

Civic Engagement in your City or Town WebQuest

*Big Quest(ion)/Task:
Describe the civic health of your community. Why does it matter and what can be done about it?*

Introduction

The data that we explored in our last class was taken from the Texas Civic Health Index and it provides a comprehensive, first-time look at civic and political engagement in Texas. It presents information about who engages in their communities and in politics across Texas and how. Data reported here are obtained from U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Supplements on Voting, Volunteering and Civic Engagement.

Much of the information presented throughout this report leads to a troubling conclusion: Texas ranks among the lowest in the nation on many measures of political and civic participation. Low levels of political and civic participation may stem from a variety of causes: relatively noncompetitive elections; lack of information and education; inconvenience and disenfranchisement; and the challenge of incorporating a rapidly changing population all may be contributing to lackluster civic health in Texas.

This WebQuest will lead your group through a series of websites that explains whether or not individuals in your community vote, volunteer, and engage. By the end of this lesson your team should be able to describe your city's (or area's) civic health, what might be causing it, and what you're going to do about it.

The Quest

You are going to try to uncover if there is any civic health data related to your community. Do the people in your community vote? Do they volunteer? Do they discuss politics or meet with public officials? Create a community issues frame and action plan for how to address this issue.

The Process and Resources

Each of you will research a separate aspect of civic health (political, civic, or social connectedness) and then come together in a team to brainstorm the following:

- Problems with low levels of engagement
- Solutions to these problems

Once you have identified the major issues and possible solutions to the political participation, civic involvement, and social connectedness, your team will create a plan of action of addressing the particular issues of civic engagement in your community. All sources you use must be documented.

Phase 1 - Background: Who, What, and Why

Thinking back to the data from our last class period, Texas ranks among the lowest in the nation on many measures of political and civic participation. Use the Internet information linked below to determine how your community stacks up. If you need a reminder about what the Texas data looks like you can check out the full Texas Civic Health report at <http://www.txcivichealth.org>.

Phase 2 - Looking at Your Community

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Individuals from your WebQuest team will need to break-up into three groups
 - a. Political participation (1-2 people)
 - b. Civic involvement (1-2 people)
 - c. Social connectedness (1-2 people)
2. Click through to all of the links provided in your section (political participation, civic involvement, or social connectedness).
 - a. If you print out the files, underline the passages that you feel are the most important. If you look at the files on the computer, copy sections you feel are important by dragging the mouse across the data or observation and copying / pasting it into a word processor or other writing software. Remember to write down or copy/paste the URL of the file you take the passage from so you can quickly go back to it if you need to reference it in your write-up.
3. Summarize what you have learned by writing a short statement that describes your main opinion about the Big Quest(ion).

Political participation

Use the Internet information linked below to answer: **At what rate do your community's citizens register and vote?** What are the causes of low voter turnout and what can be done about it?

1. Your county election's division website
2. Your local area newspaper
3. Nonprofit Vote, Voter Turnout Facts: <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/voter-turnout-factors.html>

Civic Involvement

Use the Internet information linked below to answer: **At what rate do your community's citizens volunteer?** What are the causes of low volunteer engagement and what can be done about it?

1. Volunteering in America. <http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/TX>
2. Your city or county United Way
3. Corporation for Community and National Service, Youth Helping America http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0406_disad_youth.pdf
4. United Way of Dane County, Volunteer Engagement and Mobilization Plan: <https://www.unitedwaydanecounty.org/reports/VolunteerEngagementMobilizationPlan.pdf>

Social Connectedness

Use the Internet information linked below to answer: **At what rate does your community connect socially?** What are the causes for low levels of social connectedness and what can be done about it?

1. Your local area newspaper
2. Soul of a Community, pp. 2-6
http://soulofthecommunity.org/sites/default/files/SOTC_2010_Report_STPAUL_11-12-10_mh.pdf
3. Minnesota Post, Increasing Social Connectedness. <http://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2012/05/increasing-social-connectedness-lets-make-difference>

Phase 3 – Sharing, Discussing Causes, and Discussing Solutions

You have all learned about a different part of civic engagement in this WebQuest. Now your group members will come back to the larger WebQuest team with expertise gained by searching one type of community engagement. You must all now answer the Task / Quest(ion) as a group.

Describe the civic health of your community. Why does it matter and what can be done about it?

Conclusion

Nice work. You should be proud of yourselves!

Now you are ready to fill out your Community Problem Solving Frame.