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**Civics Project Guidebook**

Guidance to support implementation of Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018,

*An Act to promote and enhance civic engagement.*

**Revised December 2021**

*Knowledge*

*Skills*

*Dispositions*

*Engagement*

**Acknowledgements**

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# **Introduction**

*How do we ensure* ***all*** *students have access to high-quality civic learning opportunities? What specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions are essential for civic readiness? What does it mean to be an informed, thoughtful, and active citizen[[1]](#footnote-2)? What does democratic citizenship look like in action? How do we effectively foster civic agency?*

The purpose of this Civics Project Guidebook is to help answer these questions by supporting meaningful implementation of [*Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement.*](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2018/Chapter296)That legislation requires student-led civics projects aligned to the [2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html). This Guidebook seeks to develop common understanding of the “what” and “how” of high-quality civics projects in Massachusetts and includes tools and resources for districts, schools, and educators related to both project planning and implementation.

Every student regardless of race, class, ethnicity, language status, religion, education, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability has the right to civics education, including effective pedagogy and applied learning. Civics education should be culturally responsive, develop students’ civic identities, and center the acquisition of knowledge, intellectual skills, and applied competencies that citizens need for informed and effective participation in civics and democratic life.

“Each public school serving students in the eighth grade and each public high school shall provide not less than 1 student-led, non-partisan civics project for each student…Civics projects may be individual, small group or class wide, and designed to promote a student’s ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state and local policies, including issues that may impact the student’s school or community. Any student choosing not to participate in a particular group or class-wide project shall be offered the opportunity to develop an individual civics project, with approval by the principal.”

- *Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement*

Historically, civics education has been unequal in both access and quality, highlighting the need for an equity-centered approach to civics. According to [a recent white paper](https://generationcitizen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GC_Equity_in_Civics_MA_FINAL_300dpi-1.pdf?mc_cid=d21b626434&mc_eid=8f64482238) published by Generation Citizen, a member of the [Massachusetts Civic Learning Coalition](https://www.macivicsforall.org/), one key focus for developing more equitable statewide civics policies is “expand[ing] equality of access to comprehensive civic learning that blends project-based democracy education with a contextual approach to civic knowledge” (Generation Citizen, 2021, p. 2). **Ensuring all Massachusetts students have an opportunity to participate in a student-led civics projects grounded in action civics—the process of applying civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions to mobilize change leading to systems impact—is one way of advancing a statewide equity-centered approach to civics education.**

# **The Goals of Student-Led Civics Projects**

**By completing student-led civics projects, students will:**

* Develop civic dispositions and a sense of self-efficacy.
* Develop and practice civic skills.
* Build civic content knowledge.
* Develop and practice literacy skills, including digital media literacy.
* Conduct inquiries and determine next steps.
* Develop and practice social-emotional skills.
* Be more academically engaged.
* Develop cultural competence and social political awareness.

While the list above identifies *some* of the outcome goals of civics projects, the **ultimate goal** of student-led civics projects is to develop **civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions** as defined in the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework:

**CIVICS DISPOSITIONS**

Values, virtues, and behaviors, such as respect for others, commitment to equality, capacity for listening, and capacity for communicating in ways accessible to others, including engaging with varying points of view and ideas in civil discourse.

**CIVIC KNOWLEDGE**

Core relates to civics and government, economics, geography, and history, including the rights and responsibilities established by the Constitution and how to exercise them in local, state, and national government.

**CIVIC SKILLS**

Intellectual and participatory skills that encompass the ability to identify, assess, interpret, describe, analyze and explain matters relating to civic life, knowing how to make and support arguments using logical reasoning, and the ability to use the political process to take *informed action*.

As districts consider implementation of the student-led, non-partisan civics projects, it is important to consider the [high-quality curriculum and instruction](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/instruction/grade-8-civics/index.html#/) that supports students’ development of civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In addition, schools and districts should consider the importance of fostering a school climate and culture that enhances students’ application of these skills. While civics projects should align to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, projects can be interdisciplinary and facilitated across content areas.[[2]](#footnote-3)

## **For District Leaders: Considerations and Guiding Questions**

District leaders are encouraged to think about the following as they plan for supporting educators in implementing student-led civics projects. The considerations and guiding questions in this section are designed to promote a community-wide understanding of student-led civics action projects and foster the type of school climate and culture that enhances students’ application of their civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

**Consideration: Building the Foundation for District-wide Civics Engagement**

* **Guiding Question:** *How will the civics projects be integrated with and supported by year-long high-quality curriculum and instructional materials that reflect the three pillars (Content, Practice, and Literacy Standards) of the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework?*
  + **Reminder:** The Framework outlines the learning standards for a year-long Grade 8 civics course in which projects will be embedded.
  + **Reminder:** At the high school level, leaders, in collaboration with teachers, will need to make a decision about which required course or courses to embed projects before considering alignment to learning standards.
  + **Tip:** Facilitate district-wide professional learning opportunities for exploring and supporting project planning and implementation.
* **Guiding Question:** *Are there current practices and partnerships that require students to participate in project-based learning? How can you leverage that experience and expertise?* 
  + **Reminder:** This experience and expertise does not need to be solely among history and social science staff.
  + **Reminder:** Projects can involve interdisciplinary collaboration and do not need to necessarily take place in a core history course.

**Consideration: Informing the Community**

* **Guiding Question:** *How familiar are teachers, families, school leaders, and the community with student-led civics projects?*
  + **Tip:** Share information regarding the purpose and process of the student-led civics projects with various stakeholders, which may include families, K-12 teachers, school and district leadership, community organizations, local officials, school committee, and community leaders.
  + **Tip:** Provide connections between the civic education legislation, [Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018](https://mass.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=d8f37d1a90dacd97f207f0b4a&id=5928f57500&e=3ea032469f), and the 2018 [Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html).
  + **Tip:** Develop a district-wide strategy for collecting student project information including topics, community partnerships, process description, and final outcomes.
  + **Tip:** Incorporate a description and expectations of the civics projects in applicable course syllabi.
  + **Tip**: Consider sharing the following excerpt related to student-led civics project from DESE’s [Race, Racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching in History and Social Science in Massachusetts: Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/faq.pdf)

***“How are schools and districts ensuring that the required student-led civics projects are truly nonpartisan?***

*Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018, An act to promote and enhance civic engagement, requires that schools provide students with a nonpartisan, student-led civic action project once in eighth grade and once in high school. The law stipulates that civics projects may be individual, small group or class wide, and designed to promote a student’s ability to: (i) analyze complex issues; (ii) consider differing points of view; (iii) reason, make logical arguments and support claims using valid evidence; (iv) engage in civil discourse with those who hold opposing positions; and (v) demonstrate an understanding of the connections between federal, state and local policies, including issues that may impact the student’s school or community.*

*It is essential that these projects are student-led; while teachers may set boundaries on the topics that can be addressed (e.g., working with a science teacher to engage students in action around an environmental policy issue), the choice of topic and action plan should ultimately be student-generated. Although these projects can and likely will lead to discussion of pressing and contemporary issues, as explained in the Civics Project Guidebook, action plans should not be directed at electoral politics, nor should they be developed in support of candidates in particular elections. Furthermore, the law requires that if classes engage in a project collaboratively, students must have the option of doing an individual project instead.”*

**Consideration: Building the Capacity for Dialogue**

* **Guiding Question:** *How will all educators be prepared and supported to discuss complex and controversial issues and ideas with their students?* 
  + **Tip**: Facilitate professional development focused on strategies for facilitating classroom conversations related to complex and controversial issues as these topics may arise as students explore a range of issues. The resources listed in the “Considerations for Examining and Discussing Real-World Issues” (pg. 28) of this Guidebook include some of these strategies.

**Consideration: Conducting Research and Interacting with External Organizations**

* **Guiding Question:** *How will the district support teachers in developing students’ research skills and digital media literacy?*
  + **Tip:** Leverage librarians, media specialists, and other researchers and community members to enhance and support student research.
  + **Reminder:** Include information about this project phase and the ask for support with it in the initial communication informing the community about student-led civics projects.
* **Guiding Question:** *Where can teachers and school leaders access current policies for engaging with external organizations?*
  + **Tip:** Create a district level document capturing any policies and protocols related to partnerships, external communication, school visitors, field trips, student participation in off-site meetings, social media campaigns, conducting interviews, and surveying internal and/or external stakeholders
  + **Tip:** Review or develop processes/policies for bringing community experts and external civic leaders into the classroom as guest speakers or as specific partners.
  + **Tip:** Review or develop processes/policies for student engagement with journalists and social media in different platforms including radio, TV, and newspaper.
* **Guiding Question:** *How will the district support teachers in engaging in outreach to community partners and other external stakeholders?*
* **Tip:** Consider using this template to send a letter to students’ state legislators to share more about the project and potential project-related communication from students: [Civics Project District Resource: Letter to Legislators](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/civics-letter-to-legislators.docx).

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* **Tip:** Review technology settings and needs related to students sending emails and making phone calls.
* **Tip:** Create a district level document capturing planned external communication to support appropriate timing of outreach and internal collaboration.
* **Reminder:** Inform teachers of any barriers students may encounter engaging in external communication (e.g. sending emails to non-school email addresses) so they can account for that in their project planning.

# **Defining Student-Led Civics Projects**

A high-quality student-led civics project aligned to the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework and Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018:

* Follows the **six stages** of action civics.
* Embeds eight **key characteristics** throughout the six project stages.
* Is **culturally responsive** in design and implementation.

**SIX STAGES**

The six stages of action civics include:

1. Examine Self and Civic Identity
2. Identifying and Issue
3. Researching and Investigating
4. Developing an Action Plan
5. Taking Action
6. Reflecting and Showcasing

**KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

The eight key project characteristics include:

1. Student-led
2. Project-based
3. Real-world
4. Rooted in an understanding of systems impact
5. Goal-driven
6. Inquiry-based
7. Non-partisan
8. Process-focused

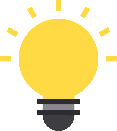
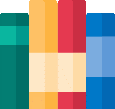
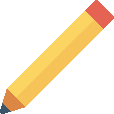
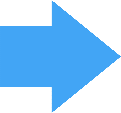
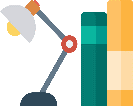
**CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING**

As conceived by leading scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings and informed by an evolving body of research, culturally responsive teaching and leading promotes three outcomes supporting student learning:

* Academic achievement.
* Cultural competence.
* Sociopolitical awareness.

## **The Six Stages**

A high-quality student-led civics project should follow these six stages grounded in action civics. However, there is no prescriptive learning experience. Throughout the six stages, students make, reflect on, and evaluate their own learning decisions. Engaging with the process of learning and continuous improvement, not perfect mastery, is the goal, and defines success of student-led civics projects. Depending on the time available, educators may decide to break down each of the six stages into a larger number of steps.



## **Key Characteristics**

**8 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CIVICS PROJECTS**

1. Student-led
2. Project-based
3. Real-world
4. Rooted in an understanding of systems impact
5. Goal-driven
6. Inquiry-based
7. Non-partisan
8. Process-focused

A high-quality student-led civics project demonstrates the following eight key characteristics throughout the six project stages**.** Each characteristic detailed below is accompanied by key “look fors” to help distinguish examples and non-examples of the characteristic in action.

**1. Student-Led**

Student choice defines the project experience. Students should make informed decisions about the issue, process, and goals for their civics project even as the teacher is setting the broader learning objectives. In doing so, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator, offering guidance, choices, and suggestions, especially at key inflection points of the project.

* **Tip:** A move from teacher-led instruction to teacher-facilitated learning can be challenging, both for the teacher and the student. Setting up norms, contracts and inclusive structures will help everyone start to adjust to this different teaching model.

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| --- | --- |
| **Student-Led** | **NOT Student-Led** |
| Students discuss as a class and vote on a project topic. Then, students split into teams to research the topic.  Students share in the responsibility of ensuring their classmates are meaningfully included in project-related work as members of a classroom learning community.  Students share in the responsibility of creating a class contract and resolving group disagreements and answering each other’s questions. | The teacher decides that the class will focus on a particular topic because of their own experiences.  Teacher is directly answering all student questions rather than encouraging students to engage in their own exploration for answers first. |

**2. Project-Based**

Students achieve their learning objectives by applying knowledge and skills for an extended period of time to achieve the goal of solving a real-world problem or answering a complex question. Project-based learning not only offers greater student learning and engagement due to increased relevance to students’ lives, but also expands skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, time management, and problem-solving.

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| **Project-Based** | **NOT Project-Based** |
| Students conduct an inquiry and demonstrate their learning by engaging with or presenting to the public, taking their work beyond the classroom.  The unit *is* the project, with rigorous inquiry and critical thinking applied to real-world action. | Students complete a prescribed summative task to assess rote knowledge on the content of a unit. |

**3. Real-World**

Real-world application pushes past hypothetical scenarios or theoretical action and teaches students the power of their voices as constituents. Even if they ultimately do not achieve 100% of their goals, real-world application strengthens students’ sense of agency and capabilities for self-advocacy.

Ultimately, student-led civics projects should support all students in seeing themselves as powerful agents of change who recognize the fact that their voice and contributions matter. This means engaging students in a project process that has them working to take real-world action versus hypothetical action related to their project goals.

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| **Real-World** | **NOT Real-World** |
| *Examples of real-world application:*   * Students develop a persuasive argument for the kind of real-world impact they want to see or rally support for this impact. * Students interact with community stakeholders or real-world decision-makers who have the power to listen to students’ concerns and do something about them. * Students draft a plan detailing the steps they will take to write and introduce new legislation and work to implement that plan. | Students engage in a simulation related to their issue.  Students learn about the history of their issue but not the present political context.  Students write a paper about the actions they would like to take related to their project (but don’t plan to take them).  Students complete a prescribed set of learning activities related to their topic with no opportunity to apply that learning outside of the classroom. |

**4. Rooted in an Understanding of Systems Impact**

To strive for systems impact, student actions focus on the processes, policies, institutions, and people most connected to a root cause of an issue. Striving for this level of impact necessitates an examination of and conversations about systems of power and oppression, including who benefits from and who is harmed by those systems.

* **Tip**: To help students think past individual-level decision making and operate on the systems-level, have them ask “why” repeatedly to get to the root causes of an issue. Then, consider the people, institutions, policies, structures, and processes that impact those root causes.

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| **Systems Impact** | **NOT Systems Impact** |
| After identifying a pressing community issue and researching potential solutions, students take one or more of the following actions:   * Advocate for existing legislation related to their topic. * Introduce a new piece of legislation. * Organize a Community Task Force to increase awareness and implement new policies and practices related to their issue.   The identified impact is measurable and sustainable—extends beyond the life of the project. | After identifying a pressing community issue and researching potential solutions, students take one or more of the following actions:   * Raise money to invite a guest speaker to talk about their issue. * Post flyers in the school hallways about their issue.   Students engage in an isolated action with an impact that ends after project completion.  It is difficult to link the action taken to the desired impact. |

**5. Goal-Driven**

Students should develop goals aimed at addressing the root causes of their issues to make long-term change. This may be through **influencing public opinion** on an issue and/or **influencing a policy goal**. Students may be inspired by local, national, or global issues and should aim to find ways to impact change around an issue. At any level, students should have real interaction with community and civic leaders, one of the most empowering parts of a civics project, as they work to take action related to their project goal.

* **Tip:** Celebrate smaller victories (gathering 100 petition signatures, meeting with a decision maker, etc.) helps students to develop persistence and pride in their work even if the semester ends without the ultimate goal coming to fruition.
* **Consideration:** There are benefits and challenges with choosing an issue at each level of scale (local, national, global). For example, localized issues may allow for more immediate and direct contact with decision makers while global issues require engagement with more ambitious goals and wider audiences.

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| **Goal-Driven** | **NOT Goal-Driven** |
| *Sample goals related to influencing public opinion:*   * Run an awareness campaign carefully targeted at a specific audience, where impact can be measured. * Host a town forum to engage the community and key decision-makers, including voters, and provide opportunity for discussion and debate.   *Sample goals related to influencing policy:*   * Advocate for a change in the school curriculum. * Add a youth voting member to the school committee. * Introduce a policy or piece of legislation. * Support resource re-allocation for various community needs. | Student’s goal is to “do well on the project”.  Student or group of students create a poster about the importance of their issue and display it with no specific audience in mind or goal beyond informing others about the problem.  Student or group of students develop a slide show focused on talking about the issue with community members and do not include a specific ask. |

**6. Inquiry-Based**

Student-led civics projects provide an authentic opportunity for students to practice research skills, to ask probing questions about real-world issues, and to make judgements about the appropriateness and success of various research methods. Educators do not need to be the experts of the issue students choose to explore. Rather, educators serve as facilitators who connect students to a range of sources and resources that will develop students’ understanding of the root cause(s) of their project issue.

