2011 KENTUCKY CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

SHAPING KENTUCKY'S FUTURE TOGETHER

Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education
education ★ citizenship

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

At the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), we believe everyone has the power to make a difference in how their community and country thrive.

We are a dynamic, non-partisan nonprofit working at the forefront of our nation's civic life. We continuously explore what shapes today's citizenry, define the evolving role of the individual in our democracy, and uncover ways to motivate greater participation. Through our events, research and reports, NCoC expands our nation's contemporary understanding of what it means to be a citizen. We seek new ideas and approaches for creating greater civic health and vitality throughout the United States.

THE INSTITUTE FOR CITIZENSHIP & SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility (ICSR) is an organization at Western Kentucky University of administrators, faculty, students, and staff committed to promoting our central mission to develop students' abilities to *think critically, serve generously, and act responsibly.* ICSR programs encourage careful reflection on civic values and critical analysis of contemporary social, economic, and political problems. The goal is to work towards developing the capacities and skills of community organizing, citizenship, and civic engagement as a means to achieving social change and the common good. www.wku.edu/icsr/

MCCONNELL CENTER

The McConnell Center was established in 1991 by Kentucky's senior U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell and the University of Louisville. The Center was founded based on McConnell's belief that "Kentucky's future depends on inspiring talented, motivated leaders." In 2005, that mission expanded to include a Civic Education Program at the University of Louisville. Through a variety of professional development conferences, lectures and seminars, this non-profit, non-partisan program is designed to improve Kentuckian's understanding of their history, assist Kentucky citizens in developing a better understanding of the American Constitution and American history, and encourage open and free discussion of perennial concerns that inform contemporary politics. www.louisville.edu/mcconnellcenter

KENTUCKY ADVOCATES FOR CIVIC EDUCATION (KACE)

Established in September 2010, KACE is a consortium of organizations and agencies dedicated to advancing civic education. KACE is an outgrowth of the 2004 Civic Literacy Initiative of Kentucky (CLIK) and is designed to maintain on-going promotion and coordination of civic education advocacy and information. The ultimate goal for KACE is an informed Kentucky citizenry, effectively engaged in the democratic process.

KENTUCKY OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Alison Lundergan Grimes, Kentucky's 76th Secretary of State, is the Commonwealth's chief advocate for civic engagement and literacy. Through partnerships with civics-oriented organizations on the local, state and national levels, the Secretary supports a variety of programs to promote greater participation in the democratic process, including mock elections, slogan and essay contests, and civic education initiatives. The decline of civic engagement among Kentucky citizens is alarming, and the Secretary is passionate about discovering the reasons for and reversing that trend and working toward a more enthusiastic and informed electorate. Secretary Grimes believes that Kentucky can achieve its brightest future when Kentuckians embrace fully both their rights and obligations as citizens.

All cover photos and photos this spread are courtesy of www.kentuckytourism.com

A MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY OF STATE ALISON LUNDERGAN GRIMES

Dear Citizens of Kentucky,

As Kentucky's 76th Secretary of State, I am privileged to serve as the Commonwealth's chief advocate for civic engagement and literacy. Encouraging an enthusiastic and educated electorate is a critical part of my role as the state's Chief Election Official, and it is one that I hold in high regard.

Indeed, Kentucky is at its best when its citizens are engaged. Thus, the Secretary of State's office routinely partners with local and national organizations to increase civic involvement. The 2011 Kentucky Civic Health Index report is the result of such a collaboration, and I am truly excited about the results it highlights and the opportunities it creates.

The 2011 Civic Health Index report identifies both strengths and weaknesses in Kentucky's overall public participation and civic literacy. I urge Kentucky's educators and elected officials to use this report to inform and focus the ongoing discussion about promoting civic involvement. Developing an even stronger and more involved citizenry will undoubtedly lead to a more robust economy and connectedness among Kentuckians.

I am grateful for the thoughtful, thorough work that is contained in this report, and I look forward to the conversations and initiatives it will inspire. By capitalizing on Kentucky's civic strengths and working toward progress in all areas, we will achieve Kentucky's brightest future.

Sincerely,

Alison Lundergan Grimes

Alison Lundergan Grimes, 76th Secretary of State

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS

The Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility at Western Kentucky University was created in 2009 to promote strong citizenship and foster democratic skills and capacities in our campus community and throughout the region. We have pursued this mission through curricular and co-curricular initiatives.

The ICSR also was created as a space where students and faculty could come together to think rigorously and critically about the most important issues facing our communities and democracy and how responsible citizens could address those issues. Thus, we enthusiastically seized the opportunity to partner with the National Conference on Citizenship to produce this first-ever *Civic Health Index* report for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As we started the process that led to the production of this report, we were very fortunate to find two other partners whose financial support has been critical to the effort: the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville and Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education. We also have been fortunate in receiving support from Dr. Gordon Emslie, Provost of Western Kentucky University, and Dr. Gordon Baylis, Vice President for Research at Western Kentucky University. The conclusions in this report are the authors' alone and not necessarily those of the partners whose support made the report possible.

In writing this report, we are guided by two principles: honesty and hope. First, we identify those areas in which Kentucky is ailing. Citizenship in the Commonwealth could be much stronger. At the same time, we identify those areas where we are doing well, and prescribe ways in which we could build upon our strengths while addressing our weaknesses.

We hope this report sparks discussions throughout the Commonwealth and provides the motivation and path forward for Kentuckians to strengthen their democracy and their communities.

Sincerely,

Saundra Ardrey, Co-Director, Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility
Eric Bain-Selbo, Co-Director, Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility
Paul Markham, Co-Director, Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility
Courte Vorhees, Assistant Professor, Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility

WHAT'S INSIDE

WHY CIVIC HEALTH MATTERS

Shaping Kentucky's Future Together

The Commonwealth of Kentucky is not alone in the challenges its citizens, communities, and institutions face in these turbulent economic and political times. Our democratic and civic practices and institutions are the means by which we can address these challenges, but it can be difficult to maintain and strengthen these practices and institutions given the demands of the current political and economic climate.

One need not look far to see the deteriorating condition of democracy and citizen engagement in the United States, and there is plenty of social science research to confirm what we see. Robert Putnam's groundbreaking book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* details the decline of civic engagement, and thus the decline of democracy, in the United States. Published in 2000, Putnam concludes that "Americans are playing virtually every aspect of the civic game less frequently today than we did two decades ago."[1] The data indicate that during the first two-thirds of the 20th Century, Americans were increasingly involved in civic life, and that in the last third they slowly became less and less involved.[2]

Putnam considers a number of factors that help to explain this phenomenon, but perhaps the most important are the advent of television culture and rampant consumerism—cornerstones of today's popular culture. Television has served and continues to serve as an anchor that tethers us to our homes—joined now by our computers, game consoles, and home entertainment centers. Putnam notes that between 1965 and 1995 Americans gained approximately six hours of leisure time in their weekly schedule and devoted almost all of it to watching television.[3] Husbands and wives spend six to seven times as much time watching television as they spend "in community activities outside the home."[4] And this move to a more private existence impacts other activities. Even when we are engaged politically, it is increasingly through an individual act performed out of our home (e.g., signing an online petition) rather than a communal act in which we are face-to-face with other people.[5] In short, we are very private citizens—more isolated than we have been for a long time.

