&A at public forums.

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

7. Joining & Belonging (Community Connection)

- ☐ Recruit friends to attend events with you.
- ☐ Join a local advocacy group and attend regularly.
- ☐ Call into radio or podcast programs to add your perspective.
- ☐ Host a house meeting or discussion with neighbors.
- ☐ Mentor the next generation of leaders.

8. Amplifying Your Voice (Public Expression)

- ☐ Join a second advocacy group to broaden perspective.
- ☐ Tell your personal story into the public square to humanize an issue.
- ☐ Organize a panel, book club, or community teach-in.
- ☐ Host debate or election night watch parties with structured discussion.
- ☐ Write letters to the editor.
- ☐ Publish op-eds in local or regional media.
- ☐ Start or contribute to a blog, newsletter, or Substack.
- ☐ Testify at hearings or committee meetings.

9. Organized Activism (Taking Responsibility)

- ☐ Intensive involvement in structured campaigns.
- ☐ Take on recurring volunteer roles in advocacy groups.
- ☐ Help lead canvassing, phone banking, or social media efforts.
- ☐ Fundraise for an advocacy group or candidate.
- ☐ Serve as a poll worker or election monitor.

10. Local Leadership (Stepping Into Responsibility)

- ☐ Taking initiative to guide projects and people.
- ☐ Lead a project within an advocacy group.
- ☐ Mentor new members and help with leadership development.
- ☐ Develop political strategy for a campaign or coalition.
- ☐ Organize lobby days at the statehouse.

11. Power Building (High Engagement)

- ☐ Meet with legislators directly to advocate.
- ☐ Testify before a legislative committee as an organized group
- ☐ Partner with multiple organizations to form coalitions.
- ☐ Lead multiple projects across advocacy groups.

12. Governing & Movement Leadership (Transformational Engagement)

- ☐ Run for local office (school board, city council, county commission).
- ☐ Run for higher office (state legislature, Congress).
- ☐ Serve in elected office and champion democratic values.
- ☐ Build new organizations that address gaps in democracy work.