* **Connection:** The seven Standards for History and Social Science Practice focus on the processes of inquiry and research that are integral to the foundation for active and responsible citizenship.

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| **Inquiry-Based** | **NOT Inquiry-Based** |
| Students ask probing questions of their own and others’ project-related research.  Students engage in research that includes both traditional sources (scholarly articles and news sources) AND conducting surveys and interviews.  Students consider multiple points of view**,** from next-door neighbors to community leaders and elected officials.  Students develop an understanding of the breadth of the issue, including opposing viewpoints. | Teacher is the only member of the classroom community asking questions and offering feedback on student work.  Students only conduct research using online resources.  Students only select and investigate sources that affirm their own opinions related to their issue. |

**7. Non-partisan**

In the case of student-led, non-partisan civics projects, “non-partisan” refers specifically to whether a project takes a side in party politics and party competitions. Student-led civics projects **should not** be directed at electoral politics, nor should they be developed in support of candidates in particular elections. Student projects **may**be directed at ballot propositions, involve student communication with legislators in support of a specific bill, and have political viewpoints that reflect the student’s political perspective.

* **Tip:** Student-led civics projects may lead to discussions of relevant and pressing contemporary issues. The 2018 History and Social Science Framework’s emphasis on civics education encourages intentional and informed dialogue about such topics. Educators should facilitate conversations where all voices are heard, respected, and rooted in evidence from legitimate sources.
* **Reminder:** Student projects may involve students communicating directly with legislators in support of specific bills or participating in events related to their issue. Teachers *may* support students in developing and executing project plans that include such action steps but *may not*engage in these action steps themselves.
* **Tip:**Become familiar with local policies that may include additional parameters on educator lobbying or political action.
* **Reminder:** There is a question related to the non-partisan defining component of civics projects in DESE’s [Race, Racism, and Culturally Responsive Teaching in History and Social Science in Massachusetts: Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/faq.pdf).

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*It is essential that these projects are student-led; while teachers may set boundaries on the topics that can be addressed (e.g., working with a science teacher to engage students in action around an environmental policy issue), the choice of topic and action plan should ultimately be student-generated. Although these projects can and likely will lead to discussion of pressing and contemporary issues, as explained in the Civics Project Guidebook, action plans should not be directed at electoral politics, nor should they be developed in support of candidates in particular elections. Furthermore, the law requires that if classes engage in a project collaboratively, students must have the option of doing an individual project instead.”*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Non-partisan** | **NOT Non-partisan** |
| Students community directly with local lawmakers in support of or opposition to a particular piece of legislation.  Research and information reflect all sides of an issue.  Communications issued during the project are targeted at audiences without party affiliations or at audiences with multiple party affiliations. | Students make phone-calls to campaign for candidates.  Teacher only asks students to engage with research on one side of an issue. |

**8. Process-Focused**

Every project should incorporate the six stages of civics projects, as described in the previous section of this Guidebook. The success of student-led civics projects derives from students learning and engaging in an effective process for civic action rather than accomplishing 100% of their goals. Many students may not accomplish their goals during the civics projects and this is an important lesson for students to learn: change takes time and their work has moved the issue forward even if they have not achieved their goal.

* **Reminder:** Educators should focus on teaching and assessing the process of effective civic action, rather than focus their assessment on whether or not a project led to a significant outcome.
* **Tip**: Students can often feel stuck with where to start or how to ensure they are making adequate progress on a project. It is both useful and empowering for students to map out their project(s) starting with the ultimate goal and then working backwards to identify the individual tasks and objectives that need to occur in order to get there.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Process-Focused** | **NOT Process-Focused** |
| Students identify an issue, conduct research, develop clear goals, and take informed action.  Students are assessed on their use of the six stages to inform their project process and their engagement in each stage.  Teachers have regular check-ins with students related to progress on their various action steps. | Teachers give students a higher grade if they succeed in making a change.  Teachers only assess the final project outcome.  Teacher communicates to students throughout the project that if they don’t achieve their desired change their project won’t be successful. |

## **Culturally Responsive Projects[[3]](#footnote-4)**

Cultural responsiveness is an approach to viewing students' culture and identity (including race, ethnicity, multilingualism, disability, and other characteristics) as assets, and creating learning experiences and environments that value and empower them. As conceived by leading scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings and informed by an evolving body of research, culturally responsive teaching and leading promotes three outcomes supporting student learning:

* **Academic achievement:** Educators hold high, transparent expectations for all students, and support the development of students' academic skills and identities as learners.
* **Cultural competence:** Educators understand culture's role in education, their students' cultures, and their own identity and biases to 1) affirm students' backgrounds and identities and 2) foster their ability to understand and honor others' cultures.
* **Sociopolitical awareness:** Educators and students partner to identify, analyze, and work to solve systemic inequities in their communities and the world.

The student-led civics projects can foster students’ **academic** **achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness** by giving students opportunities to:

In their book *Schooling for Critical Consciousness: Engaging Black and Latinx Youth in Analyzing, Navigating, and Challenging Racial Injustice* (2020), Scott Seider and Daren Graves identify three key components of critical consciousness:

* social analysis,
* political agency,
* social action.

Seider and Graves report on “a growing body of research that has found critical consciousness to be an important tool through which youth of color can both resist the negative effects of racial injustice and challenge its root cases” (pg. 3).

* Assess the world around them.
* Reflect on and leverage the assets of their identity and community.
* Focus on issues that matter to them and their communities.
* Engage with and examine multiple perspectives related to those issues.
* Take real-world action based on research of the root causes of those issues.

Culturally responsive teachings mean that students’ examinations of systems and institutions in their projects are not removed from forces of power and oppression. This is an important step in developing their sociopolitical awareness. As students develop their sociopolitical awareness, they are developing their *critical consciousness* about these forces.

It is important that educators attend to and value the experiences and many intersecting identities of students when planning and implementing projects, as well as understand and reflect on their own identities and biases. This is key to developing both students’ and teachers’ cultural competence.

In her work, *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (2020), Dr. Gholdy Muhammad states that identity is "composed of notions of who we are, who others say we are (in positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be....Our identities (both cultural identities and others) are continually being (re)defined and revised while we reconsider who we are within our sociocultural and sociopolitical environment."

The report “[Let’s Go There: Race, Ethnicity, and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e20c70a7802d9509b9aeff2/t/5e66cd4feddd0f57bb759f21/1583795568756/LetsGoThere_Paper_V17.pdf)” (2018) asserts that educators and students must “acknowledge and analyze the privilege and multiple identities that they bring to the classroom and collectively co-construct learning spaces that affirm and embrace those identities” (pg. 6). For example, students may identify focus issues that matter to them that the teacher would not have chosen based on the teacher’s own experiences.

Students come to the table with a wealth of knowledge about who they are, what they value, and what they have experienced. The exploration of self and community in Stage 1 supports student engagement in and connection to the projects, builds a sense of agency as students engage with issues they care about, and develops expertise in the specific levers and systems they want to impact through the process of participating in the project.

**Helpful Resources**

Consider exploring the resources below to develop deeper understanding of and capacity for designing and implementing projects through a culturally responsive lens:

* [Common Beliefs Survey: Teaching Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students (Learning for Justice](https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/common-beliefs-survey-teaching-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-students)): A framework for helping educators, individually or working in groups, to examine commonly held beliefs about racially and ethnically diverse students.
* [Exploring Ethnic-Racial Identity (Harvard Graduate School of Education](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/02/exploring-ethnic-racial-identity)): Brief article about recent research related to the positive impacts of curricula that allow students to explore their identities and backgrounds.
* “[How to Be an Antiracist Educator” by Dena Simmons (ASCD](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-to-be-an-antiracist-educator)): Short article that offers five actionable steps educators can take toward creating an anti-racist future.
* [Intersecting Culturally Responsive Teaching and Inclusive Education](https://www.thinkinclusive.us/post/culturally-responsive-teaching) (Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education, Inc.): Blog post that offers some pedagogical best practices for developing classroom communities that blend culturally responsive and inclusive educational practices.
* [Reflecting on Practice (Learning for Justice](https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/reflecting-on-practice)): A series on short self-reflection activities for educators to do individually or in small group.
* [Start with Yourself: Reflection Prompts and Action Steps (Facing History and Ourselves](https://www.facinghistory.org/chunk/start-yourself-reflection-prompts-and-action-steps)): A self-reflection tool educators can use to more deeply examine their own identities and implicit biases and how both impact their work with students.

## **Civics Projects versus Service Learning**

While both community service and student-led civics projects ask students to perform a service that benefits a community, there are differences in their approach that are important to distinguish. When doing community service, students often perform a service that benefits the community either by engaging in one-time event or ongoing direct volunteerism. A student-led civics project using the six stages grounded in the principles of action civics requires students to take action toward achieving systems impact, to engage with decision-makers, and to consider multiple points of view before taking action. Ultimately, taking action strengthen students’ sense of agency and capabilities for self-advocacy as informed and active members of a democratic society, and the focus on systems impact deepens students’ sociopolitical awareness.

Below are two examples of how teachers turned community service learning projects into student-led, non-partisan civics projects:

| **Grade** | **Community Service Project** | **Civics Project** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade 8** | **FOOD DRIVE SERVICE PROJECT**  Students organized a school-wide food drive and got other groups in the community to participate. They were able to collect over 2,000 cans to donate to the local homeless shelter, which was more than the shelter had ever received through a single drive. | **INSTITUTIONALIZING A DISTRICT-WIDE FOOD PANTRY**  Students researched in their biology class how chronic hunger affects the body and its effects on young people in particular. Students advocated to the City and School District for resources and then implemented a School-Based Food Pantry by partnering with the Merrimack Food Bank. |
| **High School** | **FUNDRAISING FOR COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS**  Students developed a concern for the cost of college and lack of access for many of their peers due to such costs.  They held a fundraiser to pay for a fellow student’s college fees. | **ADVOCATING FOR STATE-LEVEL POLICY**  After engaging in a unit in math class on the costs of college, financial aid formulas, and loan interest accrual, students decided to tackle the issue of college affordability. They joined organizations around the state in support of the [Debt Free Future Act S.744/H.1221](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/S744) that would provide free college tuition to all MA residents attending state colleges. |

# **Getting Started with Planning**

**All civics projects provide opportunities for students to engage with the six stages,** however, there are many ways to design the project and different models for how to embed the project within instruction in grade 8 and at the high school level. While civics projects should align to the 2018 History and Social Science Framework, projects can also be interdisciplinary and facilitated across content areas.

This section of the Guidebook is designed to support educators planning projects to consider key decision points related to the planning process.

* **Reminder:** Continue to revisit the key characteristic examples and non-examples and culturally responsive teacher resources from the previous section as you facilitate projects.

## **Grade 8 versus High School: Key Differences and Considerations**

Students will complete two student-led civics projects—one in grade 8 and another in grades 9-12. The civics projects support students as they complete the real work of engaged, informed participants of a democracy by identifying issues and advocating for change in their communities. Leading up to grade 8, students develop content knowledge, both civics and literacy skills, and fluency in History and Social Science Practices, as outlined in the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework. In Grade 8, projects are embedded in a year-long civics course aligned to 2018 Framework. At the high school level, school and/or district leaders, in collaboration with teachers, will need to decide in which required course (or courses) to embed a student-led civics project.

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| **Grade 8** | **High School** |
| Students will have the opportunity to apply their civic knowledge of foundational documents, how and why U.S. government institutions developed, and how government evolved though legislation and court decisions, and how individuals exercise their rights and civic responsibilities.   * Students will **hone their civic skills** with class activities that engage them in critically thinking and problem-solving, and that provide them multiple opportunities to communicate persuasively and work collaboratively. * Students will **apply both civic skills and dispositions** such as respect for others, commitment to equality, logical reasoning, and the ability to consider various perspectives and engage in civil discourse to complete a six-stage civics project. * Students will primarily **focus on the process (six stages) of completing a civics project** and will require significant scaffolding. | Studentsdeepen their knowledge and application of civics skills and dispositions within a national and global context as they take additional courses in U.S. and World History, social sciences, and other disciplines.   * + Students will acquire skills that enable them to **apply a more critical lens to the political, social, and economic context of issues.**   + Students will analyze and **deeply evaluate** political institutions and policies and root causes of issues.   + Students will complete a student-led civics project **with a greater degree of independence, depth, and complexity.** |

## **Considerations for Meaningful Inclusion: English Learners and Students with Disabilities**

All students are expected to complete projects once in grade 8 and once again in high school. Every student brings to civics projects distinct assets and opportunities for growth, and those facilitating projects have a responsibility to ensure that all students are meaningfully included in and have access to projects with appropriate scaffolding and differentiation.

This section includes some best practices and resources for consideration as educators plan for the meaningful inclusion of English Learners and students with disabilities in projects. **It is important to note that these student populations are not homogenous, but rather made up of diverse individuals, each with their own unique identity and rich set of lived experiences.** This means that to create learning environments and experiences that value and empower all students, it is important to recognize each student as a unique and individual learner and acknowledge diverse experiences and identities when planning for project implementation.

The list of best practices and resources that follow is not comprehensive. Rather, they are meant as a starting point to support the planning and implementation of equitable, inclusive, and accessible student-led civics projects that further all students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness.

### **Best Practices: English Learners**

*“English Language Development Standard 5: English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies”*

*-* [*ELD Standards (WIDA), pg. 4.*](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/2012-ELD-Standards.pdf)

*How will you structure and embed opportunities for English Learners to practice all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, writing? Which aspects of language will students practice and develop at each stage of this project?*

As you plan for the meaningful inclusion of English Learners, consider the following best practices:

**KNOW YOUR ENGLISH LEARNERS**

* Become familiar with students’ WIDA levels.
* Understand students’ cultural and linguistic strengths.
* Recognize that students will bring with them a diverse set of experiences with both formal and informal learning.

**NUTURE AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

* Use [WIDA Can Do](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/can-do/descriptors) descriptors.
* Elevate students’ cultural and linguistic strengths in individual and group work.
* Design ways for students to actively contribute to and practice their language development both individually and in project groupwork.

**ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY**

* Set clear goals around key language uses (narrate, inform, explain, argue) throughout the project.
* Scaffold support for facilitating conversations and developing vocabulary/language skills, specifically when engaging with community stakeholders.
* Provide equitable access to tools such as live interpretation, translation devices, and bilingual dictionaries.

**Helpful Resources**

* [The Massachusetts Blueprint for English Learner Success (DESE)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/): Provides a clear vision for supporting EL success, as well as resources for realizing that vision and measuring progress toward realization.
* [Dismantling Barriers for English Language Learners in Middle and High School (Edutopia](https://www.edutopia.org/article/dismantling-barriers-english-language-learners)): Offers a set of equity-focused tips and resources for teachers as they plan for meaningful inclusions of ELs across classroom learning opportunities.
* [Extending English Language Learners' Classroom Interactions Using the Response Protocol (Colorín Colorado)](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/extending-english-language-learners-classroom-interactions-using-response-protocol): Offers classrooms examples and guidance on how to effectively use the response protocol to engage ELs in classroom discussion in affirming and meaningful ways.

### **Best Practices: Students with Disabilities**

*How will you structure and embed opportunities for students with disabilities to practice self-advocacy and self-determination skills?*

As you plan for the equitable inclusion of students with disabilities, consider the following best practices:

**KNOW YOUR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

* Become familiar with student’s IEPs.
* Understand students’ strength and areas of focus.
* Recognize that students will need varying levels of support across project stages based on their strengths and areas of focus.

**NUTURE AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

* Share resources related to disability history and disability advocacy groups when introducing the project and potential project topics to explore.
* Structure and highlight opportunities to practice self-determination and self-advocacy, both when engaging in individual work and in project groupwork.
* Ensure all students, when engaging in project groupwork, share responsibility for building an inclusive and affirming group experience.

**ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY**

* Provide for accommodations according to students’ IEPs, and target skill/competency development during each project stage.
* Scaffold support for developing self-determination and self-advocacy skills, especially when in engaging students in deliberative practices and lobbying influencers to take action.
* Ensure the facilitation of each project stage includes multiple means of learning across the four domains of [Universal Design for Learning Social Studies](http://www.emergingamerica.org/accessing-inquiry/universal-design) (representation, engagement, expressions, cultural considerations). *Note this framework is adapted from* [*CAST’s UDL Framework*](https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl)*.*

**Helpful Resources**

* [Accessing Inquiry](http://www.emergingamerica.org/accessing-inquiry/overview) (Emerging America) This digital clearinghouse of resources offers tools and strategies to support students with disabilities and all learners in learning civics and history.
* [Building Student Engagement in the Special Education Classroom (Right Question Institute)](https://rightquestion.org/resources/student-engagement-special-education-classroom/): This and other [Question Formulation Technique resources](https://rightquestion.org/resources/subject/special-education/) from the Right Question Institute demonstrate methods of engaging all students, across abilities, in shaping questions for civic action.
* [EAD Roadmap History and Civics Extension (Learning Disabilities Association)](https://ldaamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Roadmap-8.0-Educating-for-American-Democracy-Civil-Rights-Extensions-1.pdf): Serves as a companion document to the [*Education for American Democracy Roadmap*](http://educatingforamericandemocracy.org/) and [Pedagogy Companion](https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/pedagogy-companion/). Supports educators in carefully considering accessibility for students with disabilities when planning and implementing civic learning opportunities.

## **Considerations for Examining and Discussing Real-World Issues**

The projects have the potential for students to be exploring and engaging in conversations about topics that are sensitive and controversial. One of the outcomes of the project, as stated in Chapter 296 and the Framework, is that students are “prepared to discuss complex and controversial issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to speak with clarity and respectfulness.”

As students often grapple with issues connected to racism, sexism, ableism, discrimination, and bigotry, it is important to consider how to create classrooms that are brave spaces. The [Anti-Defamation League](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/moving-from-safe-classrooms-to-brave-classrooms#:~:text=A%20brave%20space%20is%20one,so%20with%20care%20and%20compassion.) defines a brave space as “one in which we accept that we will feel uncomfortable and maybe even defensive when exploring issues of bias, injustice and oppression. A brave space is one in which we take risks, doing so with care and compassion.”

**Planning and Reflection Questions**

Consider these planning and reflection questions for building and nurturing brave classrooms spaces:

* *How can I foster a classroom of trust and openness to ensure all students feel supported while exploring real world issues?*
* *What are the guidelines and norms our class has established prior to beginning the projects that can help foster honest, brave, and informed discussions? Which of these might we need to revisit or amend now?*
* *How can I provide opportunities for students to provide feedback, reflect, and check-in one-on-one after difficult discussions?*
* *How can I help my students consider multiple viewpoints and bridging differences in discussion?*

**Resources**

Consider these planning and reflection questions for building and nurturing brave classrooms spaces:

* [*Civil Discourse in the Classroom*](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Civil-Discourse-v2-CoverRedesign-Oct2017.pdf) (Learning for Justice): A curriculum for teaching about civil discourse, both content and skills, that includes several resources and classroom activities for developing students’ capacity to engage in civil discourse.
* [*Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations*](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse.pdf) (Facing History and Ourselves): Guide for educators to support the development of brave classroom space where students engage in respectful conversations about issues that matter most to them and develop their civics identities.
* [*Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students*](https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk) (Learning for Justice): Guide with classroom-ready strategies to plan and to facilitate these conversations with your students.
* [*A Pathway to Racial Literacy: Using the LETS ACT Framework to Teach Controversial Issues*](https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/82/6/pathway-racial-literacy-using-lets-act-framework-teach-controversial-issues) by LaGarrett J. King, Amanda E. Vickery, Genevieve Caffrey in *Social Education* (November/December 2018): Article about how productive classroom conversations about race and other controversial issues develops students’ racial literacies and equips them to be proactive citizens in a democratic society.
* [*Teaching About Controversial Issues: Resource Guide*](https://www.choices.edu/teaching-news-lesson/teaching-about-controversial-issues-a-resource-guide/) (The Choices Program at Brown University): A Guide for educators with resources and pedagogical tools for teaching and facilitating discussions about controversial issues.

## **Project Size: Individual, Group, Class**

Civics projects can be completed at the individual, group, or class level. Per the legislation, “Any student choosing not to participate in a particular group or class-wide project shall be offered the opportunity to develop an individual civics project, with approval by the principal.”

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Size | Benefits | Limitations |
| Individual | - Student autonomy and aligned to personal interest and identity  - Project can be tailored to meet needs of students  - Students tend to be most motivated to complete a topic that is connected their personal interest | - Less opportunity for collaboration and consensus building  - Hands-on support is more individualized  - Students and teachers may be overwhelmed without a clear process for taking action |
| Small Group | - Groups can be made based on topics  - Group topics across class or classes to share resources and streamline  - Opportunity for collaboration  - Hands-on support from teacher in conferencing. Setting goals, facilitating connections is streamlined | - Consensus takes time  - Instruction on norms and collaboration necessary  - Still can be many topics and contacts for teachers |
| Whole Class | - Teachers can focus energy around one topic, especially if they have many classes with projects  - Teachers can take more active role in connecting students with resources and developing an action  - Groups within the whole class can choose different actions | - Consensus takes time and students may not be as invested in the chosen topic  - Teachers need to create and structure tasks to engage all students |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Size | Recommendations for implementation |
| Individual | Teachers serve as a coach/facilitator for the project, providing a structure and format for student to brainstorm topics, conduct research etc. Modeling and exemplars of each step of the process are critical in this format. The challenge of this format is for teachers to provide support without doing the “heavy intellectual lifting” of developing contacts and resources for students. Individualized projects likely work best in smaller classrooms with independent students. |
| Small Group | Small group projects provide a clearer structure for managing the number of projects students complete. Group projects allow students to group themselves around a specific topic which can also help consolidate the resources and contacts they will need for their project (more manageable for teachers). Direct instruction and practice of social skills such as negotiation and compromise are also helpful for this model. The group project model can work well in medium sized classrooms with students who have some familiarity with project-based learning. |
| Whole Class | Whole class projects are highly engaging in that they enlist the whole class in the brainstorming and consensus building process. Once a class selects a topic, the process for gathering research and developing a civic engagement approach is much more streamlined because the class can be subdivided into smaller groups who pursue a specific civic engagement strategy. Teachers can take a much more active role in assisting students with resource and contact development. Whole class projects are a great choice for teachers with limited or no experience teaching civics. |

## **Project Models: Unit, Semester, Modular**

Some educators may choose to design the project using the unit model, with the entire project happening within one unit, where others may chose a semester based model, reserving 1-2 days a week for the projects over the course of a semester, or a modular approach that breaks up the stages across the year. All design models pose benefits and challenges, and educators may wish to consider the following when deciding which will work best in their setting:

* **Connections to the three pillars** (content, practice, and literacy standards): *How can the project be integrated or used to cover content, practice, and literacy standards in the course I teach?*
* **Support and Structure**: *What level of support and structure will my students need to be successful? Which model makes most sense for me, as the educator, in order to provide the best experience for my students?*
* **External factors:** *What other events or factors will I need to consider when deciding how and when to carry out the project? (end of year events, availability of and access to technology, other project-based learning already in place, pace of outside stakeholders and organizations)*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Design Model | Benefits | Limitations |
| **Unit** (end of year or embedded elsewhere) | - Build in skill-building activities prior to unit (backwards design)  - Understanding of student dynamics for deciding grouping/topics  - Easy to create and replicate resources to be used across multiple classrooms  - Flexible scheduling with other content areas | - Requires careful planning to execute within a short amount of time  - Requires refresher lessons on research and structure of government  - Pacing of project may not match stakeholders  - Scheduling around events if at the end of the year |
| **Modular** | - Easy to break up assessment of the project  - Maintaining student interest  - Allows for time between for Stages 5-6 | - Requires careful planning to track and organize student work across multiple stages  - Maintaining student interest |
| **Whole Semester**  (1-2 days a week) | - Allows for time between the Stages and for teachers to assess progress  - Students can get used the norms/expectations of the project and have a routine | - Requires flexibility with already planned content specific instruction  - Requires multiple check-ins to track student work across the semester |

### **Sample Course Maps**

Per the legislation, students complete projects once in grade 8 and once again in high school. This includes ensuring that all students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are meaningfully included in and have access to projects with appropriate modifications/accommodations as defined in their IEPs.

**Included Course Maps Overview:**

* Grade 8 Single Unit
* Grade 8 Modular
* High School: U.S. History 1
* High School: U.S. History II
* Quarter Long Course

Below are sample course maps that demonstrate how the project can be embedded in instruction. It is important to keep in mind that the projects are not an *add-on* or something extra to be done on top of content coverage, but rather an opportunity for students to hone and engage with the content, practice, and literacy standards. Teachers are encouraged to be creative in the ways they incorporate the project into instruction at both the middle and high school level.

*Sample Course Map 1: Grade 8 Single Unit*

This offers a potential scope and sequence for the student-led civics project as a **single unit** located at the end of Grade 8 using approximately **6 weeks of instructional time.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pacing (full year)** | **Unit Name or Topic** |
| 2-3 weeks | Topic 1: Foundations for U.S. political system |
| 5-7 weeks | Topic 2: The development of U.S. Government |
| 4-6 weeks | Topic 3: Institutions of U.S. Government |
| 3-4 weeks | Topic 4: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens |
| 3-4 weeks | Topic 5: Constitution, Amendments and Supreme Court Decision |
| 4-5 weeks | Topic 6: Structure of the MA State and Local Government |
| 3-4 weeks | Topic 7: News/Media Literacy |
| **6 weeks** | **Unit: Student Led Civics Project**   * Week 1: Stages 1-2 * Week 2: Stage 2-3 * Week 3: Stage 4 * Week 4: Stage 5 * Week 5: Stage 5 * Week 6: Stage 5 and 6 |

#### Sample Course Map 2: Grade 8 Modular

This offers a potential scope and sequence for the student-led civics project as **four separate mini-units** across the year, totaling **8-12 weeks.**

* **Tip:** With this pacing model, each stage may require mini-lessons/refreshers of skills.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pacing (full year)** | **Unit Name or Topic** |
| **1-2 weeks** | Unit: Stage 1: Examining Self and Community |
| 3-4 weeks | Topic 4: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens |
| 3-4 weeks | Topic 7: News/Media Literacy |
| **1-2 weeks** | Unit: Stage 2: Identifying an Issue **and** Stage 3: Research and Investigation |
| 2-3 weeks | Topic 1: Foundations for U.S. Political System |
| 5-7 weeks | Topic 2: The development of U.S. Government |
| 4-6 weeks | Topic 3: Institutions of U.S. Government |
| 4-5 week | Topic 6: Structure of the MA state and Local gov |
| **3-4 weeks** | Unit: Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan **and** Stage 5: Taking Action |
| 3-5 weeks | Topic 5: Constitution, Amendments and Supreme Court Decisions |
| **3-4 weeks** | Unit: Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing |

#### Sample Course Map 3: High School: US History I

This offers a potential scope and sequence for the student-led civics project asa **single six-week unit**.

* **Tip:** The content of the unit prior [US1.T4] acts a great connector to the activism of the project.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pacing (semester)** | **Unit Name or Topic** |
| 3-4 weeks | [US1.T1] Origins of the Revolution and the Constitution |
| 2-3 weeks | [US1.T2] Democratization and Expansion |
| 4-6 weeks | [US1.T3] Economic Growth in North, South, and West |
| 2-3 weeks | [US1.T4] Social, Political and Religious Change |
| 6 weeks | Unit: Student-Led Civics Project   * Week 1: Stages 1- 2 * Week 2: Stage 3 * Week 3: Stage 3 * Week 4: Stage 4-5 * Week 5: Stage 5 * Week 6: Stage 6 |
| 5-6 weeks | [US1.T5] Civil War and Reconstruction |
| 3-4 weeks | [US1.T6] Rebuilding the United States: Industry and Immigration |
| 5-6 weeks | [USI.T7] Progressivism and World War I |

#### Sample Course Map 4: High School: US II

This offers a potential scope and sequence for the student-led civics project asa **single six-week unit**.

* **Tip:** The content of the unit prior [USIIT.4] acts a great connector to the activism of the project.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pacing (semester)** | **Unit Name or Topic** |
| 3-4 weeks | [USII.T1] The role of economics in modern United States history |
| 4-5 weeks | [USII.T2] Modernity in the United States: ideologies and economies |
| 6-8 weeks | [USII.T3] Defending democracy: responses to fascism and communism |
| 6-8 weeks | [USII.T4] Defending democracy: The Cold War and civil rights at home |
| 6 weeks | Unit: Student Led Civics Project   * Week 1: Stages 1- 2 * Week 2: Stage 3 * Week 3: Stage 3 * Week 4: Stage 4-5 * Week 5: Stage 5 * Week 6: Stage 6 |
| 5-6 weeks | [USII.T5] United States and globalization |

#### Course Map 5: Quarter Long

This offers a potential scope and sequence for the student-led civics project as **a quarter-long experience** in either grade 8 or high school. This scope and sequence assumes students spend 2 classes per week working on the student-led civics project throughout the quarter. (18 classes total).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pacing (quarter)** | **Project Stage** |
| Week 1 | Stage 1: Examining Self and Community |
| Week 2 | Stage 2: Identifying an Issue |
| Week 3 | Stage 3: Research and Investigation |
| Week 4 | Stage 3: Research and Investigation Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan |
| Week 5 | Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan |
| Weeks 6-7 | Stage 5: Taking Action |
| Week 8 | Stage 5: Taking Action Stage 6: Showcasing and Reflecting |
| Week 9 | Stage 6: Showcasing |

* **Tip:** With this pacing model, each stage may require mini-lessons/refreshers of skills. The model outlined could be useful for embedding projects in an advisory or senior seminar. As a reminder, projects do not need to happen in a history/social science class.

## **Assessing the Projects**

Civics projects are **process-focused,** which can make rubrics a useful formative and summative assessment tool. Both in grade 8 and in high school, assessment of projects should address the extent to which students engage with the process and show progress toward identified learning goals, not only if their project achieved the desired impact. The outcome of the action or the extent to which it actually solves the issue is not what defines success in the student-led projects; rather, what matters is the process. At its core, the project is an opportunity for students to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions by finding an issue that matters to them, researching to understand the root cause of that issue, and trying to do something about it at a systems level.

**Sample Project Assessment Tools**

The following examples include both formative and summative assessment tools for providing constructive feedback on students’ engagement with the process throughout the project. These examples are also included in this Guidebook in the “Facilitating the Six Stages” sections noted in parenthesis below.

* **Example 1:** [**Action Research Reflection**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/126vi2UF-aEMVPe0am4AOoS90_9Jvjv3ppstebki9-hQ/edit) Resource to support student self-reflection, individual and group, throughout the project. [See also *Facilitating the Six Stages, Stage 3*]
* **Example 2:** [**Assessment of Student Inclusion in Civic Engagement Projects**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NdtVHOVmqSPeflCUt8D1D5jnClrhpihz4eukDKbtPPM/edit) (Emerging America):Resource to support student self-reflection related to their contribution toward creating an inclusive classroom and/or small group community.[See also *Facilitating the Six Stages, Stage 4*]
* **Example 3:** [**Communicate and Collaborate Rubric**](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1EknvzL0Y5ph2U72TA1YfsJIW_ioq6Sr4)(Generation Citizen): Useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection as it relates to their group engagement and for formative assessments. [See also *Facilitating the Six Stages, Stage 4*]
* **Example 4:** [**Self-Reflection Rubric**](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ya1RBzgNzFOwN18wovrj6ZzgnQpmQ9Ml/view)(Generation Citizen): Useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection and for formative assessments. [See also *Facilitating the Six Stages, Stage 4*]
* **Example 5:** [**Writing assignment: Persuasive Argument for Our Community Issue**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mz6P7uxg6hLRQ9BlJ84Wmz_rw-wp1rmwutnl5uqqs9Y/edit) (Generation Citizen). Resource for supporting students in crafting a persuasive argument. Useful as an in-class formative assessment. [See also Facilitating the Six Stages, Stage 3]

# **Facilitating the Six Stages**

This section provides guidance and resources for facilitating each of the six stages of student-led civics projects, including an aligned set of sample process goals to guide teacher planning, student learning objectives, and instructional resources specific to each stage.

