*Civics Career Academy Support Lesson*

**Introduction to Civic Engagement**

What is Civic Engagement? Why is Civic Engagement important?

*A Lesson for Civics Career Academy Course Public Service Experiential Learning*

***Course***

**Public Service Experiential Learning**

***Benchmark***

SS.912.CG.2.2: Explain the importance of political and civic participation to the success of the United States constitutional republic.

SS.912.CG.2.7: Analyze the impact of civic engagement as a means of preserving or reforming institutions.

***Course Unit*UNIT 1: Civic Engagement in the Constitutional Republic**

***Lesson Foci***

The objective of this lesson is to explore and understand the various motivations that drive individuals to participate in civic engagement activities. By the end of the lesson, students should be able to identify and analyze different motivations behind civic engagement and recognize their significance for creating an active and informed citizenry.

***Activity Documents, Materials, and Handouts***

* **Chart Paper**
* **Computers**
* **Markers**
* **Article from CIRCLE:** [**Creating Equitable Opportunities for Youth to Serve, Learn Skills, and Strengthen Communities.**](https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/creating-equitable-opportunities-youth-serve-learn-skills-and-strengthen)

***Activity Vocabulary***

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| ***Word*** | ***Definition*** |
| Civic engagement | Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference; civic engagement means promoting the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes |
| Motivation | the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way |
| Civic participation | involves participating in activities intended to improve the quality of life in one’s community by addressing issues of public concern, such as homelessness, pollution, or food insecurity, and developing the knowledge and skills needed to address those issues |
| Society | the aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community |
| Volunteer | a person who freely offers to participate in an enterprise or undertake a task, often for the common good |
| Experiential learning | an engaged learning process whereby students “learn by doing” and by reflecting on the experience |
| Community service | voluntary work intended to help people in a particular area |

***Teacher Note***

This lesson is an introduction lesson for Unit One. The lesson will set the tone for civic engagement and what civic engagement looks like for students.

This lesson is based on a 90-minute block scheduling period but could easily be split into two 50-minute classes.

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***Lesson Steps***

1. Introduction (5 mins):
   1. Review the vocabulary words with students.
   2. Review the objective and standards with students.
2. Warm-up (10 min):
   1. Brainstorming Activity: Conduct a brainstorming session to elicit students' prior knowledge about civic engagement.
   2. Ask students: "What does civic engagement mean to you?" "Why is civic engagement essential for citizens to be engaged in their community?" "What are some examples of civic engagement activities?"
3. Motivations for Civic Engagement (15 minutes)
   1. Present a list of motivations driving people to participate in civic engagement. These may include
      1. The desire for positive change in the community
      2. Personal values and beliefs
      3. Sense of responsibility and duty as a citizen
      4. Empathy and compassion for others
      5. Frustration with existing problems or injustices
      6. Need for social connections and a sense of belonging
      7. Political efficacy and the belief that their actions can make a difference
      8. Influence of family, peers, or role models
      9. The desire for personal growth and skill development
   2. Direct students to read the article: [**Creating Equitable Opportunities for Youth to Serve, Learn Skills, and Strengthen Communities.**](https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/creating-equitable-opportunities-youth-serve-learn-skills-and-strengthen)
      1. Direct students to share out the barriers that face students on becoming civically engaged in their community.
4. Group Activity: Motivation Analysis (20 minutes)
   1. Divide the students into small groups.
   2. Assign each group a specific motivation from the list provided in Step 3.
   3. Instruct the groups to discuss and analyze how this motivation can influence civic engagement and lead to different types of involvement in the community.
   4. Encourage students to develop real-life examples or case studies to illustrate their points.
5. Presentations and Discussion (10 minutes)
   1. Direct each group to present their findings to the class.
   2. Facilitate a class discussion after each presentation to share insights and reflections.
   3. Encourage students to ask questions and offer constructive feedback.
6. Closure (5 minutes)
   1. Summarize the primary motivations for civic engagement discussed during the lesson.
   2. Emphasize the significance of understanding these motivations to foster a more engaged and active citizenry.
   3. Encourage students to reflect on their motivations and consider how they can contribute to their community.

