THE CIVIC INFORMATION INDEX

Mapping drivers of engaged, informed, equitable and healthy communities

Listening Post Collective
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information futures lab

Press Forward »

CIVIC INFORMATION INDEX FOREWORD

By Dale R. Anglin
Director, Press Forward

At Press Forward, we are galvanizing a movement to reinvigorate local news nationwide. But our overarching goal is not to preserve journalism for journalism's sake; it's to strengthen communities.

In fact, we believe the futures of reliable local journalism and communities are inextricably linked. Thriving neighborhoods are those where people participate—by voting, volunteering, and understanding and discussing important issues that impact their lives. Trusted sources of information play a vital role in this. After all, how else can someone stay informed about what's happening at City Hall, in the local business district, or at a nearby school without trustworthy local news?

We at Press Forward need data to guide our work and help local leaders, funders and journalists understand the roles that news and information play within the larger context of a community's civic health. That's why, as one of our first investments, we supported the development of the Civic Information Index, which includes 21 data sets that can help us view and evaluate communities holistically.

Created by The Listening Post Collective at Internews and the Information Futures Lab at Brown University, the Index allows users to see both where their communities are excelling and where they face unique challenges. By inputting the name of a county, one can quickly see a range of factors and determinants, including volunteer rates, housing insecurity, medical debt and the existence of local news outlets, among others. We need to look at these specific data points both in isolation and together, so we can see a community's unique civic realities, opportunities, and, as we invest, watch how they shift over time.

As funders, we are optimistic about the potential of the Index to guide local leaders and foundations in their investment decisions. By leveraging insights provided by the Index, these stakeholders can identify areas that require support and determine the most effective ways to allocate their resources. We also hope that journalists will use the Index to uncover community trends to report on, and that journalism support organizations will use it to strengthen local media ecosystems. We are also excited about the invitation for local people to continue improving the Index, by adding trusted sources of local news to the database.

As evidenced in this Index, more media outlets in a community doesn't inherently mean better civic health. The local information ecosystem is only one factor in nurturing civic life, albeit an important one. True changes require partnerships with and action by journalists, media outlets, local government, residents, civic organizations, foundations, and others. Seeing these determinants together can point us all in the right direction as we seek to nurture healthy, resilient communities.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grassroots civic media efforts and investments in local journalism are on the rise in the U.S. After years of local news decline, it is time to take a fresh look at the role news and information play in communities across the nation — and their potential impact on civic health outcomes. Civic health is facilitated by local infrastructure that enables engaged, informed, equitable and healthy communities.

In best case scenarios, news organizations play an integral role within that infrastructure by keeping people informed and educated on the issues most impacting their region. In reality, this promise has lapsed in places where local news outlets have not served all parts of their communities equally, leaving behind those who need transparency, accountability and quality information the most — a challenge exacerbated by dwindling local news business models.

There is an urgent need for news media organizations to better listen to the communities they serve and to better understand the gaps and opportunities within their local information ecosystems. At the same time, recognizing journalism as a part of broader civic health efforts shifts conversations about the need for independent news from an abstract plea to "save journalism" to concrete examples of how journalism can support and benefit people and communities — and how equitable information access can impact people's lives for the better.

This report introduces

THE CIVIC INFORMATION INDEX

a new tool for media entrepreneurs, funders and communities to assess the strength of a community's civic health. Combining 21 publicly available, county-level datasets on elements of civic health such as volunteer rates, library visits, news deserts, housing insecurity and medical debt, the Index serves as a data-driven starting point for newsrooms and civic media start-ups to engage and collaborate with their communities.

"I think this project is powerful because it brings together diverse data sets and visualizes them in a way that highlights opportunities for improving civic health. It's a comprehensive approach that can guide us in making impactful changes."

Amanda Zamora, Co-Founder, The 19th

The Index was co-created by the Listening Post Collective at Internews and the Information Futures Lab at Brown University, in partnership with an Advisory Group of experts and journalism leaders. This report summarizes the Index framework, metrics, and methodology; it then shares key findings and recommendations that emerge from the data.
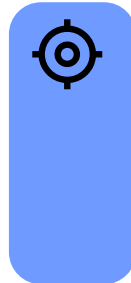
Going forward, the Civic Information Index can serve as a resource for a range of journalism stakeholders, supporting strategic investments and innovative approaches.