For each of the six stages, there is list of suggested planning questions/considerations and example student competencies.

* **Connection:** Each sample student competency supports students’ development of one or more of the Framework’s Standards for History and Social Science Practice, as well as the History and Social Science Standards for Literacy.
* **Reminder:** Consider revisiting the resources in these two sections of this document throughout the project planning process to ensure projects are accessible and meaningful to all students at each stage:
  + [Considerations for Meaningful Inclusion: English Learners and Students with Disabilities](#_Considerations_for_Meaningful) (pp. 25 - 27)
  + [Considerations for Examining and Discussions Real-World Issues](#_Considerations_for_Examining) (pg. 28)

We have included a few resources directly below rather than within one of the six stages in this section because they are likely to support facilitation across multiple stages and may be helpful to supporting students working on projects independently or who may need to participate remotely at times.

* [**Civic Action Projects Student Discussions**](https://crfcap.org/mod/hsuforum/view.php?id=320)(Constitutional Rights Foundation)  
  This page provides students with a platform to discuss their civic action topics and projects with others. Using this platform, students can give and receive feedback on action plans
* **[Democratic Knowledge Project](https://www.democraticknowledgeproject.org/)**

This includes a civics curriculum with a digital civics student [workbook](https://www.democraticknowledgeproject.org/civic-project-workbook). The workbook introduces them to various ways for young people to engage in civic life beyond voting, helps them find research and select a topic, provides games and interactive activities, and suggests methods of taking action remotely. It is intended to be largely student-led and self-paced and includes several lesson plans aligned to various stages of the civics projects.

* [**From Reflection to Action: A Choosing to Participate Toolkit**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/reflection-action-choosing-participate-toolkit)(Facing History and Ourselves)This guide contains a number of lesson ideas that facilitate student reflection and informed action. Although the guide is intended for in-person learning, many of the activities can be adapted for synchronous delivery using platforms like Google Docs or Jamboard.

## **Callout icon representing project stage one. Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

***The goal of this stage is for students to develop as comprehensive a list of potential issues as possible.*** Students start by brainstorming the issues and topics that matter to them, their peers, their families, and their communities, and then begin to examine these issues. The issues and topics may range from the hyper-local, like food waste in the cafeteria or trash in a local park, to broad and widespread, like immigration or homelessness. At this stage, every observation is crucial, even if it needs to be further developed or revised; this exploration is all about honoring students’ lived experience and asking them to learn from the experiences of others outside the classroom, which is key to developing their cultural competence.

**Key Planning Questions**

* *How can I model the practice of reflecting on my own identities in relation to race, identity, oppression, and power while encouraging my students to do the same?*
* *How can I model and support acceptance of student self-determination of identity, recognizing that students’ understanding of their identities is often complex and evolving?*
* *How do I invite students to identify issues and themes that are critical to them but might be outside of my own comfort zone? (*[*See Let’s Go There. Pg. 9)*](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e20c70a7802d9509b9aeff2/t/5e66cd4feddd0f57bb759f21/1583795568756/LetsGoThere_Paper_V17.pdf)
* *How will students contact organizations and community stakeholders?*
* *Who do I need to inform when inviting different stakeholders into the building or to a Zoom conversation with my students?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:***Develop a student-led, democratic classroom culture with shared norms that will guide the classroom community’s work together.*

The exploration in Stage 1 builds both the students’ and teachers’ cultural competence. Educators should support students’ discussion of complex and critical issues and affirm students’ identities and experiences as they examine their identities and their communities. For this reason, it is crucial that students feel that the classroom is a brave space to share and have potentially difficult conversations*.*

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How does our classroom reflect a democracy during this process? | Understand core democratic principles and explain how they guide interactions. |
| What are our rights and responsibilities to each other?  How do we model and support acceptance of student self-determination of identity, recognizing that students’ understanding of their identities is often complex and evolving? | Identify and apply norms that guide inclusive and affirming interactions. |

**Related Resources:**

* [**Classroom Constitution**](https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/a-new-set-of-rules) (Learning for Justice) and [**Class Constitution Handout**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VGbdAXb90K5vJvZ8-R3Bw4oEv6YP-dL89DBHLQLzaFg/edit)**:** Teaching strategy for collaborating to establish norms and expectations for the environment members of a learning community want to co-construct.
* [**Contracting**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/contracting#:~:text=Facing%20History%20teachers%20have%20found%20that%20useful%20class,ways%20to%20proceed%20with%20developing%20a%20classroom%20contract.) (Facing History and Ourselves): Teaching strategy for developing classroom norms and expectations that guide the work and interactions of all members of the classroom community.

**Process Goal:** *Explore definitions of community, what communities students feel a part of, and their roles and responsibilities as a community member.*

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is a community? | Define “community”. |
| What communities am I a part of? | Identify the communities to which they belong. |
| What does it mean to be a member of a community? | Identify who and what contributes to their notion of community. |
| What is my role and responsibility in my community? | Identify their role(s) and relationship to others in their community. |

**Related Resources:**

* [**Lesson: What is Community?** (Facing History and Ourselves):](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/identity-and-community/what-community) This lesson guides students through exploring and defining the concept of “community” and their relationship to those they feel they belong. Can be adapted for both grade 8 and 9-12 students.
* [**Democracy and Community**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/democracy-and-community) (Facing History and Ourselves): A quotation and connecting questions to engage students in conversation about what community means to them and its relationship to democracy.
* [**Opinion Continuum**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/barometer-taking-stand-controversial-issues) (Facing History and Ourselves): Teaching strategy where students react to and express their opinions on a variety of statements about the role of government and youth civic engagement.

**Process Goal:** *Identify the assets students’ communities offer, as well as collect and synthesize data from the community about the needs and priorities of others.*

Students can begin this process by examining challenges they are currently experiencing that they feel go unaddressed or are under-addressed, or alternatively, they can take note of valuable work that is already being done in the community to solve problems. Ideally, students are interviewing and surveying a variety of community members to gather a well-rounded understanding of different perspectives.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is an asset? | Define “asset”. |
| What are the assets that my community offers? | Identify and explain the assets their community has to offer. |
| What problems or challenges do people in my community routinely encounter? | Analyze data from community members about their concerns and priorities.  Analyze data from media outlets regarding community issues.  Develop and express their own opinions on community issues verbally and in writing. |

**Related Resources:**

* [**The Advocacy Hourglass**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wwEhI11vm-qWwXO1TQgx6vRkhT41gu7U43XpDnr09XY/edit)  (Generation Citizen): A civic action framework that can guide students’ in selecting and researching an issue and mapping it to current events.
* [**Getting to know the Ten Questions**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/10-questions-young-changemakers/getting-know-10-questions)(Facing History and Ourselves): A lesson plan for introducing students to the [Ten Questions Framework](https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/), a framework for developing students’ civic identity through an examination of issues that matter most to them.
* [**RAN Chart**](http://www.emergingamerica.org/teaching-resources/ran-chart)(Emerging America): A protocol confirming or correcting misconceptions about issues, topics, and ideas students may choose to investigate.
* [**Community Issues Organizer**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/12Brs7k6ibOnqHMve48uTEbqbBccA4oMF1-kIz7RI9No/edit?usp=sharing) (Generation Citizen) and [**Community Interviews Protocol**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ol1_FXi294QBp2HIXXbK_KGHHQp10jGmqNZYg1H_fhM/edit): Handouts for recording notes on community interviews, students own observations of their lived experience, and ideas gleaned from local media.
* [**Community Asset Map**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cvGUli8f6toG7sGV3JD6w4Ccg4W4VDlUs8TUtyCsPPw/edit) and [**My Community Wheel Activity**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GR_3_j9XMNx7A_bcq30aYIpR4k41htF03tfsVFIKB4Q/edit)**:** Resources to guide students in mapping various assets and values they believe their communities have to offer. These assets can be utilized when doing their civics project

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 1 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students effectively explained how a given issue(s) not only matters to them, but others in the larger community by using a variety of sources when exploring the issue.
* Students synthesized data from conducted interviews and surveys with a range of their peers and community members and used strong supporting questions to get a well-rounded understanding of the impact of the issue. There was clear evidence of consideration and exploration of multiple points of view and engagement in dialogue with people whose positions in the world differed from their own.

**Sample Reflection Questions**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

## **Lightbulb icon representing project stage two.Stage 2: Identifying an Issue**

***The goal of this stage is for students to identify a focus issue for their student-led project***. If the project is based on the whole class or small group model, it is important to build consensus on *one* community issue students identified. Consensus is critical for student buy-in to a project and an important concept for students to learn in a civics class. Even if students are pursuing individual projects, building consensus develops collaborative decision-making.

**Key Planning Questions**

* *How can I model the practice of reflecting on my own identities in relation to race, identity, oppression, and power while encouraging my students to do the same?*
* *How do I invite students to identify issues and themes that are critical to them but might be outside of my own comfort zone? (*[*See Let’s Go There, pg. 9*](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e20c70a7802d9509b9aeff2/t/5e66cd4feddd0f57bb759f21/1583795568756/LetsGoThere_Paper_V17.pdf)*)*
* *How can I help all students to gain familiarity with issues and themes that are new to some?*
* *Does my school have any existing programs or structures that can be used as a foundation for conversations focused on civic engagement and systems change? How can those resources be leveraged?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:** *Build consensus on a single issue.*

Consider developing a working definition of “consensus” and differentiating the concept of “consensus” from the concept of “majority rules.”

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| Why might consensus lead to more equitable outcomes and everyone feeling heard?  What is the difference between “consensus” and majority rules? | Develop a working definition of consensus and differentiate the concept of consensus from the concept of “majority rules”. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Consensus Building Lesson Plan**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PKzrlkqguvqyjg3x49AMqt51-gHhqZ_n-xrecxqW7c4/edit) (Generation Citizen): Lesson plan focused on building consensus on one (or a few) issues using a continuum approach.
* [**Consensus Building Reflection Handout:**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e-QPepiQZdIGInHORBHJqbEUu03ZcjhiMAczCRjWx_8/edit) Resource for engaging students in the reflective process as they build consensus.
* [**Discussion protocols**](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tRtgO3jwzu-Gw1Xu4I8-fa33SNMqbNHr/view) (HGSE, Teaching and Learning Lab): Overview of several different discussion protocol useful for facilitating conversations toward the aim of building consensus.

**Process Goal:** *Narrow students’ comprehensive list of community issues to a select few to explore more deeply.*

Consider using ranked-choice voting or another reflective process to select 4-5 potential community issues.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is ranked-choice voting? | Define and apply ranked-choice voting. |
| How does ranked-choice voting balance individual preferences with group preferences? | Use ranked-choice voting as a strategy for identifying a community’s priority issues. |

**Related resources:**

* **Community Issue Ranking Activity**: Students brainstorm a list of community issues narrowing them down to a small list of priorities. [Issue Brainstorm Group Organizer](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FN7Apl50WF4KpKJjVPTnc7qFntGi1D1I/edit)- Consider introducing students to the concept of [Ranked Choice Voting](https://www.fairvote.org/rcv#where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used) and applying it to this process.

**Process Goal:** *Investigate a small number of community issues more deeply.*

Collect facts, statistics, and personal testimonies on 4-5 community issues to debate and vote.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How do we learn more about our community issues? | Identify and apply strategies for engaging in deeper community research. |
| How can we use facts, statistics, and stories to convey the depth and scope of a community issue? | Use facts and statistics to argue for the need to take a deeper look at an issue. |
| What are persuasive techniques and how do we use them to convince others of the importance of a community issue?  How can we hear and respect the perspectives of everyone, even when we disagree? | Identify and practice persuasive techniques to build consensus in a way that provides space for deliberation. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Community Issue Research Group Handout**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LP59F6-VbyzHdZUDlMM8D7798nV_4IjW39-4Mgj3_Ao/edit)**:** Resource for guiding student groups through planning for the research stage of their identified issue.
* [**Pathos, Ethos, Logos Explainer Handout**](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1166/PersuasiveTechniques.pdf): Resource for supporting students in applying persuasive strategies that appeal to emotion and reason and are credible.

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 2 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students respected the ideas and experiences of others in the class and engaged in civil discourse when discussing and selecting an issue, especially those who hold opposing positions.
* Students leveraged facts and statistics from their initial findings in stage 1 to support their choice and consulted information from multiple sources to determine the importance and scope of the issue.
* Students actively listened and participated in whole-class discussions surrounding potential complex and critical community issues.
* Students expressed ideas clearly in collaborative discussions building on others’ ideas and expressing their own.

**Remember to Reflect…**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

## **Book icon representing project stage three.Stage 3: Research and Investigation**

***The goal of this stage is to engage in research to (1) develop common language and knowledge on the issue, including the range of perspectives on the issue, and (2) learn about the possible root causes of the issue.*** This requires students not only conduct research to identify a range of perspectives related to their topic, but also to critically analyze these perspectives to develop their sociopolitical awareness and cultural competence.

To strive for systemic change, students need to be looking for the deepest causes of their issue or topic. There may be many, so this research should be framed in terms of ultimately choosing one. Like Stage 1, students should also not limit themselves to traditional research online and in libraries; rather, they should survey community members and interview community experts in order to gather the most pertinent, localized information on how this issue or topic manifests in the community, whether that means school, school district, city, state, or country, and what can be done about it to create lasting, systemic change.

**Key Planning Questions**

* *How can I ensure that students are using credible information from trusted sources for researching their issues?*
* *Does my school have any existing programs or structures that can be used as a foundation for conversations focused on civic engagement and systems change? How can those resources be leveraged?*
* *How can my students gather information to support their projects outside the traditional means of academic research?*
* *How can I collaborate with my school’s librarian or media specialist, or one in my local community, to support students through the research stage?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:***Understand quality research.*

Examine issues via different types of research (e.g. research studies, case studies, community interviews, personal narrative/experience, etc.), reflecting on the impact and purpose of each type of research.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is research? What types of research do I need to do to better understand my focus issue? | Analyze how different forms of research serve different purposes. |
| How do I do research well? | Understand the research process, including how to identify dominant narratives and marginalized voices and the importance of collecting data from a range of resources and perspectives. |
| Why do we need evidence? How do I identify bias and perspective? | Define bias and explain why evidence from diverse sources and voices is important for creating an action plan and identifying root causes. |

**Process Goal:** *Conduct research.*

Collect research, reflecting on how each specific research point supports understanding of the focus issue.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What does action research look like? | Explain the methods and value of Participatory Action Research, including Youth Participatory Action Research. |
| Where do I go to research my focus issue? How do I research my own community? | Plan/organize an action research plan. |
| What voices and perspectives are missing from my research? | Examine which voices are most present in collected research and address the gaps. |
| What type of data will inform my focus area? | Identify and gather appropriate and relevant evidence to support an argument. |
| Which sources are trustworthy? | Critically examine the collected research. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Participatory Action Research Explainer and Team Organizer**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1I2aGOwKpjtVlx5x0h9PZxMvoCvWGI_cePpkoj7PJ-hk/edit) (Generation Citizen): Tracking document to support students, working in teams, through the Participatory Action Research process.
* [**Action Research Reflections**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/126vi2UF-aEMVPe0am4AOoS90_9Jvjv3ppstebki9-hQ/edit)**:** Handout to support students in reflecting on the research process and their participation in it.
* [**Digital Civics Toolkit**](https://www.digitalcivicstoolkit.org/) (MacArthur Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics): Collection of resources for engaging students digitally in the action research process.
* [**Media Bias Ratings**](https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-ratings) (AllSides): Tool for supporting consumers of digital media to detect hidden bias.
* [**Play NewsFeed Defenders**](https://www.icivics.org/games/newsfeed-defenders) (iCivics): Interactive game for developing students’ capabilities for identifying false reporting and fake social media posts.

**Process Goal:** *Understand and identify systems-level root causes related to the focus issue.*

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is a root cause? Why is it important to identify a root cause? | Define and identify root causes and how they impact a community. |
| What are the differences between individual and systemic root causes? | Explain the difference between individual and systemic root causes and how those relate to a research topic. |
| What “isms” or oppressive systems are connected to the issue? | Identify the “isms” or oppressive systems connected to an issue and explain the connection. |
| What are the root causes of my focus issue? | Synthesize research to identify the root causes of an issue. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Understanding Root Cause Handout**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-TRQE3MFWBhM4LmTEZuyaArwKfFvwHQpzDb6CEXyV-8/edit) (Generation Citizen): Resource to support students in exploring individual and systemic root causes by discussing specific (but brief) examples. Consider using one research article to analyze when doing this all together as practice.