Another cause for the decline of civic engagement is rampant consumerism. We increasingly identify ourselves more by what we own than by our relationships to other people. Individuals increasingly are focused on the pursuit of wealth and the consumer products to which wealth gives access.[6] Little time may be left for engaging with one another to learn about pressing social problems or to discuss with neighbors the defining political problems of the day. The idea of working with our fellow community members to solve community problems might strike citizens as too time-consuming to be a reasonable option.

Television and consumerism have played key roles in this decline in social connectedness, and thus a decline in social capital—the resource that is critical not only to solving community problems but for creating communities where people can thrive. Putnam shows children are better educated, neighborhoods are safer, economic prosperity is higher and more equally distributed,

Social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people together and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

Photo provided by the WKU Political Engagement Project.

children and adults are healthier, and people generally are happier in communities with high social capital—where people are more socially connected. In short, our social connectedness has dramatic consequences for our personal and collective welfare, and the deterioration of civic life does, as well. Putnam cites evidence that indicates the "younger you are, the worse things have gotten over the last decades of the twentieth century in terms of headaches, indigestion, sleeplessness, as well as general satisfaction with life and even likelihood of taking your own life." While he cannot attribute all of these negative indicators to the "generational decline in social connectedness," there are good reasons to make such an attribution.[7]

So a thriving democracy, which is only possible through the active and effective civic engagement of everyone, is not just a theoretical aim or good. It quite literally is good for us—good for our health, our individual prosperity, and our communities' ability to thrive.

Let's take it a step further. Putnam makes the case that the more social capital there is the more social equality there tends to be; and, the more social equality there is, the more easily social capital can be generated—a cycle that leads to stronger communities and healthier and happier citizens.[8] In their book *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett draw upon an amazing wealth of data and studies to show that social inequality has negative impacts on a wide range of social and personal issues, including community life and social relations, mental health, drug use, physical health and life expectancy, educational achievement, teenage pregnancy, violence and crime, and social mobility. The important conclusion of the book is that these negative impacts are less dependent on a population's average income (at least in developed countries) as they are on the *disparity* of incomes across economic classes. Furthermore, these impacts cut across all economic classes.

Addressing issues of inequality or injustice requires an engaged citizenry—it requires the contributions of community members who take the time to learn about the issues, who register and vote, and who work with neighbors and community organizations to solve the many problems we face in our towns, cities and state.

Given the critical importance of civic life to the vitality of our personal and collective lives, this report is intended to examine and better understand the current state of civic health in Kentucky. The Census now asks numerous questions about volunteering and political and civic engagement which will be explored throughout this report. In addition to indicator-by-indicator analysis, in order to help illustrate the bigger picture of engagement across the state, three composite scores were developed for social connectedness, political action, and public work. Each section of this report assesses where we stand now, shares a vision for where we want to be in the future, and offers recommendations for how we can move ahead together. Only an honest assessment of our civic health will provide us the opportunity to understand our strengths and weaknesses, in order to improve opportunities for engagement, build stronger communities, and advance our democracy.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC HEALTH

Voter Registration and Voter Turnout

Registered	2006	2010
KY	73.4%	66.9%
US	67.6%	65.1%

Turnout	2006	2010
KY	49.4%	46.8%
US	47.8%	45.5%

Where we stand

Voter Registration

Voter registration in Kentucky in 2006 and 2010 was above the national average. Consistent with national trends, family income, age, and race are all predictors of voter registration. For example, 78.9% of Kentuckians with family incomes of $75,000 or more were registered compared with just 56.8% registration for those with incomes of less than $35,000.

As Kentuckians grew older, registration increased. The youngest age group (18-24 years) registered at 44.4%, middle age (45-54) registered at 70.2% and 75+ years at 83.1%.

Registration levels are different for African Americans and whites—68.8% of whites were registered compared with 59.8% of African Americans.

Voter Turnout

From 1978 to 2002, Kentuckians consistently trailed the national turnout rate in midterm elections. In 2006 and 2010, Kentucky broke that trend with turnout slightly above the national average. An estimated 49.4% of citizens in KY voted in 2006.

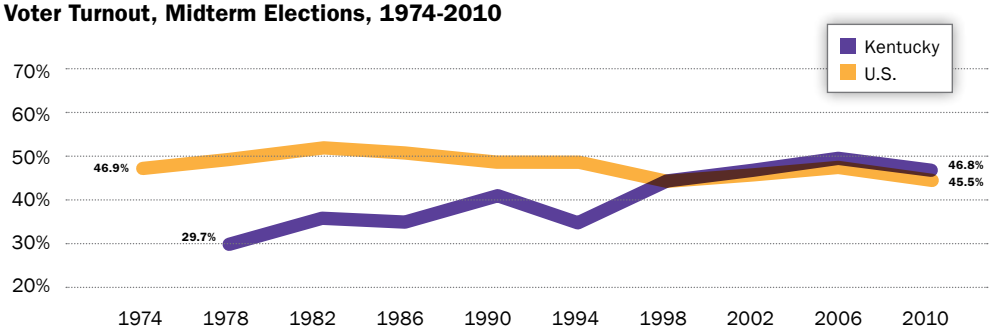
The number of statewide races on the ballot and the competiveness of the races seemed to drive voter turnout. In 2006, several local races and key seats in the Kentucky House were competitive. Several counties reported local turnout as high as 67%.[9]

Kentucky received national attention with the campaign of Tea Party candidate Rand Paul for the U.S. Senate. The fervor of his campaign helped to accentuate 2010 voter turnout levels.

In 2010, voter registration in Kentucky was above the national average.

Photo provided by the WKU Political Engagement Project.

Voter Turnout, Midterm Elections, 1974-2010



Similar to voter registration, voter turnout varies by demographic factors. Historically, African Americans have lower levels of voter registration and turnout than whites. In 2010, African Americans in Kentucky voted at 39.1% while white voters turned out at 48.3% - a racial difference of 9 percentage points. The turnout gap between the lowest family income and the highest family income is 19.5 percentage points.

Education makes a difference. Kentuckians with less than a high school diploma report voting levels at 25%. That rate steadily improves as the level of education increases. The rate increased to 41.8% for high school graduates, to 51.2% for some college education and to 67.5% for those with a college degree.

The turnout gap is even more pronounced between the youngest and oldest, with turnout at 19.7% for ages 18-24 and seniors (those age 75+) at 69.7%.

GOAL

While the statewide turnout rate is just above the national average, the goal should be to bring currently marginalized segments of the community, because of age, race, income and/or education, into the community of politically engaged citizens. Special attention and strategies should be developed to target these groups to increase turnout in 2014 by a minimum of 10 percentage points across the state. Based on current rankings, this would move Kentucky from its current state ranking of 26 well into the top ten of state rankings with a turnout rate of 56.8%.

SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Registration obstacles such as the 30-day residency requirement, cut-off dates, and inconvenient locations often combine to attenuate the registration rates of marginalized populations.

