



The Civic Health of Wisconsin Initiative
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE in “SOFT ROLL-OUT” CONVENING

WHEN: March 5th, 9 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

WHERE: UW South Madison Partnership Space, 2312 S Park St, Madison, WI 53713 (with virtual participation options available)

WHAT: Breakfast Meeting and Gathering of Key Wisconsin Partners and other “Civic Health” colleagues to:

- (1) Review initial data and information to be used for an Inaugural Civic Health of Wisconsin Report;**
- (2) Hear from the National Conference on Citizenship to understand how a Civic Health Initiative can inspire improved civic participation and about other states’ efforts to this end;**
- (3) Provide input on our Inaugural Civic Health of Wisconsin Report;**
- (4) Contribute to commitments -- associated with the roll-out of the report -- by statewide and local groups to inspire and support improved civic participation in Wisconsin**

Background/Justification:

There is a widely accepted understanding that in the U.S., civic participation has been on the decline, and that there are associated negative implications and social problems, which impact individuals, families, and communities. Through the inaugural Wisconsin Civic Health Report, community members, civic leaders, and researchers will understand the “civic health of Wisconsin”, as well as where Wisconsin fits in the general trend that “civic health” has been on the decline, sometimes acutely in what are known as “civic health deserts.”¹ We define civic health to include civility and various forms of civic participation. We aim to learn about the nature of this issue in Wisconsin through the preparation of a “Civic Health of Wisconsin Report” and the launch of an ongoing initiative which will promote informed strategies to continually improve Wisconsin’s civic health.

While many states and municipalities across the U.S. have already conducted a “Civic Health Report”, or recurring reports, with the support of the National Conference on Citizenship (“NCOC”) and using the Civic Health Index (“CHI”) (see: <https://ncoc.org/chi/>), Wisconsin has yet to do so. There is currently no organized data about the strength or weakness of civic health in Wisconsin. To date, we have little understanding of whether different Wisconsin communities and groups participate similarly, or if, as identified in previous studies (e.g., Littenberg-Tobias & Cohen, 2016), there are disparities in participation across identities, such as age, rural or urban status, or racial or ethnic groups. Information from the report

¹ <https://tischcollege.tufts.edu/research/civic-deserts-americas-civic-health-challenge>

will indicate Wisconsin's strengths and areas for growth as it relates to: Political Involvement, Group Membership, Volunteering and Giving, and Social Connectedness.

Our Coalition:

Our coalition of statewide nonpartisan organizations, includes:

Host Organization:

- The University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (the "CommNS"). Based at the School of Human Ecology, conducting engaged research and outreach on a variety of themes related to community and civil society, the CommNS is the lead unit for this submission and the proposed "host" entity for the Report and ongoing Initiative.

Additional Coalition Participants: Campus Compact for Wisconsin; League of Wisconsin Municipalities; UW-Extension Department of Youth, Family, and Community Development; UW-Milwaukee Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management; the UW-Madison Morgridge Center for Public Service; the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service; Wisconsin Partners; UW-Madison UniverCity Alliance.

From an Inaugural Civic Health of Wisconsin Report to an Ongoing Initiative. . .

We have engaged NCOC for initial data and are now gathering key stakeholders and coalition members together to review the initial data and determine commitments and strategic action steps to disseminate the report and ensure that the report leads to action in our communities and across Wisconsin! We will then finalize the report and broadly disseminate our Inaugural Civic Health of Wisconsin Report for awareness-building among Wisconsin communities, institutions, and stakeholders. We will leverage the publication of the first Report to launch an ongoing Civic Health Initiative, which will include an online platform and "hub" for information about promising civic health programming, support from the CommNS and Coalition members for community groups, municipalities, state government units, and others to develop their own civic health programs, mini-grant opportunities for organizations and groups to launch civic health efforts, and connections to broader, national civic health discussions and efforts.

We expect that the inaugural Report will set a **baseline** for future comparison through additional periodic Reports, and that such comparison will allow us to assess:

- 1) changes in civic health in Wisconsin over time,*
- 2) the influence of certain efforts of our Initiative, and*
- 3) the impacts on individuals, families, and communities.*

Key **outcomes** of this effort will include:

- 1) understanding of the state of civic health of Wisconsin, and of particular groups in Wisconsin,*
- 2) identification of "civic deserts" in the state,*
- 3) increase awareness of civic health issues in Wisconsin, and*
- 4) increase opportunities for communities, organizations, and households to take action to improve civic health.*

The project also connects Wisconsin to a national network of states and municipalities already conducting "Civic Health" reports and initiatives through the NCOC. Promising strategies from these efforts are shared across this community of scholars, practitioners, and leaders. Connecting with this network through our project will create a valuable link between Wisconsin and leading thought and action for civic health across the nation.

For more information, contact Mary Beth Collins, Executive Director of the UW-Madison Center for Nonprofit Studies, mecollins@wisc.edu and Garret Zastoupil, gzastoupil@wisc.edu.