**Process Goal:** *Develop a civic action goal that addresses one of the root causes students have identified.*

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What are the different types of policy goals that lead to effective civic action? | Understand the four types of policy goals. |
| What are the different goals we might take action on? | Develop a list of potential action goals and use a reflective process to narrow the list. |
| How do I develop a theory of change to guide my project development, implementation, and evaluation? | Synthesize collected research and identify a process for making systemic change. |
| How will the “isms” or oppressive systems connected to the issue be addressed? | Identify and write goals that focus on systems-level change. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Understanding Policy Goals Worksheet**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sfyukB3nvtrn6HbtfLaq7inUxt1DIRdtM_Uhad45Kts/edit) (Generation Citizen): Resource for deepening students’ understanding of different types of policy goals using classroom examples.

**Process Goal:** *Develop a persuasive argument by synthesizing research.*

Reflecting on their research, students will be able to link their findings to the root causes and develop a ‘story of self’ or persuasive argument that demonstrates why their issue is important and its root causes.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How do I produce a convincing and persuasive argument to gain support for my issue? | Make a claim and support it using relevant data from multiple sources and diverse perspectives.  Use examples grounded in data to convince others.  Understand and consider the audience when developing your argument. |
| How can I use the evidence and data from my research to build support for this topic? | Articulate an argument for the importance of an issue and related action goals.  Collect and evaluate research from multiple sources and diverse perspectives. |
| How can we ensure that everyone’s voice and perspective is heard in identifying a root cause? | Deliberate toward the aim of identifying a root cause. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Writing Assignment: Persuasive Argument for Our Community Issue**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1mz6P7uxg6hLRQ9BlJ84Wmz_rw-wp1rmwutnl5uqqs9Y/edit) (Generation Citizen): Resource for supporting students in crafting a persuasive argument. Useful as an in-class formative assessment.

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 3 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students asked compelling questions to conduct sustained inquiry and deeper understanding into the root causes of a complex issue. Students’ questions extend beyond superficial background and consider the broader political, economic, and social context of the topic.
* Students utilized and cited information from different types of sources (e.g. case studies, community interviews, personal narrative, statistics, academic journals, newspapers, publications, books, articles) when conducting research.
* Students critically consumed information from multiple sources to build knowledge and was able to distinguish opinion for fact, as well as the credibility, reliability, and accuracy of each source.
* Students generated new questions about the issues as they conducted deeper inquiries.
* Students applied knowledge of the connections between federal, local, and state policies when examining root causes.

**Remember to Reflect…**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

## **Pencil icon representing project stage four.Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

***The goal of this stage is to build an action plan (which students will implement in Stage 5) that includes a variety of tactics to make it more likely that change related to the identified root cause will occur.*** Plans could focus on influencing systems-level change through influencing public opinion on an issue and/or influencing a policy goal. An action should delineate specific people (decision makers and influencers) that students will contact and tactics for making change happen.

**Key Planning Questions**

* *Does my school have any existing programs or structures that can be used as a foundation for conversations focused on civic engagement and systems change? How can those resources be leveraged?*
* *How will I know if plans have a charity-lens, focused on the “helper and the helped” or adopt a social-change lens, focused on community empowerment and sustained solutions?*
* *How can specialists and teachers across departments support student projects?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:** *Define who might help us achieve our goal: decision makers and influencers.*Students learn how to identify decision makers and influencers who hold power to help make change and inform their action plan.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is a decision maker? What is an influencer? How will we know if we leave anyone out in this definition? | Distinguish between decision makers and influencers. |
| Who are considered decision makers and influencers in our community? | Identify key influencers and decision makers in a community who can influence systems change related to specific issues. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Extension Worksheet: Apply your Knowledge to Your Goal!**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qLdZeqG__snM-nBCMP71TnBuxRhWZCGNQHlPh2NgPxo/edit) and [**Target Organizer**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1u2TWje4t0NhqHQLrYBhJ1ze3GTkxmP7laELqr_hLk2A/edit) (Generation Citizen): Resources for helping students apply their learning about decision makers and influences to their project goals.

**Process Goal:** *Define what types of action step tactics can be used to achieve our goal.*

Students consider a wide variety of action tactics in order to evaluate which ones will serve their project best.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What is a tactic?  What are different types of tactics we can use to make a change?  Why do we think certain tactics will be more effective than others? | Work together to identify civic action tactics to create change.  Evaluate, select, and apply civic action tactics to create change. |
| How can we backwards map towards a long-term goal? | Work together to create a strategy for executing a theory of change for civic action. |

**Related resources:**

* [**List of Tactics**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LzUBGdJLnjVA6G0VmGxeL3707BiDq78oIQ9TjDgIobk/edit) (Generation Citizen): Students work together choose a set of tactics to use in student project.

**Process Goal:** *Form and structure action teams and construct an action plan*.

Students collaboratively build an action plan, create a system to measure and evaluate progress, and reflect on the extent to which the team worked cohesively.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What do we need to be good team members? How can we contribute to our team? | Identify and define the roles and responsibilities of team members and group accountability processes. |
| What are strategies for addressing difference or challenges as a team? | Identify and develop collaboration and teamwork skills to drive work forward. |
| How do I work effectively in a group to push forward change in an inclusive and respectful way? | Develop inclusive project management skills that help drive work forward. |
| How do we develop an action plan to effectively guide our work? | Identify key action steps for achieving the action goal, and the logical order in which they should be taken.    Identify the full project timeline and map your action steps to the timeline.    Consider and plan for how to mitigate potential barriers to executing action steps.  Identify a process for monitoring progress toward your action goal. |

* [**School District Readiness to Engage All Learners in Civic Engagement**](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/drive.google.com/file/d/1Z_gyLfipEd6HkInk5LxtlC7J64k1Lq9r/view__;!!CUhgQOZqV7M!mS4lIlHEJ2QXWsqOHpUGbvbaTaKi53fmx0ceteAw795sgA0JsNCZEH9F-Rhm5Er9X0yjAXsbmBG_prpFXcskeaWmxGSZrHA$) (Emerging America). A resource to support schools in assessing how well its culture and policies support inclusion and to identify and discuss priorities and means for improvement.
* [**Communicate and Collaborate Rubric**](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1EknvzL0Y5ph2U72TA1YfsJIW_ioq6Sr4)(Generation Citizen): Useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection as it relates to their group engagement and for formative assessments.
* [**Self-Reflection Rubric**](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ya1RBzgNzFOwN18wovrj6ZzgnQpmQ9Ml) (Generation Citizen): Useful tool for encouraging student self-reflection and for formative assessments.

**Process Goal:** *Formulate asks to make during action.*

Students develop a persuasive “ask” and learn how to make their case for a particular policy or initiative.To effectively attempt to convince influencers and decision makers to work with them or support their ideas, studentswill need to develop concrete “asks.”

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| What makes a request persuasive? | Develop and practice making persuasive arguments related to action goals. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Developing an Ask Worksheet**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11NHiU6fuv4rYj85ConKqcE4T5--bVOJ8T7AAiA1-Rh4/edit) (Generation Citizen): Graphic organizer to help students draft persuasive “asks” aligned to their project goal.

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 4 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students applied knowledge of the connections between federal, local, and state policies when identifying the root cause and developing a theory of action and when identifying decision makers.
* Students drew evidence from multiple sources to support their rationale regarding their goals and theory of action. Students synthesized their findings from stage three and incorporated this evidence to articulate a clear root cause and the corresponding potential tactics for change.
* Students thoughtfully identified which leaders were the decision makers and influencers directly connected to their issue and action plan (i.e. the sponsor for a bill they want to support, or the chair of a budget committee who determines funding related to their cause).

**Remember to Reflect…**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

## **Blue arrow icon representing project stage five.Stage 5: Taking Action**

***The goal of this stage is to act on the tactics students listed in their action plan – to move beyond the walls of the classroom and exercise their voices***. This is the stage that will be the most unique to each project, depending on the choices students make along the way. It is important to note that this stage requires a variety of logistical decisions from the teacher, many of which are reflected in the key planning questions below.

**Key Planning Questions**

* *How will I support and monitor student communication with the community?* 
  + *Will students be making phone calls on their own personal devices and sending emails directly from their school email accounts?*
  + *What routines and expectations need to be put in place for everyone’s safety and success?*
  + *What kinds of communication with administration and district leadership need to happen before students begin?*
* *How will students build collaboration and team working skills?*
* *What knowledge and skills will I assess throughout the action taking process and what backwards mapping is necessary?*
* *How can I be sure all my students feel and are safe while they take action?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:** *Gain support from influencers and convince them to act.*

Students will work to reach out to and meet with influencers and decision makers and will create materials (surveys, data summaries, memos, op-eds, proposals) that can help try to convince influencers and decision makers to support their goals.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How do I bring together people and organizations in my community to support my issue? | Develop material and present persuasive arguments supporting an action goal. |
| How do I invite influencers and decision makers to have a conversation and take action on the issue? | Contact and communicate effectively with civic leaders who hold power to influence or take action on an issue.  *The following sample goals are adapted from the* [*speaking and listening standards for grades 6-12*](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/ela/2017-06.pdf)*:*   * Initiate and participate in collaborative discussions with civic leaders, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. * Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Tactic Tips: Rallying Support**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18TVV6ViDCVMsoHqTcxfXzfcBMQXbH6c2DgTUrziM28E/edit) (Generation Citizen): Tips for conducting various types of outreach for gaining support from influencers.
* [**Tactic Tips: Lobbying Decision Makers**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SsANqvY5DkEjiXzJNzh3FnWYaIytPJ8xX0ia1Gbf79M/edit)(Generation Citizen): Tips for engaging with decisions makers in myriad ways and convincing them to act.

**Process Goal (if a group project):** *Work effectively in groups to enact their action plan*.

Review, select, and implement strategies help students build their teamwork skills (e.g. group work logs, reflective assignments).

* **Tip:** If doing a group project, use the aforementioned process goal to build on the Stage 4 process goal “***Form and structure action teams******and construct an action plan*”** (pp. 49-50).Revisit and consider reusing or adapting some of the guiding questions, student learning objectives, and resources from this section.

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 5 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students used their constitutionally guaranteed rights to use a variety of tactics in order to target their root causes, falling into three categories: developing our argument and plan, rallying support, or influencing decision makers.
* Students clearly communicated their claims across a variety of media.
* Students used the appropriate political process and avenues to communicate with elected officials, representatives, and civic leaders.
* Students worked collaboratively to present the argument for a call to action logically, persuasively, and effectively using valid evidence.

**Remember to Reflect…**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

## **Lamp and journal icon representing project stage six.Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing**

***The goal of this stage is to allow students to celebrate, showcase, and reflect on their learning.*** While students should be reflecting on individual growth and project success throughout the six stages, a student-led civics project should end with a final, summative reflection and work showcase. Such a showcase is not only the perfect opportunity for assessment; it is also a best practice of project-based learning that supports student pride and ownership in their work. It is crucial for students to showcase and reflect on the action that did (or maybe did not) happen during the project in order to reach larger conclusions about civic engagement and what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. By reflecting on what they’ve learned, what they’ve accomplished, and how they’ve grown, students develop the dispositions necessary to become changemakers.

* **Reminder:** Project success should not be defined by a policy goal being achieved--change takes time! For example, success may be holding a meeting with a decision maker or rallying widespread community support so that work can continue.
* **Tip:** Consider reviewing these resources before co-planning your students’ civics showcase with them: [Planning a Civics Showcase](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jRexn2RkNmEfnT-ROaOg-SwVeL0IHQhXQT9MErQ8HUU/edit?ts=5cd1832f) (Generation Citizen) and ["10 Reasons to Send Student Work Out into the World"](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/15/learning/writing-for-audience-beyond-teacher.html) (*New York Times*).

**Key Planning Question**

* *How will our civics showcase of student work signal to students that their civic contributions during the project are valuable?*

**Example Process Goals**

**Process Goal:** *Reflect on individual growth.*

Students reflect on the individual growth of their civic advocacy skills throughout the action civics project. Students should identify both strengths and areas for future growth.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How did the six stages of an action civics project impact your participation and engagement? | Reflect on individual growth in civic knowledge, skills, and values.  Reflect on individual growth in developing advocacy skills. |

**Related resources:**

* [**Big Paper: Silent Conversations**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/big-paper-silent-conversation) (Facing History and Ourselves): Teaching strategy where students can have a silent conversation about how they personally grew throughout the project including the skills, knowledge and dispositions they gained.
* [**Zones of Comfort, Risk, and Danger for Youth Engagement**](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/zones-of-comfort-risk-and-danger-for-youth-engagement/) (School Reform Initiative): Protocol where students can reflect on when they left their comfort zone or stayed within it during the implementation of their civic action project. Consider using this with the [Zones of Comfort Student Activity Sheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1niKfb2pYuY8RH1odEwVc8R1Vn6BFMnwBzUR7d9cnhFc/edit?usp=sharing).

**Process Goal:** *Analyze collective growth and understanding.*

Students will analyze the impact of collaborating with peers and experts in the field throughout the action civics projects.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How do you think information influences a person’s understanding and perspectives? | Reflect on what has influenced their understanding and perspectives and then apply that to thinking about others. |
| How did your group’s collaboration change throughout the action civics projects?  How can collaborating with peers impact your understanding and civic engagement? | Analyze collective growth and understanding. |
| How did your group ensure that everyone’s voices were heard and honored? | Reflect on contracted norms and processes for ensuring an inclusive culture and adherence to them. |

**Related resources:**

* [Reflective Discussion Circles](https://www.socialstudies.org/publications/ssyl/march-april2019/reflective-discussion-circles-method-for-promoting-civic-engagement) (M. McGriff and S. Clemons, [Social Studies and the Young Learner March/April 2019](https://www.socialstudies.org/social-studies-and-young-learner/31/4)): Students can use this protocol throughout the process to reflect on how they are progressing together as a group ([Reflective Discussion Activity Sheet](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_AqgImdEfmf_L_wvhZ71SZlFVRasZlgU/view?usp=sharing))
* [Compass Points](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/compass-points-north-south-east-and-west-for-youth-engagement/) (School Reform Initiative): Students can reflect on their leadership abilities and tendencies in order to become better teammates in the process

**Process Goal:** *Apply advocacy skills beyond the classroom.*

Students will determine strategies for applying advocacy skills beyond the classroom to showcase their work and to continue their civic engagement with their local community.

The table below provides some potential guiding questions and aligned student goals related to this process goal.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Potential Guiding Questions** | **Sample Student Learning Goals:** *Students will be able to-* |
| How do advocacy skills support your civic engagement beyond the classroom?  How will you utilize your civic advocacy skills beyond the classroom? | Determine the application of advocacy skills beyond the classroom. |
| How does the presentation of your information impact your audience’s understanding of your topic? | Offer opportunities for public input and feedback. |
| How can we share our work and receive feedback from the public to better our civic action projects? | Communicate information in a clear and concise fashion orally.  Represent information visually (through text, images, graphics) that communicate key learnings. |

**Example Student Competencies**

These are some of the competencies Stage 6 is designed to develop. Educators may wish to include these competencies in rubrics they use for assessing student engagement in the project process.

* Students identified the extent to which their action plan was effective and could clearly determine and evaluate areas of success and growth.
* Students effectively explained their reasoning behind each action they took and made clear connections back to previous stages of the project.
* Students can reflect and provide evidence of how they expressed their voice and advocated for their ideas in group work, class work and beyond the classroom.

**Remember to Reflect…**

* How did my execution of this stage further students’ academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness?
* Thinking about my response to the previous question, what do I want to:
  + **Stop** doing?
  + **Start** doing?
  + **Continue** doing?

# **Project Examples: Topics and Sample Goals**

The following examples of student-led civics projects were facilitated by educators and led by students in Massachusetts in collaboration with Generation Citizen and The Democratic Knowledge Project of Harvard University’s Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics.