In a review of the nine states with same-day registration, voter turnout is usually seven points higher.[10] According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), in 2008, on average 59% of young Americans whose home state offered election day registration (EDR) voted. That turnout rate is nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in EDR states.

Another strategy in the quest for greater citizen inclusion is to reconsider the complex issue of Kentucky's law that prohibits convicted felons from voting in elections. This law disproportionately impacts African American males. One in four African American males in Kentucky cannot vote because of felony convictions. This disenfranchisement rate is the highest in the United States and triple the rate of the national average.[11]

Overall turnout significantly increased in 2006 because of competitive statewide and local races, but some of that increase can be attributed to several statewide initiatives that specifically target youth voting. The Kentucky Secretary of State's office made available an online resource database for teachers, parents, and students. These resources include sample ballots, voting registration cards, and education resources for the classroom. The Secretary's office also maintains a web-based portal for kids entitled "Kentucky Civics for Kids" to encourage youth civic awareness. The idea is to not only plant an early seed of civic responsibility in young students, but also to change the behavior and attitudes of their adult family members.

While civic literacy is important, education is the key. As the levels of education increase, voter registration and turnout increase. Additionally, higher levels of educational attainment connect to higher family incomes. As family income increases, so too does political participation. A college education provides opportunities for better-informed and more engaged citizens, which collectively results in a healthier democracy.

Kentucky stakeholders must work with the Council on Post Secondary Education to ensure education realizes its potential as the great equalizer in Kentucky. Encouragement and incentives such as financial support, college preparedness, and universal access must be commonplace. College graduates not only stimulate the economic life of our communities but also ensure a robust civic life for the Commonwealth.

19.5

The turnout gap between the lowest family income and the highest family income is 19.5 percentage points.

Photo provided by the WKU Political Engagement Project.

Political Action

"Political action" means conventional political engagement: mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. It is composed of these four items: voting, discussing politics with family and friends a few times a week or more, contacting public officials, and buying or boycotting products. One way of measuring political action is to create a composite score. An individual receives one point for each activity that he or she reports. The state's mean is the average score for all residents age 18+.

2010 Respondents Involved in At Least One Political Action	KY	US
Black	40.8%	60.3%
White	62.5%	65.0%
Employed	61.0%	60.2%
Unemployed	38.0%	49.5%
65+	79.1%	72.6%
20-24 years	39.0%	40.2%

Where we stand—Kentuckians divided

Voting in national elections in the United States is one of the lowest of all the democratic countries. For example, Australia turnout in national elections is 94.5%. In South Africa, the rate is 89% and in Sweden 87%. In the United States the average turnout is 66.5%.[12]

Almost 41% of adults reported no political acts in 2010 and 35.6% said they had done just one act. While Kentucky is consistent with the national trend, Kentuckians demonstrated a greater divide based on race, employment, and age differences.

Among white Kentuckians, 62.5% reported at least one political act versus just 40.8% for African Americans. At the national level and in some states, political activity did not differ much depending on employment. This is not the case in Kentucky. Sixty-one percent of the employed engaged in at least one political act compared to 38% of those without jobs. Young people, age 20 to 24, typically lag behind older cohorts. But the difference is more pronounced in Kentucky. Among older Kentuckians, age 65+, 79.1% engaged in at least one political action compared with 39% of the young people.

Kentucky citizens seem especially hesitant to initiate contact with elected officials. More than 90% of citizens did not contact an official in 2010.

Families with incomes of $75,000+ were twice as likely to contact an official as those with family incomes of $35,000 or less. White respondents were twice as likely as African Americans to initiate contact. College graduates were nearly four times more likely to contact an official than those with less than a high school degree. Senior citizens were about five times more likely to engage with officials than the youngest Kentuckians.

In terms of buying or boycotting goods and services based on values, Kentuckians ranked extremely low as well, and again there is a divide among groups. Families with incomes of $75,000+ were almost twice as likely to buy or boycott products and services based on values as families with incomes of $35,000 or less. It is important to consider, however, how financial security and flexibility might impact how individuals wield purchasing power. College graduates were almost seven times more likely to buy or boycott products and services based on values than those with less than a high school degree.

GOAL

The snapshot of the politically active in Kentucky—white, elderly, educated, and upper income—does not adequately reflect the demographics of the state. While 80.3% have completed high school, only 20% have a four-year college degree and 13.5% live below the poverty level. Kentucky also has a growing African American and international population.

90%

More than 90% of Kentucky citizens did not contact an official in 2010.

Photo provided by the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville.

The goals are to bring marginalized groups into the community of politically engaged citizens, to create a healthy and engaged civic society, and to overcome the distinctions that divide us.

SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Several initiatives coordinated by colleges, interest groups, sororities, fraternities, and other social organizations are taking place to engage communities often overlooked.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, local NAACP chapters, and other nonprofit agencies are gearing up for a "Get Out the Vote in 2012" voter registration campaign. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and others are mobilizing the African American community for political action. As part of these efforts, workshops and forums will be organized to educate citizen groups to be active participants as volunteers, voters, and community organizers, so they can shape public policy and effect social change.

CONCLUSION

Civic education is vital to a greater sense of political efficacy.

Photo provided by the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville.

Similar efforts are underway at institutions of higher learning in Kentucky. The Political Engagement Project (PEP) at the Western Kentucky University Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility creates a campus environment that promotes political participation. PEP promotes political engagement by providing students with the skills and opportunities to work in campaigns, interact with local, state and national decision-makers, and evaluate public policy.

Additionally, the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville has established a series of civic education projects to help Kentuckians address the national problem of declining classroom emphasis on American history and civic education. Through civic education each new generation is taught the roles and responsibilities of active citizenship in a democratic society. The Center conducts educational programs for teachers, high school and college students, and the general public focused on developing a strong knowledge of American history and fostering creative thinking about the possibilities and problems of citizenship in the 21st Century. A few of those programs include: the Civic Education Program, U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell and Secretary Elaine L. Chao Archives, and the Public Lecture Series. The Civic Education Program was established to address the growing detachment of young people from the political process by improving their understanding of the American process and Kentucky's history. The U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell and Secretary Elaine L. Chao Archives serves as an outreach program in the form of a civic education gallery and hopes to increase present political awareness through the documentation of the past. Lastly, the Public Lecture Series seeks to bring a variety of influential public figures to the University of Louisville through lectures, seminars, panel discussions, and conferences.

Several other partners are involved in the effort to increase civic education and to influence political behavior. The Civic Literacy Initiative of Kentucky attempts to increase civic awareness and involvement in the Commonwealth through a series of conferences, summits, and consortia. The American Democracy Project, a national initiative to increase civic engagement among college-age students, is active in six Kentucky universities. Going one step further, the University of Louisville has additional programs to engage students of all ages in civic involvement through its Office of Civic Education and Engagement. This office works within the college to increase civic involvement and also works with local high schools to give civics lessons. At the grassroots level, a group of students has partnered with political leaders in "Civics Education for Kentucky," an initiative to bring an institutionalized civics education program to the public schools.