THE INDEX MAY BE APPLIED BY:

THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY
to fund local news initiatives in targeted regions throughout the country.

JOURNALISM SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS
to help local media partners map information needs and build relevant news infrastructures that meaningfully serve individual communities.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWS OUTLETS
to map crucial community information needs and inequities, prioritize untold storylines that emerge from Index data, and engage with partners to deliver reporting in more nuanced and equitable ways.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
can use the Index to advocate for more support to improve information access and to demonstrate their important role as culturally competent connectors between local communities and journalism stakeholders.
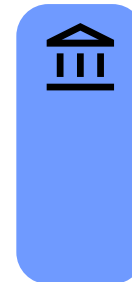
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
can consult the data and findings to understand the strengths and weaknesses in local civic health and information ecosystems, and fund, build and support diverse infrastructure efforts accordingly.

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS
can support their local communities by helping collect and store local data, provide research support, host partnerships between local a nd outside collaborators and publish local impact assessments.

Together we can do so much

INTRODUCTION:
HOW A FOCUS ON CIVIC HEALTH CAN REVITALIZE LOCAL JOURNALISM

Amidst increasing polarization and rapid societal, political, technological and environmental change, communities across the U.S. are changing. To ensure that reliable, accessible and trustworthy information remains a core pillar of how communities adapt and thrive, journalism must change with them.

Today, news ventures of all kinds are a vital part of increasingly diverse local civic health ecosystems. As communities adapt to rapid societal, political, technological and environmental change, local news organizations connect people with critical information, verify and contextualize the news, and hold the powerful accountable. But they don't do so in isolation. Local advocacy and power-building movements, community organizations, grassroots initiatives and others work alongside journalists and civic media with the

shared goal of strengthening discourse, transparency, engagement, accountability — and ultimately, equitable outcomes for all.

"There's a great opportunity to build awareness about the critical role of media in supporting healthy, engaged communities. This work helps highlight the interconnectedness of different facets of our lives and how they contribute to civic health. It's essential for journalism to be part of this ecosystem, serving the community transparently and truthfully."

Madeleine Bair, *Founding Director, El Tímpano*

Historically, traditional news organizations often have not served all parts of their communities equally, leaving behind those needing transparency, accountability and quality information the most. To this day, too many newsrooms fail to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Advocates continue to press for better representation, and more and more nuanced coverage of the issues and challenges experienced by communities confronting racial, economic, and other forms of discrimination.

Similarly, outdated news delivery mechanisms can create new barriers to information access and vulnerabilities for people who, for instance, can't afford to get behind a paywall, who have low levels of trust in news and authorities, or who come from a different language and cultural context.

There is an urgent need for news media organizations to better listen to and understand civic health at the local level. It is the first step to creating more reflective, responsive and community-centered news and information projects that support and are supported by the communities they serve.

At the same time, recognizing journalism as a part of the broader civic health ecosystem opens up important opportunities. It allows shifting conversations about the need for independent news from an abstract plea to "save journalism" to very concrete examples of how journalism can support and benefit people and communities. It allows news organizations to reconnect with community members, explore how to best serve local information needs, and rebuild trust. It makes journalism more collaborative, more informed, more effective — and sustainable.

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our Index dashboard.

INTRODUCING THE CIVIC INFORMATION INDEX

In this report, we introduce the **Civic Information Index** (the Index), a new tool for media entrepreneurs, funders and communities. The Index focuses efforts to revitalize local news on the core purpose of journalism: "to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing." (Kovach & Rosenstiel, The Elements of Journalism.)

Centering on this notion — that the core purpose of news media is to strengthen civic health — the Index combines 21 publicly available, county-level datasets to assess the strength of a community's civic health. It combines data on elements of civic health such as volunteer rates, library visits, housing insecurity and medical debt, enabling media entrepreneurs and information providers to engage and collaborate with their audiences and communities through a renewed emphasis on the outcomes journalists and other civic health actors hope to achieve.

"It became very clear at the onset of the pandemic, when lockdowns were first ordered here in North Carolina, that our media ecosystem was not equipped to get essential information to the people. It was community organizations and trusted messengers, including community news organizations, who did."