## **Focus Issue: Mental Health (Grade 8 Example)**

Students at a middle school in Lynn created a goal of increasing the number of social workers at all schools across their district in order to improve student mental health throughout their city. Through their research, they found that the ideal clinical ratio of students to social workers in a school is 250:1. The ratio in their middle school was 1400:1. They scheduled a meeting with their superintendent during which they shared their research, argued their case, and made their request: enough money in the school budget to increase the number of social workers at each school in Lynn by a minimum of 1. The superintendent did some quick math and delivered some unfortunate news: that ask was simply too expensive to put in the budget this year. He provided an excellent explanation of the challenges and tensions of creating a budget, and then made them a promise. He promised that his budget would include a radical increase in funding for student mental health, including a number of social workers (though not quite enough for one per school), and that he would do so every year until they reached the clinical ideal. Hopefully by the time they, currently in the 8th grade, graduated from high school, they would be there. Sure enough, his ambitious budget does include funding for more social workers, and the local paper has made a point of highlighting this fact.

**Additional Sample Actions and GOALS related to *mental health:***

* Advocate for the City to improve its website and/or make a user-friendly app that allows young people to easily search for and find free mental health services near them.
* Introduce and sustain a student-run school program designed to educate the student body on mental health issues.
* Increased funding in the state budget for suicide prevention line item 4513-1026 to support suicide awareness and prevention training in schools.

## **Focus Issue: Education (High School Example)**

Ninth grade students at a school in Boston have frequently been told that physical education classes were impossible to implement because the school had no gym. After diligent research, they found out that some schools in Boston rent space at local YMCAs and similar facilities. The students took action and advocated for H.4127: An Act to Promote Quality Physical Education for all schools. They reached out to their State Senator, BPS Health and Wellness Department, as well as conducted email campaigns, surveys, and petitions. Their teacher states, “They learned that civics isn't just something you learn about in school, it is something you participate in in the real world.”

**Additional Sample Actions and GOALS related *to education:***

* Increase the funding to extracurricular opportunities in the school district.
* Implement a cultural competency curriculum for administrators and teachers in the school district.
* Create a council that provides student input for the Advisory curriculum.
* Create a committee to plan programming centering on issues of immigration and continue outreach and advocacy to immigrant communities within the school.

## **Focus Issue: Vaping (Grade 8 Example)**

Eighth grade students at a school in Lowell were discussing substance abuse as a potential issue to tackle in their civics project, given the vaping ads that targeted them on social media (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat). This issue resonated with the entire class, and so they took on an ambitious goal of proposing new e-cigarette and vaping legislation at the state level. The class spent months on research and outreach to file a bill limiting the sale of flavored vaping products statewide to adult-only stores. Never relenting, the students continued to work on their project into the spring even beyond the formal end of the program-- and their commitment paid off. With the help of a state legislator, legislation based on this project, HD.1484, officially arrived at the MA State House in late April.

**Additional Sample Actions and GOALS related to *vaping*:**

* Create a peer education program: Grade 8 students teach Grade 6 students about dangers of vaping.
* Advocate for targeted messaging / advertising to increase awareness of the health risks of vaping among middle school students.
* Increase education in Health and Wellness classes focused on teen vaping
* Advocate for Bill H.2654: An act to minimize youth vaping and support addiction prevention services.
* Advocate to create a meaningful drug prevention program in the middle and high school grades.
* Introduce anti-tobacco/drug use curriculum across all middle schools.
* Implement a vape "Buy Back" Program in the town.
* Introduce a state bill that bans the selling of flavored tobacco in under-21 stores targeted at children.

## **Focus Issue: Transportation (Grade 8 Example)**

Eighth graders at a Somerville school worked to address the unreliable bus system that affects how students get to and from school, extracurricular-activities, and work. After conducting research, the class planned and hosted a community meeting with MBTA employees at their local library to discuss the issue further. Students advocated for more community input, especially from students, on decisions for new busing policies and bus scheduling. Currently, students are working to collaborate with MBTA employees to advocate for scheduling policies that would account for Somerville schools’ dismissal times and promote bus usage across the city.

## **Additional Sample Actions and Goals related to OTHER specific topics:**

**Bullying:**

* Amend school policy to create an anonymous reporting form for instances of bullying.
* Advocate for inclusion of content related to bullying, cyberbullying, prevention, and response in the mandatory middle school curriculum.

**Climate Change/Environment:**

* Advocate for solar energy sites throughout the city.
* Advocate for building code policy that addresses carbon emissions.
* Pass a city ordinance to eliminate plastic bags.

**Homelessness:**

* Support homeless shelters in the area by advocating for the coordination of donations from local supermarkets and restaurants throughout the city.
* Advocate for more of district budget to be allocated towards cold weather materials for students in need.
* Advocate for the passage of S.2043: An Act to provide identification to homeless youth and families.
* Increase funding for job training centers in the city.

## **Project Examples: Case Studies**

The following examples of student-led civics projects were facilitated by educators and led by students in Massachusetts in collaboration with Generation Citizen and The Democratic Knowledge Project of Harvard University’s Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics.

In each case, an educator describes the civics projects and their steps at each stage. These cases provide examples of implementing student-led civics projects within the classroom and are intended to facilitate deeper discussion among educators about the process of integrating student-led civics projects in the classroom. They are not intended to be exemplars or prescriptive.

**As you read each case study, consider the following guiding questions:**

* How did this teacher facilitate each of the six stages of student-led civics projects?
* To what extent are the six stages and defining characteristics represented in each project?
* How did this project support students in deepening their academic achievement, critical consciousness, sociopolitical awareness?

**Examining Case Studies**

If possible, consider examining the case studies that follow with colleagues who are also planning and implementing civics projects. The sample process and protocols below are suggestions for a few ways to consider using these case studies to facilitate group learning.

* **Note:** The suggested protocols can also be used to support individual reading and reflection of the case studies.
* **Tip:** Consider using one or more of the suggested protocols with your students to guide them through a closer examination of resources they engage with during the project process.

**Suggested Process for Groups**

* **Step 1: Launch—**Divide the group and assign each group one or more case studies to review.
* **Step 2: Read—**While in groups, provide time to read and annotate the case study to identify key concepts or questions to share with the small group.
* **Step 3: Discuss—**Consider using one of the protocols below to facilitate conversations between participants.

**Suggested Protocols**

* [3 Levels of Text Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/3_levels_text_0.pdf) (adapted, National School Reform Faculty)
  + - **LEVEL 1:** Read aloud the phrase or sentence that you have selected.
    - **LEVEL 2:** Share your thoughts about the brief selection *(interpretation, connections, past experiences, etc.).*
    - **LEVEL 3:** Share what you see as the implications to your classroom instruction.
  + [Connect, Extend, Challenge](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/connect-extend-challenge) (Facing History and Ourselves)
    - Individually or in small groups identify a case study and use the Connect, Extend, Challenge strategy to examine and deepen your understanding of the process of planning and implementing a student-led civic action project.
    - Consider using the following the Connect-Extend-Challenge questions:
      * **Connect:** How do the ideas and information in this case study connect to what you already knew about planning and implementing student-led civic action projects?
      * **Extend:** How does this case study extend or broaden your thinking about planning and implementing student-led civic action projects?
      * **Challenge:** How does this case study challenge or complicate your understanding of what it means to plan and implement a student-led civics project? What new questions does it raise for you?
* [Character Charts Protocol](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/character-charts) (Facing History and Ourselves)
  + - Individually or in small groups complete a character chart to analyze the roles and responsibilities of different participants during each stage of the civics project.
    - Make a copy of and use the [Case Study Analysis: Roles & Responsibilities Chart](https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1M3kkdAZ3n_tRaWj1DEuMgQah283h6ADdAyrDrJc8hhs/copy?pli=1) (Google Doc) to take notes as you read and discuss participants’ roles and responsibilities.

### **Case Study A: Six Stages Reflection (Grade 8)**

***Context:*** *This is a six-week-long unit that comes at the end of a year-long civics curriculum for Grade 8. By the time students start the unit, they have covered the core topics in the History and Social Science Framework. As the last unit, the civics project guides students to leverage the skills and knowledge learned from the prior units to implement civic action projects. Students explore a range of civic action in which they can engage. They tap into whatever speaks to their hearts and minds, such as their personal hobbies and interests, family, or friend groups. Our inquiry was guided by the* [*Ten Questions for Changemakers Framework*](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/10-questions-young-changemakers/getting-know-10-questions)*, developed by the Democratic Knowledge Project at Harvard University. This unit helps students find their civic voice and hone it to achieve their goal. Students learn the practices of democratic coordination and political institutions, while reinforcing media literacy skills to increase access to networks, opportunities to participate, and other forms of social capital that promote civic agency.*

**Prior to the Project**

The first step I took was to develop a clear scope and sequence for the unit and the desired outcome. I worked closely with my district coach, Harvard University coordinator, library media specialist, and department head to achieve this goal. We met weekly for about 2 months before the project began. Then, I met with my principal and library media specialist, to go over the unit and identify anticipated outcomes and pitfalls. My principal was the first person to share the project publicly with families through our school newsletter. The weekly newsletter informs parents of the upcoming curriculum, important events, and other relevant information. The next step was to notify families directly of the upcoming project, and it was first made during our spring parent-teacher conferences. After speaking with families about their students’ progress through the year, I showed them an overview of the project and received overwhelmingly positive comments. I informed parents who were not able to attend via email or phone of this upcoming civic action project. The next step was to notify and involve central administration and local politicians about the project. I notified multiple people to prepare them for the upcoming contact they were going to receive from students. I specifically contacted the mayor's liaison on education to involve the mayor's office in the process. The mayor was the most contacted person during this project by my students. They spoke on the phone to numerous students and responded to every email. My district coach and department head presented an overview of the project at a school committee meeting to inform them. The school committee was the second most contacted group of public officials. Lastly, I set up a classroom period for the city's head of participatory budgeting to come in and present to the students. Many students then submitted budget proposals to the city as part of their project.

The use of social media was central to many of the projects. I worked closely with my library media specialist to develop a process for how to use these platforms effectively. Our district is developing a framework for how to best utilize these social media platforms within a classroom structure. For example, social media accounts were required to stay private until they were checked by a teacher, and any new post had to get teacher approval before being made public.

**Stage 1 and 2: Examining Self and Civic Identity/Identifying and Issue**

Students needed to move from identification of their own personal passions and commitments to an understanding of the issue that also connects to the commitments and interests of others. The goal for this stage is to help students formulate an issue that not only matters to them but that also is important to a broader community. Students working in groups had to achieve consensus on project definition. I took the lead in setting up project groups, basing them on the student interests previously submitted via the topic selection form. I took peer relationships, as well as students’ interests, into consideration for group formation. To build class excitement, I had a ceremony to announce groups. When groups were made, students got together and decided their shared topic, gathered consensus as a group, built on initial research, and worked on refining their message for the public.

**Stage 3: Researching**

Once they were in groups and had refined their topic area, students needed to do a deeper research dive. We are a 1:1 to classroom so the students are able to do online research in class. I prepared them to judge the reliability of their sources, and students set up a reliable source list and bibliography. Finally, many students are able to build on research work they have already done on their issue in the immediately preceding unit of the curriculum in which students write a research editorial. To help students consider divergent perspectives*,* I used an issues and controversies database. Students needed this deeper research investigation to prepare for their strategic planning around their action project. Their research covered not only their subject area of interest but also tools and strategies they might use for achieving impact in relation to their issue. For instance, students identified target audiences that they wanted to reach out to and explored the pros and cons of using online tools (see potential risks involved in their participation online).

**Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

The first and perhaps most important step was that they needed to make a decision about whether they would aim to influence public opinion or influence a policy change. Students gave forethought to what type of project (public opinion/policy/both) they might want to pursue. A great moment of success for me during this unit was hearing the conversations students were having. There was real discussion about whether they thought changing public opinion or changing laws was more important, about why they did or did not think that art could play a role in social change, and about why some felt that they could add more value in one over the others. I felt this aspect of the projects was able to ground students in making deep connections between their issue, theory of change, and proposed action(s). Finally, they took time to document their personal choice and related theory of change. This was a great foundation to start the planning and implementation phases of the project. To guide the students in this planning work, and also to be able to assess their project in relation to the quality of their process and planning, we created the planning and implementation sheet. This was a spreadsheet that each group used to assign tasks, link their documents, and record their accomplishments. I encouraged students to plan multiple components to their projects. I also offered youth-friendly templates for letter writing, surveys, phone calls, petitioning, policy proposals, public service announcements, proclamations, etc.

**Stage 5: Taking Action**

I developed another essential document. This was the individual check-in document that acted as an exit ticket for each class. This was a daily assignment throughout the implementation phase of the unit. The key difference with this document from the group planning sheet was the check-in was individual, meaning only the student filling it out and I would see it. Students used this as a way to tell me if there were any issues with the content of the project or within their group dynamics. The check-in allowed me to troubleshoot some group issues and keep the projects on track.  To implement their plans, students made use of various on and offline resources to boost their civic action. Students wrote to the school board; they attended participatory budget meetings. They targeted audiences and tracked their impact on them. They recorded all of these action steps in their planning and implementation spreadsheet and check-in document. The most challenging moments were definitely when students were using programs or social media platforms that I had no background in or real knowledge of. There are always evolving forms of communication and expression that young people are familiar with that I am not.

**Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing**

To support the process of reflection and documentation, I asked the students to compile all these components into a portfolio with a presentation element. While the completion of the civic action was the most important deliverable of the project, it was important that they report to their classmates on what they had done. For this they needed a portfolio, including a civic action portfolio reflection assignment. Among other things, they refer back to the theory of change that they selected. It is important, though, that this portfolio documents the civic action they have undertaken rather than being a research presentation about an issue area. For this 8th Grade project, my biggest goal was to build self confidence in young people as changemakers. At the beginning of the unit, most students claimed they felt little power to make change on issues that mattered to them most. At the end of the unit, I gave them an informal survey, and the great majority of students felt they had increased their capacity to be civic actors.

### **Case Study B: Youth Vaping (Grade 8)**

***Context:*** *This project is a three-month unit (approximately 20-30 lessons) and was completed in an eighth grade class as a component of the civics course. This student-led civics project used the* [*Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework*](https://generationcitizen.org/our-approach/framework-for-action/) *to guide the process.*

**Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

We began the year with a cross-curricular activity where students examine the role of children during the Children's March in Birmingham, as part of an informational text unit. They read a text entitled *We’ve Got a Job,* as well as additional primary and secondary source material, listened to oral testimonies, and completed a writing piece (ex: standards RI.3 and RI.9). This introductory unit demonstrated that children are changemakers and have the power to positively impact their community, and society.

We then examined a large map of our city and students identified which neighborhoods they live in. We marked school locations, as well as significant features (main parks, movie theater, train station, downtown, etc.). We also looked at an overview of the history of our city, including the waves of various groups that have arrived since the 1840s, as well as current demographics. This was helpful to orient 8th graders in our citywide school.

Next, students work independently, then in pairs and table teams to brainstorm problems and opportunities they saw in our school(s), neighborhoods, and city. These issues were recorded. For homework (given 4-5 nights to complete, including a weekend), students then interviewed 3-4 community members about problems and opportunities they saw in the community. They were asked to mix it up, speaking with adults, family, neighbors, and peers who are not in our class. All of the issues were then recorded on large posters around the room labeled “Observations,” “Media,” and “Interviews.” We typically gather 50-60 issues per class.

**Stage 2: Identifying a Community Issue**

In timed intervals, students rotated in small teams to the poster boards. Each team had different color markers, and they reviewed and discussed the various issues listed on each board. As a group they put a check mark next to their favorite four on each poster board. After one round, the groups visited each board one more time and put a check mark next to their favorite two (note: they could add check marks to ones they’d already checked). At the end of this process, we narrowed down our options by identifying the ten with the most checks out of all three of the poster boards. For the next class, I put the top ten topics on an anonymous ballot, and each student was given one as they entered. Students selected their top two and dropped it in our ballot box. Once all were submitted, we compiled the results and identified our top four overall.

From this point, we projected the top four in a grind on the smartboard and students rotated up in small groups, with each student placing a post-it in each of their top two. We then created an opinion continuum for each of our top two issues. Each took about 15 minutes. Students were asked to consider each topic independently as a focus issue for its potential as a class civics project, not in comparison with the other issue. Students lined up, from “not very interested in this topic and not excited about it” to “I love this topic and want to work on it.” Students then had opportunities to engage one another along the line, advocating for or against each issue. Students were reminded ahead of time to focus on the issues, and that we are all on the same team working to find the best possible issue for our class. Students who are not interested in a specific issue are encouraged to think about ways the issue could become more appealing to them, and to advocate for that. An example of this is “I would be more interested in working on homelessness as our issue if we could focus on children or veterans.”