To meet our goal to increase voter turnout and to instill a greater sense of political efficacy, these initiatives must continue and even be strengthened. The task will be difficult because of a dwindling state budget and the limited resources of nonprofit agencies that are now being called upon to provide services impacted by those budget cuts. State appropriations for secondary and post-secondary education funding also have been cut. Too often in tight budget times, programs and initiatives considered "non-essential" are the first to be chopped from the school curriculum. Civic education must be understood as essential as it is vital to a democratic society and to improving the civic health of Kentucky. While civic education is not yet a statewide requirement in public schools, we recommend that Kentucky legislators mandate that civic education be a required course subject to statewide assessment.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND CIVIC HEALTH

Social connectedness refers to the number of ties we have with family, friends, and community members—as well as the quality of those connections. Having more high-quality social connections lowers stress and anxiety[13] while increasing health, well-being, and self-esteem.[14] Alternatively, social isolation is associated with many dangerous health risks[15] and shorter life spans.[16] This means social connectedness is an important part of physical, psychological, and interpersonal health for citizens.

One way of measuring social connectedness is by looking at how often citizens eat dinner with other members of their household, communicate with friends or family online, talk with their neighbors, and do favors for their neighbors. To glean a bigger picture of social connectedness, each person over 18 years old is scored for the number of connections they report. Scores are compiled for the state and then states are ranked by their average scores.

Where we stand

Social Connectedness Composite

The combined social connectedness score for Kentucky revealed several important trends. African American citizens are at higher risk for social isolation. About 23% of African Americans in Kentucky report being socially isolated (social connection score of zero), compared with 10.5% of whites in Kentucky. This means that African Americans are more than twice as likely to be socially isolated than white citizens of the Commonwealth. This social connectedness composite measure, however, does not incorporate group membership which is addressed on page 14 of this report. While 15.8% of African Americans reported engaging in any group, the strongest participation among African Americans was in religious institutions, at 12.6%.

Kentucky citizens over 65 years old are also at higher risk for social isolation. About 25% of Kentucky elders reported no social connections, compared with about 17% nationally. Considering the increase in health risks associated with low or no social connection, such rates are alarming.

Although Kentucky citizens without a high school diploma are less likely to be socially isolated than the national average (about 18% in KY versus about 19% nationally), they are far more likely to be socially isolated than Kentucky college graduates—where only about 6% are socially isolated (compared with about 9% nationally). This means social connection is correlated with more education, and the decrease in social isolation is more pronounced in Kentucky than nationally. This strong association indicates that increasing high school and college graduation rates may increase social connectedness. Additionally, this association indicates increasing social connectedness may increase high school and college graduation rates, which would also be a benefit for the Commonwealth.

Social connectedness is an important part of physical, psychological, and interpersonal health for citizens.

Photo provided by www.kentuckytourism.com.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS COMPONENTS

Breaking down social connectedness into its component elements yields further important comparisons:

Eating dinner with household members

Kentucky citizens rank 3rd in the nation for eating dinner with household members or family several times a week or more, up from 27th place (2008/2009). About 92% of Kentucky residents report eating dinner with household members frequently, compared with a national rate of about 88%—staying above the national average for the last three years. This is Kentucky's highest ranking in the *Civic Health Index.*

2010 Report	KY	Nation	Rank
Eat dinner with their family frequently	92.4%	88.1%	3rd

Communicating with friends or family online

Kentucky citizens rank 47th in the nation for communicating with friends or family online several times a week or more, which is down from 46th place. About 45% of Kentucky residents report talking to friends or family on the Internet frequently, compared with a national rate of about 54%.

2010 Report	KY	Nation	Rank
Talk with family and friends on the internet or via email frequently	45.2%	54.3%	47th

3rd

Kentucky ranks 3rd in the nation on one *Civic Health Index* indicator for social connectedness—eating dinner with family frequently.

Photo provided by the WKU Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility.

Talking with neighbors

Kentucky citizens rank 28th in the nation for talking with neighbors frequently, meaning they spoke with neighbors several times a week or more. About 42% of Kentucky residents report talking with neighbors frequently, which is about average within the greater United States. Kentucky residents have followed the national trend, dropping slightly on this measure compared to recent years.

2010 Report	KY	Nation	Rank
Talk with neighbors frequently	42.4%	42.3%	28th

Doing favors for neighbors

Kentucky citizens rank 21st in the nation for doing favors for neighbors frequently, reporting they engaged in aid for their neighbors several times a week or more. This rank is down from 10th place, with a drop from about 19% to 16% within a few years. This follows the trend of dropping scores in Kentucky for other neighboring behaviors like talking with neighbors and working with neighbors to solve community problems.

2010 Report	KY	Nation	Rank
Exchange favors with neighbors frequently	15.8%	15.2%	21st

SUMMARY

Overall, Kentucky is doing well on some measures of social connectedness while displaying major challenges in others. Kentucky not only fares well on eating dinner with household members frequently, but it is on the rise in rankings. Although ranking 21st on doing favors for neighbors frequently is good news, dropping scores and rankings are of concern. Kentuckians' rates of talking with neighbors frequently are average, although there was a slight drop over the past few years. The increased risk of social isolation for African Americans, people over 65 years old, and students leaving high school before completion should temper our successes and reinforce our desire for improvement. These cautions linked with the low ranking for communicating with family or friends online indicates the need for action to promote social connectedness.

Why are some Kentuckians more socially isolated than the rest of the nation? One reason may be the rural nature of Kentucky. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Kentucky's population remains at about 56% urban and 44% rural versus 79% urban and 21% rural in the U.S. as a whole, making Kentucky the 8th most rural state in the country. Although people in urban areas tend to be slightly less socially connected than in rural areas, the highly rural geography of Kentucky may add to social isolation.

GOAL

Kentucky's social connectedness scores show we have important strengths but great challenges as well. Increasing social connectedness has many positive effects on health, psychological and social well-being, our ability to deal with conflicts, educational outcomes, and reduction in mortality. Thus, our goal as Kentuckians should be to increase individual and collective well-being through fostering social connectedness.

Even simple acts like expressing compassion for strangers can increase social connectedness and well-being,[17] but longer-term efforts built into middle and high schools make it easier to reach more Kentuckians in time to affect educational and health outcomes.

Social connectedness is correlated with staying in school longer, increased involvement in extracurricular activities, and a greater sense of community.[18] Fostering collaborative community-building volunteer activities for students would build upon their existing propensities for social interaction. Research also indicates that supporting such volunteer opportunities and extracurricular activities can simultaneously reduce problem behaviors, increase scholastic performance and encourage social connectedness. Creating and expanding such efforts in Kentucky schools could increase social connectedness, as well as its many associated positive outcomes—making it a priority goal for the Commonwealth.

Photo provided by the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville.

SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

Civic education that incorporates collaborative volunteering opportunities and service-learning would not only work toward greater social connectedness but also increase Kentucky's lower-than-average volunteer rates. The Kentucky Department of Education has several programs with a service-learning component. Further, twenty-two Kentucky colleges are part of the Kentucky Campus Compact—an organization that fosters service-learning across the state. Kentucky high schools, on the other hand, lack an umbrella initiative for service-learning—although programs exist at some high schools.[19] Thus, there are great opportunities for collaborative civic service-learning projects led by Kentucky Campus Compact colleges. Volunteering opportunities can be coordinated with the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service and the national AmeriCorps program. Additionally, Public Achievement of Kentucky is an excellent example of collaborative civic oriented service-learning that can be carried out across the state.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CIVIC HEALTH

Community engagement is about working to make a difference in our communities. While community engagement includes acts of volunteerism and service, the primary aim of engagement is a rich form of public participation that involves citizens in problem-solving and decision-making that affects their quality of life. This report summarizes a number of engagement measures that contribute to stronger participation and healthy community life. It is worth noting that in a time with such economic hardship, researchers have noted a strong positive correlation between civic engagement and resilience against unemployment. In fact, states and localities with more civic engagement in 2006 saw less growth in unemployment between 2006 and 2010.[20] Although these correlations do not prove that civic engagement lowers unemployment at the state level, it should draw our intention to the substantive value of engagement as more than just a "feel good" exercise.

Although Kentuckians tend to have close bonds with their families, nearly all citizen groups show a need to expand their social connections through increased group membership.

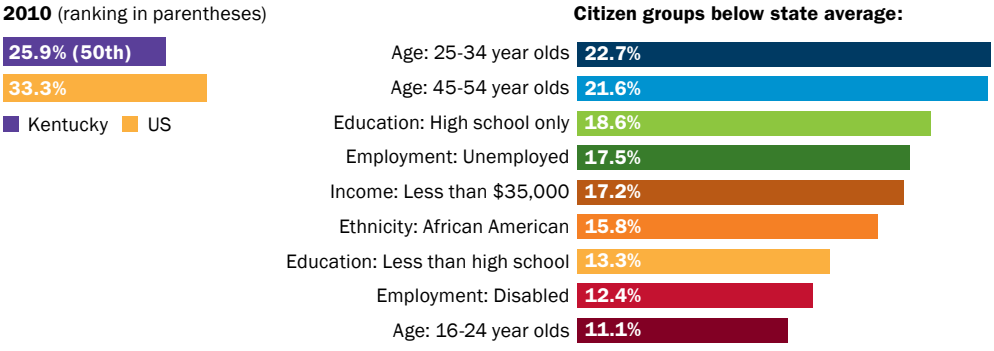
Photo provided by the WKU Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility.

Where we stand

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Group membership builds a sense of community and fosters communication. Members share needs and resources, which allows for a wider exchange of social capital and creative problem solving.

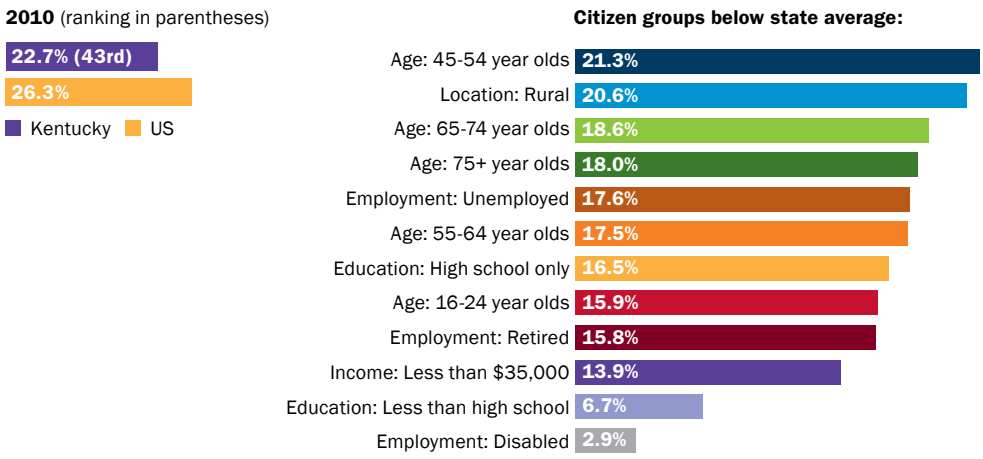
Group Membership



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers have a significant impact on meeting community needs. They deliver critical services, keep public spaces safe and clean, tutor and mentor children, build capacity and sustain infrastructure. Through their efforts, volunteers also gain valuable personal and professional experiences.

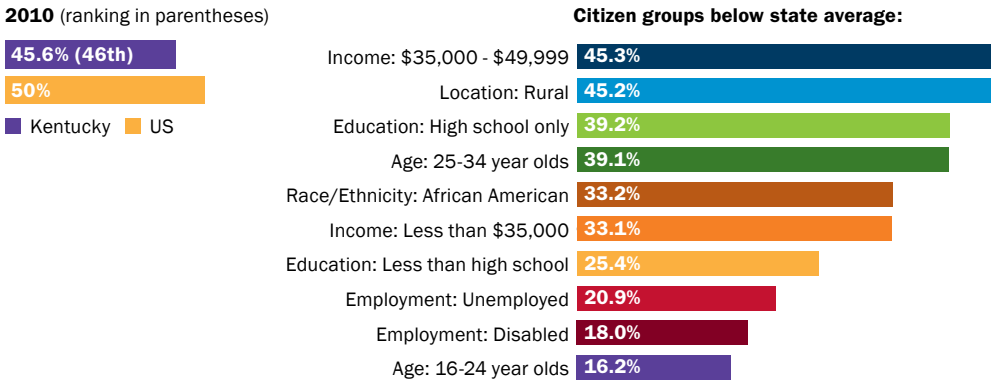
Volunteering



CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF $25 OR MORE

Many of our nation's vital services are enhanced and sustained by private charitable contributions. Particularly in difficult economic times, donations allow organizations to continue serving their communities in the absence or reduction of state and federal funding.

Charitable Contributions of $25 or More



31.7%

The level of volunteering in Kentucky peaked in 2005 at 31.7% and has been declining since. Only 25-44 year old college graduates volunteered above the state average.

Photo provided by the WKU Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility.

PUBLIC WORK IN KENTUCKY

Public work is an emerging indicator for national civic health. It is a framework for reinventing *active* citizenship. Public work stresses practical public effort by ordinary people in everyday environments who work together to address public problems and improve quality of life. Citizens engaged in public work are more able to address individual and community issues through collaborative problem solving. For the purposes of this report, "public work" refers to people 16 and older who attend meetings *and* work with neighbors to fix or improve something. Drawing on the terminology of Harry Boyte[21] (and antecedents such as Alexis de Tocqueville[22]), public work refers to the combination of talking about issues and directly acting on them.

ATTEND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Given the busy pace of our society, it is becoming more difficult to experience a sense of community. Frequent interaction with community can lead to a greater sense of individual happiness and belonging as well as a more stable and supportive society. Attending community meetings where shared issues are discussed is one key indicator of public work.