**Enrichment Suggestion** **#1** – Assign a short essay or reflective writing task to reinforce the concepts learned. Prompt students to write about their motivations for civic engagement and how they envision contributing to the betterment of their community. This can be a valuable exercise in self-awareness and goal setting.

**Teacher Background Information**

Political and civic participation refers to the active involvement of individuals in the political processes and public affairs of their community, region, or country. It is a crucial aspect of democratic societies, as it empowers citizens to have a say in decision-making, voice their concerns, and contribute to the development and functioning of the government and society. Here's some background information on political and civic participation:

1. Types of Political Participation:

Political participation can take various forms, ranging from traditional to modern methods. Some common types include:

- Voting in elections (local, regional, national)

- Joining political parties or organizations

- Participating in political rallies and demonstrations

- Engaging in public debates and discussions

- Writing letters to elected representatives

- Running for public office

- Campaigning for specific issues or candidates

- Engaging in online activism and social media campaigns

2. Importance of Political Participation:

Political participation is vital for a functioning democracy. It ensures that the government remains accountable to its citizens and reflects the will of the people. By actively participating in political processes, citizens can influence policies, advocate for their rights and interests, and work towards creating positive societal changes.

3. Civic Participation:

Civic participation extends beyond politics and includes engagement in various community and public activities that aim to improve society. Civic participation can involve volunteering for local organizations, participating in community development projects, attending town hall meetings, joining neighborhood associations, and contributing to charitable causes.

4. Barriers to Participation:

Several factors can impede political and civic participation, including:

- Voter apathy and disillusionment with politics

- Socioeconomic disparities and lack of access to information and resources

- Disenfranchisement of certain groups (e.g., minorities, low-income individuals)

- Complex and bureaucratic political processes

- Voter suppression and restrictive laws

- Lack of representation and inclusivity in decision-making bodies

5. The Role of Technology:

The advent of technology, especially the internet and social media, has significantly impacted political and civic participation. Online platforms have enabled individuals to access information quickly, connect with like-minded individuals, and engage in virtual activism. Social media has also played a significant role in mobilizing social movements and amplifying political messages.

6. Global Perspective:

Political and civic participation vary across countries and cultures. Some countries have high voter turnout and robust civic engagement, while others face challenges like political repression and limited civil liberties. Efforts to promote political and civic participation are often part of broader initiatives to strengthen democracy and ensure more excellent citizen representation.

**Civic engagement** refers to the active participation of individuals in the public life and affairs of their community, city, state, or country. It involves the involvement of citizens in various activities that contribute to the betterment of society and the democratic process. Civic engagement is vital to a functioning democracy as it allows citizens to have a say in decision-making processes, hold governments accountable, and address societal issues.

Here are some key aspects and forms of civic engagement:

1. Voting: One of the most fundamental ways citizens engage civically is by voting in local, regional, and national elections. Voting allows citizens to elect representatives who will make decisions on their behalf.

2. Volunteering: Volunteering in community-based organizations, non-profits, or social initiatives helps address local needs and fosters a sense of responsibility and connection to the community.

3. Advocacy and Activism: Engaging in advocacy and activism involves speaking up and raising awareness about specific issues or causes to promote change. This can be done through public demonstrations, lobbying, or supporting campaigns.

4. Participating in Public Meetings: Attending town hall meetings, community forums, and other public gatherings enables citizens to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas directly to policymakers and local authorities.

5. Community Service: Engaging in community service projects, such as cleaning up public spaces, organizing food drives, or supporting educational initiatives, contributes to the community's welfare.

6. Joining Social and Civic Organizations: Being a member of civic organizations, neighborhood associations, or social clubs can allow individuals to collaborate on shared interests and community projects.

7. Petitioning: Creating or signing petitions on various issues allows citizens to express their support or opposition to specific policies or initiatives.

8. Running for Public Office: Those passionate about civic engagement can run for public office to represent their community or advocate for specific causes.

9. Participating in Online Activism: The internet and social media platforms have become powerful tools for civic engagement, enabling people to connect, share information, and organize collective action.

Partially adapted from: <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/pol111mhs/chapter/6-2-other-types-of-political-participation/>   
<https://www.unomaha.edu/international-studies-and-programs/_files/docs/adler-goggin-civic-engagement.pdf>