For the purpose of this case study, I will focus on a class that chose youth vaping as their focus issue. Many of our 8th graders recognize this as an important current issue and it has become more of a concern in our school this year.

**Stage 3: Researching and Investigating**

We began our guided research phase with list of 10 reputable sources and reports. A sample includes fda.gov, mass.gov, nih.gov, makesmokinghistory.org, thetruth.org, and lung.org. Students began their research in class with a simple research template. Two to three students focused on each source and looked for facts and statistics that could help us better understand the issue of youth vaping. We also had a large poster board on an easel for students to write a statistic or fact they thought was particularly noteworthy, along with the source. Students then came up with a few possible class goals related to what they perceived as root causes.

We then hosted several guest speakers. First, a D.A.R.E. officer came out to speak with our 7th and 8th graders. We then arranged for a representative from the city’s health department to serve as a guest speaker and discuss vaping with the class. She was more of an expert on substance abuse but did provide some information on vaping. We had additional questions and arranged for an expert on youth vaping from a community partner to visit our classroom. Through conducting online research and speaking with several experts, especially our final visitor from a community partner, our students had a lot to consider. They also shared the root causes we identified and related class goals with our final guest speaker, and she helped us identify the best avenues for our project.

**Step 4: Developing an Action Plan**

The class pursued two different avenues for the project, and both focused on legislation. Our research revealed that while the FDA had classified youth vaping as an epidemic, there was no concerted effort at the state level to provide youth vaping prevention training in schools. Budget seemed to be a significant concern, and our research also determined that the last major tax on traditional tobacco products went into effect in 2013, long before youth vaping exploded. The other concern students had was access to flavored vape products, and marketing to minors. Students discovered that vape packaging and flavors mimic candy and characters children are familiar with, and they are sold in convenience stores and gas stations where older siblings and friends can easily purchase them. Students then looked at a list of potential tactics to consider and they developed a multi-point action plan to address their two primary goals: (1) Increase taxes on vape products and use additional tax revenue to pay for youth prevention / education programs; (2) Restrict the sale of flavored vape products to adult-only establishments (smoke shops) across the state.

**Step 5: Taking Action**

Students identified a proposed tax bill for tobacco that had been held up in Ways and Means Committee, and they drafted call scripts to encourage legislators to add wording to the bill to cover vape products. They also wanted to require a percentage of this additional tax revenue to be set aside for youth vaping prevention programs, and they wanted to have it moved to the floor for a vote. My students then set up a phone bank and reached out to all 30+ members of the MA House Ways and Means Committee. They also drafted an email script with the same information and followed up each call with an email. My students received responses from five representatives within a week, and they then followed up with another round of calls and emails to those they had not heard from after a few weeks. Students also worked with their representative and House counsel to draft a state bill modeled on local ordinances to restrict the sale of flavored vape products. Through research they had discovered 115 of the 351 cities and towns in our state already restrict the sale of flavored vape products, so they wanted to capitalize on the widespread support and get these products out of gas stations and convenience stores where children see and have access to them, and into adult only smoke shops.

Students also created a petition and collected over 200 adult signatures at our school’s open house night. Each student also took a petition page home and collected additional signatures from family and neighbors. A small team of students then met with our school principal, our local “decision maker,” to share what they had learned about the dangers of youth vaping and arrange to lead classroom presentations in grades 5-7. With permission granted, my students then created 20-minute presentations and led health classes on the dangers of vaping to over 150 students across six classes. This included a student survey they created to collect more information on youth access to vape products. They also created PSA videos on the dangers of youth vaping, including role playing and interviews, and they uploaded this to our school website. Several students also drafted op-eds and shared them with our local newspaper.

**Step 6: Reflection and Showcasing**

Overall, my students demonstrated a level of investment that was off the charts. Many have talked about wanting to be involved in politics and community organizations. Rather than just see themselves as voters, several have expressed interest in becoming an elected official. This is particularly important in our community where some neighborhoods turn out at less than 20% for local elections.

My students developed content knowledge as well as skills that will benefit them in other classes and in the future. They worked together, examined issues critically, learned from experts and one another, made calls and spoke to people in power, and learned how to present their ideas in formal presentations. Most importantly, they gained confidence and understand they have the power to make a difference in our community, and beyond. They won’t just sit back and complain or wait for other people to address issues. They are real civic actors at 13 and 14 years old. Several students did find it challenging to move away from the traditional teacher led model, and one solution was to assign specific tasks to those students in order to help them contribute to the class project.

After our Civics Day presentations at the State House, and receiving recognition for their projects, my students continued to work on their goals and reach out to elected officials. The tax bill they advocated for did not pass but they identified a new version of the bill, which was more in line with their primary goal of providing youth prevention programs. They also continued to work with our representative and now have their own bill filed in the House to restrict the sale of flavored vape products across our state. This is currently in committee and is receiving a lot of positive attention, and it is heading to a hearing later this session. Although it has a long way to go, we are cautiously optimistic we will be one of the first 8th grade classes to draft and pass a piece of statewide legislation. Six months after Civics Day we revisit from time to time and they are still going strong. My students recently made another round of advocacy calls to elected officials, and they have been interviewed on television and by a regional newspaper. They have also presented at a school committee meeting and at our district's citywide parent resource fair to inform children and families about the dangers of youth vaping.

### **Case Study C: Independent Study (High School)**

***Context*:** *At this school, the high school senior independent project is a semester-long project in an area of the student’s choosing. Each student has a supervisory teacher with disciplinary expertise in the area of the student’s project.*

**Prior to the Project**

For the last few years I have been developing skills at supporting action civics projects, in particular by incorporating the [Ten Questions for Changemakers Reflection Framework](https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu) into a number of my civics courses. This and other professional development efforts have helped equip me with skills to facilitate discussion protocols and thinking routines, to guide documentation and reflection exercises, and to oversee multiple projects while allowing students to take the lead. With the civic projects, I have found that I need to be a resource for community connections and creative ideas and have a mindset open to the “messiness” of student-driven inquiry and willingness to go with a flow that will change unexpectedly. The reflection habits developed through the Ten Questions Framework have been helpful to me in developing these skills.

**Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

My students arrive at the start of the semester having already identified the issue of their project. Students submit a proposal in advance of the start of the school year. Our school is developing multiple pathways along which students can complete the high school civics requirement. Doing so through this independent project is one possible pathway.

Once the school year starts, my job is to help students deepen their thinking about what matters to them and about the issue that they have chosen. I have students complete an Identity Wheel/Chart that includes skills/talents/perspectives along with aspects of identity and sense of self.

**Stage 2: Identifying an Issue**

I have the students turn the issue they are already passionate into an “equitable” commitment by making sure they engage with others in a learning community. An “equitable” commitment is one in which a student learns how to make whatever they’re pursuing about more than just themselves. We really work on situating the students’ issue in a broader context. In order to motivate students who feel disempowered or cynical about change, I encourage candid and supportive conversations about the realities of change, the slow pace of the political process and the disappointment of defeat. These conversations are important to building understanding and resilience.

**Stage 3: Research and Investigation**

After students have achieved an equitable understanding of their issue, we turn to research. The point of this research is to help the students develop a well-grounded theory of change. We learn about the different theories of change that connect to efforts to change public opinion and efforts to change laws. Students work independently to research: (a) *their issue* (root causes, multiple perspectives, impacts, etc.) and (b) past and current *actions and strategies* taken by other individuals, groups and organizations in response to the same issue.  The goal is to help them evaluate other people’s theory of change so that they have criteria for developing their own well-grounded theory of change.

We collaborate with the school librarian to support the development of research skills connected to how to identify high quality websites and to distinguish among kinds of publications. We also, though, draw on the learning community that we are building. Students give brief “brown bag lunch talks” at the semester mid-way point, to share their thinking with fellow students and teachers and to receive feedback.  Also central to this work is a focus on peer collaboration and feedback through the use of [Thinking Routines](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines) and [Discussion Protocols](https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/protocols/). These activities help underscore that good research is also about mining the wisdom of crowds.

Students are encouraged to think about the following questions: What do I need to understand about this issue in order to speak about it to others and take public action? What is the work that has already been done? What can we learn from those who came before and are currently engaged? What sources and modes of analysis are best suited for my research on the root causes of the issue I am working on?

**Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

Students work individually and collectively to create a plan of action in response to their chosen issue. They write their own *Theory of Change* essays and document and reflect on their project thus far. I encourage students to reflect on both *process* and *content* on a weekly basis. For the process, for example, students reflect on their level of motivation, work ethic, interest in these tasks, what challenges they encountered, and how they cope with them. For the content, students reflect on newly emerging questions, how they move their thinking forward, and how they connect it to what they already know.

To help students clarify which tactics will best help them pursue their objective, I organize a workshop series to enrich the students’ choice of means and methods in their project. One of the challenges of these units is to help students achieve a solid theory of change in which they can articulate the connections between their objectives and the tactics that they choose. This kind of strategic thinking is new to them. I believe this is where the value of the early work in the module on identity, values, and community really pays off. Identity exploration and community building activities both help students to feel grounded in who they are individually and together. Candid and supportive conversation about the realities of change, the slow pace of the political process and the disappointment of defeat all help to build understanding and resilience. Equally important are critical thinking skills and an honest exploration about the narrative vs. the reality of democracy and equity in the United States. Looking at examples of changemakers helps position students as a part of a legacy of change and struggle.

**Stage 5: Taking Action**

In this step, time management within an independent learning framework can be challenging for students. For many students this is the first time they are working independently. Benchmarks along the way and a scaffolded responsibility help keep students focused. Students can lose interest in a topic or get overwhelmed by the depth of a problem. I generally work to make sure that the students always weave reflection into what they are doing, including in the implementation stage. Students are encouraged to think about “What can I learn about my strengths and challenges as a civic actor while implementing my plan?” and “What skills and attributes will keep me going when I face obstacles and disappointment implementing my plan?”

The authentic and the public aspects of the work are critical. These aspects raise the bar and students overwhelmingly rise to the occasion. One of the best things about seeing the civic projects in action in the implementation phase is seeing my students interact with people of all ages and backgrounds. The projects give them real opportunities to learn from and with others.

**Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing**

The final product for the civic action project is, of course, the completion of the action. In addition, though, I ask the students to document and reflect throughout. Both individually and in the students’ learning groups, each student creates a portfolio that tells the story of their work over the course of the semester and presents their work to other students and community members. I developed a Graduate Project Rubric and Presentation Rubric for this portion of the student assessment.

The ongoing documentation and reflection components are essential criteria for success. I believe strongly that student success should be based on their ability to articulate and demonstrate their own learning; their understanding of the mechanisms of government and strategies for participating in ways that are effective, equitable and self-protection; and an assessment of their theory of change--whether or not they reached their end goal. I want students to do what they set out to do, and to reflect on the learning that happens both when things go beautifully, and also when things don’t go as planned.

### **Case Study D: Food Pantry (High School)**

***Context:*** *This is a four-month civics project built into a curriculum alongside a study of World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, drawing connections to what it means to be an upstander, both in history and today. Approximately a quarter of the student body are English Language Learners, most of whom are recent immigrants and/or refugees. This student-led civics project used the* [*Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework*](https://generationcitizen.org/our-approach/framework-for-action/) *to guide the process.*

**Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

To start our civics project, as a class we discussed the importance of creating change in our community, drawing on what we were learning in history class. With an interview template of open-ended questions (ex: “What issues do you think are important in our community?”), my students headed out into the community to interview family members, teachers, and friends. We gathered and analyzed the interview data, drawing out a master list of community issues. To this we added topics my students had written about for an op-ed project I had them complete earlier in the year. After listing all the issues on the board, there were more than thirty topics in all, ranging from homelessness to school discipline to opioid abuse.

**Stage 2: Identifying an Issue**

To narrow down and ultimately select our topic, we conducted rounds of voting to see which topics sparked the most interest. First, I had students vote on the three topics they thought we most relevant, important, or urgent. This helped us narrow to the top ten topics, all still very broad. We narrowed further by holding discussions and debates that required students to advocate for community challenges they were deeply passionate about. We started with small group discussions and then moved to full group share-out conversations. From there, we voted again, narrowing to three topics (down from thirty).

To make a final decision, we created a *human interest spectrum*. One side of the room was labeled “Really Excited” and the other side “Not So Excited.” Students stood along the invisible line to show their personal interest in the topic, allowing us all to visualize the class interest. Students who were excited could then advocate and attempt to persuade classmates and classmates who were less excited could offer ideas for how they could become excited in the topic. Different students would offer suggestions, like “Instead of focusing on adults, why don’t we focus on student hunger?” or “I might be interested if we were able to specifically create change on helping students in our school.” Students were encouraged to move along this invisible line throughout the activity to reflect their evolving feelings toward the topic in reaction to their peers’ arguments.

It was during this last set of discussions and debates that our topic started to formalize to hunger. During the spectrum activity, a number of students shared stories of friends they knew in school who did not have enough to eat or who relied on the school lunch program. Other students, many of whom had spent time in refugee camps, shared personal stories of not always having enough to eat growing up. Listening to these stories, it very quickly became apparent that this was a topic the entire class was passionate about, deeply connected to, and wanted to take action on. To narrow our focus even more, the class built on the stories they had heard from classmates and shared themselves, and they decided to specifically focus on student food insecurity at the high school level.

[**Stage 3: Researching**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uAqGPYUzD1dswu2PUM9fcRoSeWRnFnt6oERNdOB8I_A/edit) **and Investigating**

My class broke up into groups. One group tackled compiling a list of food pantries in our city, first using Google and then contacting community organizations that provided us with complete lists of pantries. This group then created a set of questions to ask these pantries, and together we created a call script before they called each pantry to ask them for key information about how they ran their programs and who they served. For my students, this also meant practicing making pretend calls many times beforehand to make sure they felt prepared to get on the phone. Another team researched and contacted the other school-based food pantries in the state to understand how they addressed food insecurity. A third team began compiling research on the science behind food insecurity and the effects of food insecurity on academic success. Finally, we then gathered each group’s cumulative information, and the teams presented to each other to share their findings and draw connections between each group’s work.

**Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

With a better understanding of the effects of food insecurity and a more comprehensive landscape of who was addressing food insecurity in the community, my students realized that there was a gap in who was being served. After their discussions, they realized that there were fewer convenient ways for high school students to get access to food if they needed it, and that unlike middle and elementary school students, many high school students might be living on their own or be primary breadwinners. My students decided to advocate for the creation of a school-based food pantry that students could have easy access to, and which could directly support their peers.

**Stage 5: Taking Action**

Together they would be working to put together a research report and proposal for the school leadership, but each team had a role and specific set of responsibilities. Google Classroom and Google Documents were essential tools that ensured all teams had access to each other’s work and could learn and draw on what each other were working on simultaneously and in real time. I also worked to intentionally build teamwork skills with my students, discussing strategies for different issues that arose internally and encouraging students to take ownership and leadership roles. We had full group, small group, and sometimes individual discussions about what roles each student was taking and how they could problem solve together and not necessarily rely on me to come in and “solve” challenges.

One team compiled a report on the food pantries they had already interviewed. One team compiled a cost analysis of establishing a school-based food pantry, including researching shelving and boxes to store food. Another team set about examining our school, exploring spaces and rooms that could be a potential site for our food pantry, talking to staff, measuring rooms and writing up a report on what spaces were most feasible based on size, accessibility, and location within the school. Yet another team followed up with the other school-based food pantries in Massachusetts, gathering more detailed information about how they operated, what challenges they faced, and what challenges we should consider. They synthesized their findings in a memo to add to our report. Drawing on research that their peers had done, another team came up with a proposal regarding who would run the pantry and how it would remain stocked throughout the year. A final team reached out to the regional food bank to set up a meeting. They then sat down with the director of the food bank and proposed a collaboration; excitingly, the food bank was incredibly enthusiastic and committed to helping. After all of this, my students compiled their separate memos and reports into one joint proposal that came out to 23 pages, single spaced! They then set about scheduling a meeting with the school leadership team to formally make their proposal. A group of three students sat down with all the class’ action teams, prepared a presentation based on their shared data, and then presented it all in multiple different meetings with school leadership. They conducted multiple formal conversations to collaborate and ultimately select a space. After a few weeks, their plan was approved!

**Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing**

As a class we had the opportunity that spring to reflect on the immense amount of work we had done and the work still to come. We did this during class time, both individually in written reflections, and also in small and full group discussions. I also created a reflection template specifically for students to assess how their skills (teamwork, editing, public speaking, etc.) had developed over the course of the semester. What was most exciting for me was watching how confident my students had become.  At the start of the semester, they had been nervous to make phone calls to food pantries, but now they were confidently sitting down to meetings with school leaders and the director of the regional food bank, assertively advocating for their pantry. But for us, the work stretched far past the semester’s end. While my course officially ended that spring, my returning students (now seniors) all excitedly returned to school the next fall to continue work on actually opening the food pantry. That meant more meetings with the regional food bank and more conversations with the school leadership. And then in October we officially opened the school’s food pantry, the fourth school-based food pantry in the state.

### **Case Study E: Civil and Human Rights (High School)**

***Context:*** *This project was incorporated into a civic action unit in a high school social studies classroom. This is a six-week unit in a semester-long elective course that focused on Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement*

**Prior to the Project**

To prepare for the civic action unit, I used the [Ten Questions for Young Changemakers](https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/action-frame-0) Reflection Framework to analyze the decisions that Civil Rights movement activists made at key points in their own change-making work. For the civic action project itself, groups of students designed and executed their own human rights-related action projects, choosing an issue of interest to them to pursue. When examining primary sources from the Reconstruction Era and Jim Crow units, students discussed whether the person was trying to leverage a form of power to influence change, or if they sought to express themselves.

In guiding students through civic action projects, I have learned that I need to envision myself as a coach rather than as a holder of knowledge. My disciplinary expertise matters less and what matters is that I am able to coach students through the six steps of the civic action project. That said, since a strong civics project does require disciplinary expertise in the issue area of the project, I find that I needed to be willing to do research simultaneously to my students in order to help them address their chosen issues as effectively as possible. Second, to prepare for this unit, I reviewed my school’s policy about the use of social media by students for a school project, and about posting videos or pictures of themselves online. Many students chose to use social media as an element of their project. It was also one of the tools we discussed that they could use to widen their audience and impact. For example, one group of students researched, wrote, and created a podcast about mass incarceration in the US. I asked the members of that group to post their podcast somewhere online so that it would be available and listened to by more people. To support my students, I coordinated with my school’s administration and its technology team. Third, I found it important to give extra attention during this unit to fostering positive peer relations and a safe classroom climate. Since we had been studying race and civil rights all semester and now students were picking human rights issues, we were often working with controversial issues or coming face to face with the different degree of exposure different students had to issues of race. At the start of the unit, I wrote a class constitution to establish norms for working together. My class had already held multiple discussions about race since we had studied Reconstruction and Jim Crow; we had explored issues of offensive language and perspective. I wanted to reinforce these learnings before my students dove into civic action projects on issues areas at least some of which were bound to be connected to controversies. Lastly, we practiced mindful listening at various times throughout the semester. This kind of norm setting for democratic practice plays an important role in the success of the project.

**Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

In order to support my students in thinking about their own values and commitments, we build on the earlier curriculum in the semester to deepen and extend our work with the Ten Questions for Young Changemakers Framework. We use the Ten Questions Framework to analyze the decision-making of various young activists who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Building on the course’s content knowledge, we used the Ten Questions Framework to discuss what motivated the activists and how they approached achieving their goals. This familiarized the students with the Ten Questions analytical framework such that they would be ready to use the questions for their own civic action projects.

I use examples of young activists in the Civil Rights Movement to demonstrate that young people have always pushed society to change and improve. My goal in picking out young people throughout history who have made a difference is to motivate students who feel disempowered or cynical about change. We discussed how in the Children’s March, it was the kids who felt most empowered to demand change precisely because they were young and did not have the same responsibilities as adults.

**Stage 2: Identifying an Issue**

Next, I had students complete mini-research assignments to investigate a human rights violation of interest to them. I generally work with our school librarian to scaffold research. This was meant to further ignite their passion for helping with a specific issue. It was also a support for students who did not feel that an issue mattered to them.

After sharing with peers about their research, students then told me or emailed me what overarching issue (LGBTQ rights, environmentalism, racism, poverty, refugees, etc.) they wanted to work on for their final project. I then made groups based on interest for the final project. The first time students got into groups, I had them do a few icebreaker questions with each other (simply going around in a circle to answer the questions) and then I asked students to honestly and authentically share what they needed from one another to collaborate well and had them create and sign the collaboration agreement document.

**Stage 3: Researching and Investigating**

Once students were in their groups, I reviewed the civics project overview. I asked students to research their broad issue. In addition, I asked them to investigate how organizations, governments, and individuals are already working on the problem. By having them think about other peoples’ theories of change, I am building up their vocabulary and analytical framework for thinking about their own theory of change, which they do in the next step. After sharing what they had learned in their groups, students followed a protocol to brainstorm about possible refined topics they could choose for their projects. They were grouped based on a broad issue that needed to be made more specific so they could then think of ways to address that narrower problem. Thereafter, students further researched their refined issue to understand the causes of the issue and generate ideas for how they might intervene.

**Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

Once students have selected their target issue and target context, I ask them to focus in on the question of whether they will pursue a changing public opinion or influencing policy. Typically, I tried to encourage my students as a group to pursue both with different members of the group taking different roles. My goal was to help them see the relation between changing public opinion and changing policy. While different students may have strengths in one or the other, I wanted them to see how those strengths and approaches could work together. After this work, students complete a formal proposal to be turned into me. I focused on if they had refined their topics enough, whether they had articulated a strong theory of change, and what potential issues they had overlooked or not anticipated adequately. Students revised their proposals afterwards. Finally, once they had finalized their proposals, I gave students the option of dividing up different roles for their work together before proceeding. Giving effective feedback on the project proposals was the most important moment in the project in terms of supporting students in achieving that success. Students often did not foresee scheduling issues or anticipate how much work would be necessary to accomplish certain goals. I was therefore an important support for logistics.

**Stage 5: Taking Action**

A major part of my role was also in helping students manage their action plans and mitigate their actions where needed to increase the effectiveness of their plans. In this step, breaking students’ work into different mini-assignments is a key strategy for managing a large number of students’ projects. Students did encounter several challenges. One of them was to get their target audience engaged with their work.

**Stage 6: Reflection and Showcasing**

I asked students to present their projects and to reflect on the successes and challenges of the project and what it’s meant to them. Students reflected authentically on their theory of change, action plan, and about their own roles in the fostering change. They were asked to articulate how their own beliefs influenced the work when reflecting during the final presentation. In the future, however, I’d like to improve a few elements. First, I would elaborate the assessment for how they ground their project in a theory of change. I would make the alignment of influencing public opinion clearer, so that students can design more sophisticated theories of change. Second, I would provide more examples of young people making change in the contemporary era.

### **Case Study F: Police Accountability (Grade 8)**

***Context:*** *This project was completed as a culminating unit in an eighth-grade course. This is a large urban public high school with approximately 1,800 students. Civics instruction at the school includes an 8th grade Civic / U.S. Government class that is offered as a history course, and an AP U.S. Government course in high school. This student-led civics project used the* [*Generation Citizen Advocacy Hourglass Framework*](https://generationcitizen.org/our-approach/framework-for-action/) *to guide the process.*

**Stage 1: Examining Self and Civic Identity**

Although I didn’t start my student-led civics projects until much later in the school year, focusing on media literacy from the beginning provided an important foundation for examining community. Since being an informed citizen is one of the hallmarks of a successful civics class, I facilitated this skill through a recurring, twice weekly assignment called “Keeping up with the News” in which students were required to read an article on a political topic or event from a reputable news source and summarize it or react to it. One area of focus in my unit is to teach students to recognize bias in media sources. We read two articles on protests in St. Louis following the 2017 acquittal of police Officer Jason Stockley in the fatal shooting of a black motorist named Anthony Lamar Smith. One of the articles was from a conservative media source and the other was from a liberal source. Students noticed clear differences in how each article described the shooting and the protesters. Our debrief of the articles led to larger conversations about racism, racial profiling, and the criminal justice system. Many of my students had seen the horrific video of the fatal shooting of Philando Castile that previous summer, and it was clear they were deeply affected by it. These were difficult conversations for me to facilitate; I acutely felt my students’ fear and frustration that incidents of law enforcement violence keep happening, which was further amplified by the fact that police officers are often acquitted in these cases. Yet as a civics teacher, my job is to point students in the direction of academic analysis and coming to a deeper understanding of the facts of an issue. In this case, I had my students do further reading on the integral relationship between prosecutors and law enforcement, and the high burden of proof for prosecutors to win criminal convictions.

**Stage 2: Identifying an Issue**

When it came time to begin our student-led civics projects, I reviewed case studies and news articles of civic advocacy projects with my students. We broke down each project into the steps it took to accomplish the policy goal. I also asked students to journal about issues in their community that affect them and the people they care about. Students wrote about issues ranging from homelessness, drug abuse, unreliable transportation, student mental health, and neighborhood cleanliness. As my students talked through these issues in classroom discussions, I took on the role of a facilitator, prompting my students to connect their observations to root causes. Since our class was using the whole class model of student-led civics projects, students needed to come to a consensus on which one of the many issues we had discussed would become the basis of our project. We achieved this through a number of strategies. In order to narrow down to our top two topics, we used anonymous (heads down) voting. Then, we did a Four Corners discussion to allow students to express their level of enthusiasm for a topic. Finally, we built consensus by creating a spectrum from 1-10 where students indicated their level of interest and attempted to persuade each other to get on board. This class needed time to have deep conversations, and some of those conversations led to passionate disagreements. This is part of the process. I found some great protocols on listening partnerships that would help students both actively listen to peers they disagreed with and process their emotions. I actively coached students to reiterate the views of peers they disagreed with, ask open-ended questions about other perspectives, and communicate their conditions for working on an issue that wasn’t their first choice. Ultimately, the class ended up with a topic that not everyone was passionate about but every student agreed to work on: police accountability.

**Stage 3: Researching**

Something I noticed during student conversations about police accountability was a significant knowledge gap of how violent encounters between police officers and citizens are investigated and adjudicated. Students clearly indicated that they wanted their project to focus on accountability and punishment for law enforcement who engaged in police brutality, but they knew very little about the process. Most had no idea there was even a process for citizen complaints of excessive force against police officers. They were unaware of the extent or quality of the training officers receive on racial bias. I assigned students some independent research about the topic, but I also curated several newspapers articles that I found to ensure a variety of perspectives would be considered. My goal was for my students to have a balanced view of the investigation process--its strengths and its flaws--and the efforts law enforcement are currently taking to train officers on racial bias and community interactions. We discussed these articles in small groups and in Socratic Seminars.

**Stage 4: Developing an Action Plan**

At this point in the project, I was really pleased that my students were exploring such a complex topic, but I was concerned that the project may create some serious friction within the class. At a school as diverse as mine, it was just as likely that a student sitting in my class was the child of a police officer as it was that they knew someone who had experienced a racially biased law enforcement encounter. Students could not agree that racial bias in law enforcement was a serious issue, but a few of my students had concerns about the action steps that our project might take. I really wanted to give my students as much latitude as possible in developing an action plan, but I felt strongly that I provide some direction so that all of my students felt heard and validated. I decided to create clear parameters around the project: we would invite members of law enforcement to have a two-way conversation on bias in policing, and our class would focus on a local action they could take on the issue within our city. Despite these parameters, we were still struggling as a class to develop a specific goal. I had to do a little more digging myself, which resulted in finding articles on citizen oversight boards of police conduct. I found out that many cities have them, and that the extent of their power varies widely. I also discovered that our city does have the process called the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. However, it only consists of three members who are appointed by the mayor and who have previous connections to some aspect of law enforcement. I presented this information to students in a jigsaw activity and posted a focus question on the board: “If you were a city councilor elected to review this Ombudsman Oversight process, what changes would you make and why?” After this conversation, we were finally able to come up with a project goal: advocate for an increase of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel from three members to seven members and inclusion of members who had no previous connections to law enforcement. Based on our goal, my students and I determined the project required five different Action Groups, including a community contact group, a presentation group, a social media group, an editorial group, and a survey / interview group. We developed a list of each Action Group’s tasks and objectives, and then students ranked their choices of which group they would most like to be in.

**Stage 5: Taking Action**

The presentation group developed a 12-slide presentation which included the survey data, quotations from peer interviews, and statistics and research that the community contact group had gathered from our community contacts and our guest speaker from the Boston Police Department. The government contact and community contact groups had a number of major successes. They emailed and called the administrator with the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel, officials within the Mayor’s office, the community affairs department of our city’s police department, and journalists at the city newspaper. The most responsive group by far were the journalists. The students were able to have some interesting conversations with them about the flaws in the internal investigation process of police complaints. The reporters actually knew very little about Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel, so it was great to see students teach the reporters about the police oversight process. Unfortunately, students did not receive a response from the administrator of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. They did, however, hear from the community relations department of our city’s police department and scheduled a classroom visit. We hosted a lieutenant from the police department who provided an overview to students about challenges they faced in the job, various youth-oriented outreach programs and community partnerships created by the department, and the philosophy behind community-based policing.

**Stage 6: Reflecting and Showcasing**

We showcased our work at a Civics Day at the Massachusetts State House. The student delegates spent about four hours after school preparing their class board for the presentation. I offered them some visual models of presentation boards and gave students full responsibility for creating their own. At the end of the event they were thrilled to learn that their project won an award for best overall project! When I reflected on how divisive this topic initially was in our class, I was extremely proud that my students had gotten to the point where they could speak about a topic as emotionally fraught as police brutality with authority and had a tangible, locally based recommendation for making law enforcement more accountable to the community.

# **Appendix A: Student-Led Civics Projects and the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework**

The Framework includes seven Standards for History and Social Science Practice (Practice Standards) that strengthen students’ skills for informed citizenship. These skills include developing civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (PS 1); formulating questions and conducting research (PS 2); organizing information from multiple sources (PS 3), evaluating sources (PS 4-5), and synthesizing information in order to develop arguments and take action (PS 6-7). The Literacy Standards in history and social science set expectations for analytical reading and logical writing and speaking, skills essential to political equality and civic engagement. Standards for news and media literacy aim to help students become discerning readers of digital news and opinion.

**In Pre-K-2**, students are introduced to democratic principles such as equality, fairness and respect, and practice these within their classroom communities. **In grades 3-4,** students begin discussing the functions of government in a society and apply ideas about self-government, rules, rights and civic responsibilities. **In grade 5**, students take a deeper dive into the origins of democracy in Massachusetts and the United States, exploring the founding principles laid out in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. This scope widens to global societies and civilizations **in grades 6-7**, including comparison of deliberative processes used across a range of groups and people.

**In grade 8,** students return to a focus on U.S. and Massachusetts government and civic life continuing to build **civic knowledge** of foundational documents, how and why government institutions developed, how government evolves through legislation and court decisions, and how individuals exercise their rights and civic responsibilities. Students hone their **civic skills** with class activities that engage them in critical thinking and problem-solving and provide them multiple opportunities to communicate persuasively and work collaboratively. Students will demonstrate **civic dispositions** such as respect for others, commitment to equality, and the ability to consider various perspectives and engage in civil discourse.

**In high school,** students deepen their knowledge and application of civics skills and dispositions within a national and global context. They will acquire knowledge and skills within social science and other fields to apply a more critical lens to their political, social and economic context. Students will have another opportunity to complete a student-led civics project with a greater degree of independence, depth, and complexity, requiring them to deeply evaluate and analyze political institutions and policies, and to take informed and intentional action with the goal of long-term change. Project topics, actions, and processes may be interdisciplinary

1. Here, and throughout this document, “citizen” means any active and responsible participant in any community or group. This broad civic use of the word contrasts with its narrower use in reference to individuals with full rights under a particular system of government. The 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework uses "citizen" throughout in this same broad civic sense. See page 23 of [*Educating for American Democracy* (2021)](https://www.educatingforamericandemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Educating-for-American-Democracy-Report-Excellence-in-History-and-Civics-for-All-Learners.pdf) for more information about the dual meanings of “citizen” and “citizenship.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See Appendix A: Student-Led Civics Projects and the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework for additional information about how the Framework supports the development of students’ civics knowledge, skills, and dispositions in grades K-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The definition of culturally responsive teaching outlined in this section of the Guidebook can also be found on DESE’s [Culturally Responsive Teaching & Leading webpage.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-responsive/) Additional resources specifically related to culturally responsive teaching in history and social science, including civics, can be found under the “Culturally Responsive Teaching Resources” drop down on DESE’s [History, Social Science, and Civics webpage](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/hss/). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)