Attend Community Meetings

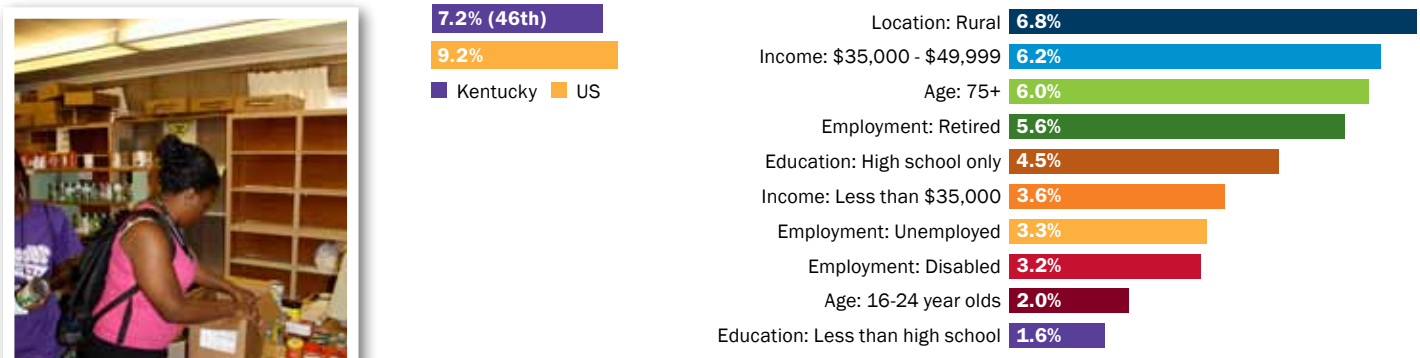
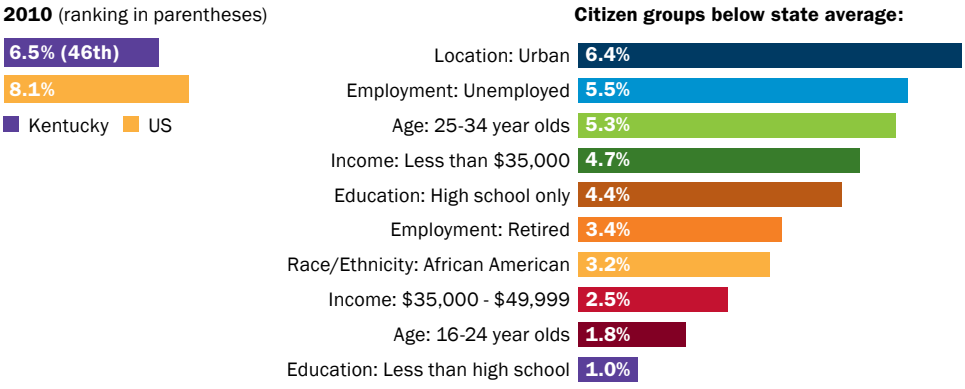


Photo provided by the WKU Alive Center for Community Partnerships.

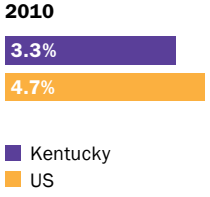
WORK WITH NEIGHBORS TO FIX OR IMPROVE SOMETHING IN THE COMMUNITY

The process of discussing issues with others and then *working* together to address them can cultivate a greater sense of co-ownership of shared resources, community pride, and collaborative problem solving. This working together to address a shared problem is another key indicator of public work.

Working with Neighbors to Fix or Improve Something in the Community



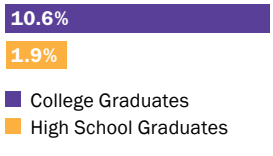
Public Work



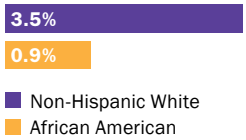
Although only 4.7% of the national population meets the definition of public work (both attending meetings and working with neighbors), these citizens—roughly 11.2 million—represent an active and productive segment of the American population working to address public problems. Public work is particularly vital in a climate of pressing economic and social need. Citizens who work together to collaboratively address issues are able to strengthen their communities even when larger systems are in decline due to economic hardship. Kentuckians are slightly less involved in public work than the national average.

As we see among the individual indicators, public work on the whole is positively correlated with level of education. There is a significant correlation between level of education and Kentuckians who participate in public work. At the national level only 1.2% of adults without high school diplomas participate in public work as opposed to 9.4% of college graduates. This correlation is even more pronounced in Kentucky where 10.6% of college graduates join with others in public work compared with only 1.9% of Kentuckians with a high school education.

Public Work in KY



Public Work in KY

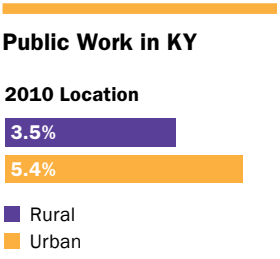


At the national level, a greater percentage of non-Hispanic whites participate in public work than other ethnic groups. For example, 5.5% of non-Hispanic whites engage in public work vs. 4.3% of African Americans. Non-Hispanic whites overwhelmingly carry out public work across the Commonwealth. It is a particular concern that African Americans in Kentucky are significantly less engaged than at the national level, with only 0.9% of respondents attending meetings with other neighborhood members and subsequently working together to solve problems.

Across the United States, public work is more common in rural areas than in larger metropolitan areas (5.4% vs. 4.1%); however, in Kentucky, citizens are more likely to participate in public work in our cities. One potential reason for this difference is the dispersion of traditional communities brought about by economic pressures that force citizens to commute to workplaces and spend an increasing amount of time isolated from their neighbors.

While the national trend points toward older adults age 55-64 being most engaged in public work, perhaps the most salient challenge for the Commonwealth is the lack of public work among Kentucky's young people. The age disparity in citizens carrying out public work was clearly pronounced as no one under age 25 in the Kentucky sample met the twin criteria for public work—meet with community members and work to collaboratively solve problems. Engaging Kentucky's youth must be a focus as we move to strengthen the civic health of the Commonwealth.

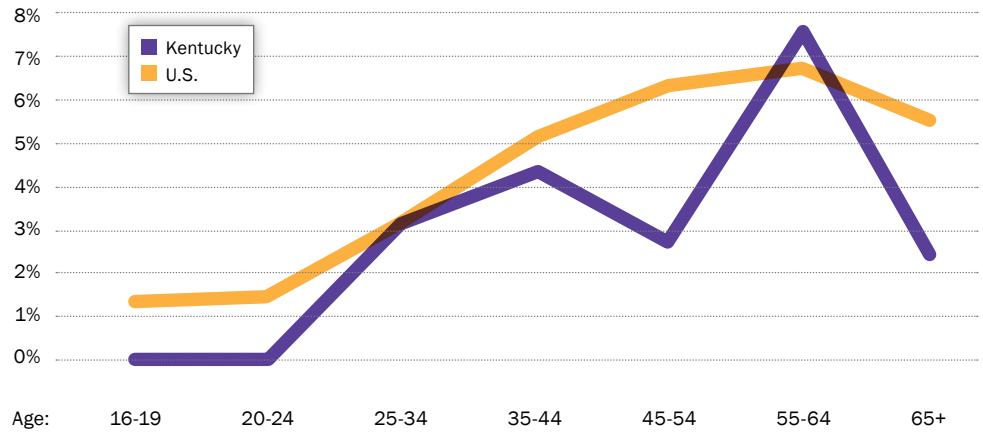
Public Work in KY



In a time of increasing economic stress, it is critical that communities work together to address their problems. The level of neighbors working together to solve community problems has been decreasing across the Commonwealth since 2008.

Photo provided by the WKU Alive Center for Community Partnerships.

Citizens Engagement in Public Works by Age



No one under the age of 25 in the Kentucky sample met the definition for public work. Engaging our young people in public work should be a focus going forward.

GOAL

Our goal should be to enhance the level of public work and related civic engagement in Kentucky by increasing the quantity and quality of civic education and community engagement across the Commonwealth.

As we continue to navigate a turbulent time in our nation's history, we require a more informed, engaged, and socially responsible citizenry. Research carried out by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) shows both educators and employers agree personal and social responsibilities are core elements of a 21st Century education. The AAC&U points out that many institutions are placing more emphasis on civic education by developing innovative educational practices to advance learning outcomes essential for responsible citizenship, at home and abroad. Such educational innovations include thematically linked learning communities, community-based research, global learning focused on real-world challenges, service-learning, diversity programs to promote learning across differences, reflective experiential learning, and curricular experiences to teach students how systems work and can be changed. Furthermore, educational institutions can serve as vital catalysts for the activation of community-based citizenship efforts across Kentucky.

SHAPING KENTUCKY TOGETHER—EFFORTS THAT GENERATE PUBLIC WORK AND CULTIVATE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Public Achievement of Kentucky

Public Achievement (PA) is a sustainable model of preparing young people to be engaged citizens in a democracy. PA addresses a variety of issues both at the individual student level and in the wider school and neighborhood setting. It is designed to address the "empowerment gap" within the young people of Kentucky's communities. According to national research, students are failing to gain the necessary skills and habits of critical thinking, complex reasoning, communication, and collaborative work needed for active citizenship and individual and community success. PA focuses on teaching young people the skills and capacities to be effective citizens and leaders in a diverse world, where complex problems require innovative and relationship-based solutions. The Public Achievement model features a deep form of civic education, which brings together students in primary, secondary, and higher education settings to work together to address "real world" problems. Public Achievement of Kentucky is an ongoing effort between the Institute for Citizenship & Responsibility at Western Kentucky University and area public school systems.

Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education

Over the past several years, civic-based learning has faded from the classroom, and countless numbers of students have been inadequately equipped to deal with the challenges facing their communities. The purpose of Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education is to raise consciousness of the need for civics education in Kentucky as a cornerstone of society that will prepare Kentuckians to be informed citizens, effectively participating in America's democratic process.

Kentucky Regional Stewardship Program

The Regional Stewardship Program, an academic initiative of Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education, promotes regional and statewide economic development, livable communities, social inclusion, creative governance, and civic participation through public engagement activities initiated by comprehensive university faculty and staff. Its purpose is to link the resources and knowledge of our universities to the needs and challenges of their respective regions. Kentucky is the first state in the nation to launch a statewide stewardship program.

Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service

The Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) administers Kentucky's AmeriCorps national service programs. The Commission is a statewide, bipartisan group comprised of 25 members, appointed by the governor, with diverse service and volunteerism backgrounds. The KCCVS actively engages citizens in community service opportunities that enable volunteers, organizations, and businesses to share ideas and effectively collaborate to address Kentucky's needs. The KCCVS hosts a number of annual statewide activities designed to encourage volunteer and service program development. The KCCVS's funding is provided by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Kentucky General Assembly.

Photo provided by the WKU Alive Center for Community Partnerships.

Photo provided by the WKU Alive Center for Community Partnerships.

CONCLUSION

This report has outlined several of the key indicators that help us determine the civic health of Kentucky. The citizens of the Commonwealth are like many Americans; they have both civic strengths and weaknesses. The report has included several goals for Kentucky and many initiatives and recommendations that would help us to achieve those goals. We would like to distill these goals and recommendations into the following:

Educate, educate, educate. Civic skills and capacities are not innate, they are learned. While schools are not the only places where these skills and capacities can be learned, they certainly hold great potential to be important locations for civic learning. Much more needs to be done to integrate civic education into our P-12 schools. Innovative programs like Public Achievement are just one positive example. The earlier we can educate our children as citizens the better. At the same time, our education as citizens need not stop with high school. Curricular and co-curricular programming through places like the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville and the Institute for Citizenship and Social Responsibility at Western Kentucky University, among many others, provide Kentucky college students with important opportunities to develop as citizens. Students not only learn important skills and capacities, but also reflect critically on obstacles to a strong democracy and effective citizenship (such as media saturation, rampant consumerism, and social disconnectedness). Course work along with service-learning and volunteering opportunities on our college campuses help to encourage informed and engaged citizenship.

Funding higher education. Our legislators need to recognize the importance of higher education for citizenship. Colleges and universities prepare students to participate fully in society, our democracy and our economy, and college graduates are typically more civically involved. It follows that promoting and supporting higher education opportunities will likely have significant implications for our state's civic health. Moving beyond the political rhetoric to an authentic commitment to higher education requires restoring much of the funding to higher education that has been cut in recent years, allowing tuition costs to go down, and providing pathways for more students to attend our colleges and universities.

Voting. It is important to recognize that scare tactics about voting fraud detract attention from significant barriers to participation. Voting fraud is miniscule[23] when compared to the large portion of citizens who are not registered or who do not vote. Our public officials need to move forward in instituting mechanisms to make registering and voting easier—whether that be same-day registration, voting by mail, or other efforts. We also need to reexamine legislation limiting the voting rights of those who have served their time in prison and have been released back into society with the expectation that they will be good citizens.

Addressing inequality. Current research on our democracy and our citizens, as well as the data in this report, indicate that poor and marginalized populations are not as civically engaged as others. Inequality tends to breed social disconnectedness and political apathy. We need the time, talents and contributions of everyone to make our communities better and our democracy stronger. Public officials need to see socioeconomic inequalities not only as threats to human dignity but as threats to our communities and our democracy. We need public policies that address existing inequality in Kentucky. These policies will, in turn, likely lead to greater social connectedness, more informed and active voters, and citizens who actively work to improve their communities in myriad ways.

Strengthening our communities and our democracy is no easy task. The data in this report indicate the challenges before us. But strengthening civic education, increasing access to higher education, removing obstacles to voting, and addressing inequality in the Commonwealth are important first steps in shaping Kentucky's future together.

** The conclusions in this report are the authors' alone and not necessarily those of the partners whose support made the report possible.*

TECHNICAL NOTES

Findings presented above are based on CIRCLE's analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any and all errors are our own. Volunteering estimates are from CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2002 - 2010, Voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/ Registration Supplement, 1972-2010, and all other civic engagement indicators, such as discussion of political information and connection to neighbors, come from the 2010 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement.

Estimates for the volunteering indicators (e.g., volunteering, working with neighbors, making donations) are based on U.S. residents ages 16 and older. Estimates for civic engagement and social connection indicators (e.g., exchanging favor with neighbor, discussing politics) are based on U.S. residents ages 18 and older. Voting and registration statistics are based on U.S. citizens who are 18 and older (eligible voters). Any time we examined the relationship between educational attainment and engagement, estimates are only based on adults ages 25 and older, based on the assumption that younger people may still be completing their education.

Because we draw from multiple sources of data with varying sample sizes, we are not able to compute one margin of error for the state across all indicators. In KY, the margins of error for major indicators varied from +/- 1.2% to 2.8%, depending on the sample size and other parameters associated with a specific indicator. Any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples and therefore the margin of error will increase. It is also important to emphasize that our margin of error estimates are approximate, as CPS sampling is highly complex and accurate estimation of error rates involves many parameters that are not publicly available.

NOTES ABOUT THE COMPOSITE CIVIC INDICATORS:

CIRCLE provided three composite measures of civic engagement offered in this report as a way to offer a summative metric to glean a bigger picture of the level of engagement among residents of the state. It is important to note, however, that these composite measures represent just one way of bundling together individual indicators into larger categories to tell one type of story about civic engagement,

The three composite measures are one of the many ways of summarizing multiple indicators:

- *"Political action" metric is a count of activities in the conventional political engagement domain. These are mainly efforts to influence the government and other large institutions. It is composed of four items: voting, discussing politics with family and friends a few times a week or more, contacting public officials, and buying or boycotting products. An individual receives one point for each activity that he or she reports to make up a scale of 0 to 4.*

- *"Social connectedness" is count of activities that are considered to maintain or strengthen social connection. It is composed of four items: eating dinner with other members of your household a few times a week or more, communicating with friends or family online a few times a week or more, talking with neighbors a few times a week or more, and doing favors for neighbors a few times a week or more. Individuals get one point for each act they report to make up a scale of 0 to 4.*

- *"Public work" composite identifies individuals who both attend meetings and work with neighbors to fix or improve something. Drawing on the terminology of Harry Boyte (and antecedents such as Alexis de Tocqueville), public work refers to the combination of talking about issues and directly acting on them. A person is scored as participating in public work if he or she both attends meetings and works with neighbors (if a person does one of the other, they are not counted in this measure).*

ENDNOTES

1 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 41.

2 Putnam, *Bowling,* 183.

3 Putnam, *Bowling,* 222-3.

4 Putnam, *Bowling,* 224.

5 Putnam, *Bowling,* 229.

6 Perhaps the best work on this phenomenon is Juliet Schor's *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998).

7 Putnam, *Bowling,* 263, 265.

8 Putnam notes that the generations that lived through the Great Depression and World War II experienced a great leveling in economic terms. These generations also were some of the most civically engaged in our nation's history (Putnam, *Bowling*, 271).

9 Commonwealth of Kentucky- State Board of Elections Voter Turnout Report for the 11/07/06 General Elections. 2006. http://elect.ky.gov.

10 Craig L. Brians, & Bernard Grofman. "Election Day Registration's Effect on U.S. Voter Turnout." 2001. Social Science Quarterly. Vol. 82, Number 1.

11 League of Women Voters of Kentucky. *Felony Disenfranchisement in the Commonwealth of Kentucky: A Report of the League of Women Voters of Kentucky.* 2006. http://www.kftc.org/our-work/restoration/lwvreport

12 Rafael Pintor; M. Gratschew & K. Sullivan. *Voter Turnout Rates from a Comparative Perspective.* Figure 11. Pages 78-81. <http://www.idea.int/publications/vt/upload/Voter%20turnout.pdf>

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14 Richard M. Lee & Steven B. Robbins, "The relationship between social connectedness and anxiety, self-esteem, and social identity," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 5 (1998): 338 –345.

15 Louise C. Hawkley, Christopher M. Masi, Jarett D. Berry, & John T. Cacioppo, "Loneliness is a unique predictor of age-related differences in systolic blood pressure," *Psychology and Aging* 21 (2006): 152–164.

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17 Cendri A. Hutcherson, Emma M. Seppala, & James J. Gross, "Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness," *Emotion* 8 (2008): 720 –724.

18 Jaana Juvonen, "Reforming middle schools: Focus on continuity, social connectedness, and engagement," *Educational Psychologist* 42 (2007): 197-208.

19 Learn and Serve America in Kentucky. 2011. http://www.learnandserve.gov/about/role_impact/state_profiles_detail.asp?tbl_profiles_state=KY

20 National Conference on Citizenship, "Civic Health and Unemployment: Can Engagement Strengthen the Economy?" http://www.ncoc.net/unemployment

21 Harry Boyte, *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life,* (Philadelphia: University of Penn Press, 2004).

22 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* (New York: Signet Classics, 2001).

23 For example, see the policy brief from the Brennan Center for Justice at http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/policy_brief_on_the_truth_about_voter_fraud/ (retrieved November 30, 2011).

CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

State and Local Partnerships

America's Civic Health Index has been produced nationally since 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. As the *Civic Health Index* is increasingly a part of the dialogue around which policymakers, communities, and the media talk about civic life, the index is increasing in its scope and specificity.

Together with its local partners, NCoC continues to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America. NCoC has worked in partnerships in communities across the country.

STATES

Alabama
University of Alabama*
David Mathews Center*
Auburn University*

Arizona
Center for the Future of Arizona

California
California Forward
Center for Civic Education
Center for Individual and Institutional Renewal*
Davenport Institute

Connecticut
Everyday Democracy*
Secretary of the State of Connecticut*

Florida
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
Bob Graham Center for Public Service
Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Illinois
Citizen Advocacy Center
McCormick Foundation

Indiana
Center on Congress at Indiana University*
Hoosier State Press Association Foundation*
Indiana Bar Foundation*
Indiana Supreme Court*
Indiana University Northwest*

Kentucky
Commonwealth of Kentucky, Secretary of State's Office*
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility, Western Kentucky University*
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education*
McConnell Center, University of Louisville*

Maryland
Mannakee Circle Group
Center for Civic Education
Common Cause-Maryland
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

Massachusetts
Harvard Institute on Politics*

Minnesota
Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Missouri
Missouri State University

New Hampshire
Carsey Institute

New York
Siena Research Institute
New York State Commission on National and Community Service*

North Carolina
North Carolina Civic Education Consortium
Center for Civic Education
NC Center for Voter Education
Democracy NC
NC Campus Compact
Western Carolina University Department of Public Policy

Ohio
Miami University Hamilton

Oklahoma
University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania
National Constitution Center

Texas
University of Texas at San Antonio

Virginia
Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

CITIES

Chicago
McCormick Foundation

Miami
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Miami Foundation*

Seattle
Seattle City Club
Boeing Company
Seattle Foundation

Twin Cities
Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Citizens League*
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

** Indicates new partner in 2011*

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Chairman, Board of Advisors, National Conference on Citizenship
Former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps

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Kristen Cambell
Chief Program Officer, National Conference on Citizenship

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Former Mayor of Indianapolis

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Jonathan Zaff
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NCoC

National Conference on Citizenship

Chartered by Congress