Lizzy Hazeltine, Director, North Carolina Local News Lab Fund

For example, do members of a neighborhood with high housing insecurity have access to information about the new rent support their city offers, reducing the probability of eviction? Do community members who don't speak English well know that the library also serves as a cooling center in a heat wave? Are local newsrooms covering the rapid increase in medical debt in some communities that reduces affected individuals' credit scores, and with that their ability to build or maintain financial stability?

The Index also includes the "news desert" data familiar to many in the local news industry as one of several data points that help better understand the strengths and weaknesses of local information ecosystems. (See section 3, The Index Framework, for details.)

"The reason I'm excited about this work is that we've been in a reactionary frame in terms of how to talk about our work. This project creates a proactive framework for discussions about what impact looks like and what we are all working towards as a collective."

Mazin Sidahmed, Co-Executive Director, Documented

How Familias en Acción meets a community's information needs

Lilia Becerril's civic information project, Familias en Acción, would never turn up on an "official" news desert map, which identifies what local media still exists throughout the U.S. But if you were to ask people around Fresno County, California how they get information about key topics like housing, food, businesses, environmental issues and legal aid in Spanish, chances are Lilia's name, and her Facebook page and WhatsApp group will come up. It's the kind of civic-health minded news start-up that strengthens a community's access to essential information and enables community members — in this case, Fresno's Spanish speaking population — to be civically engaged.

In connecting the dots among the diverse factors that drive civic health, the Civic Information Index highlights how journalism and information ecosystems are a critical part of the civic infrastructure serving people and communities.

WHY AN INDEX?

In a nutshell, an index is a way to measure things. Built on a conceptual framework that clarifies what outcomes are of interest and why, an index maps out what data is and is not available and then uses the existing data to measure the outcomes of interest. By uniquely combining diverse data to assess civic health outcomes at the county level across the United States, the Civic Information Index allows us to see trends, outliers and reinforcing factors that drive civic health. While each data set in the Index represents facts, it is important to note that the Index itself is a product of many value-based decisions, determining, for example, what factors to include and what data sets to use to measure them.

"This is not about journalism in isolation. We're building a better house, and this is the first floor."

Loris Ann Taylor, President & CEO, Native Public Media

WHERE THE INDEX DATA IS COMING FROM

All data in this Index has been downloaded from publicly available data sets. This includes commonly known data sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Department of Education, the IRS, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Urban Institute and Northwestern University's Local News Initiative. It also includes more unique datasets such as the Institute of Museum and Library Services Public Libraries Survey or the number of Facebook Pages predicted to be "Public Good" pages as collected by Opportunity Insights. (A detailed list of all indicators and their data sources is available in the Appendix.)

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our **Index dashboard.**

HOW WE CREATED THE INDEX

"Our discussions underscore a critical point: the interplay between journalism and community engagement is pivotal."

Andrea Wenzel, Associate Professor of Journalism, Temple University

The **Civic Information Index** is an initiative co-led by The Listening Post Collective at Internews and the Information Futures Lab at Brown University. It is supported by Press Forward.

The project started with two essential questions: What, exactly, drives civic health? And what is the role that news and information play in the larger civic health ecosystem?

We explored these questions and developed the conceptual framework and design of the Index in an intense four-month process that included: multiple working sessions and asynchronous engagement of a curated Advisory Group of experts in the fields of journalism and civic engagement; interviews with other experts and diverse stakeholders; and a thorough review of existing literature, evidence and approaches. (See Appendix for details on the Index methodology, data sources and bibliography).

"It is when we speak about civic health and what makes communities thrive that people get interested. Talking about news as a part of our civic muscle, that really resonates."

Paulette Brown-Hinds, Founder, Voice Media Ventures

MEET THE ADVISORY GROUP & INDEX TEAM

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ABOUT THE LISTENING POST COLLECTIVE

The Listening Post Collective was established in 2013 by Jesse Hardman to adapt Internews's global expertise in community information mapping for the U.S. Through innovative strategies, the Listening Post Collective helps local media and community organizations address information gaps and empower underserved communities. The Listening Post Collective's work demonstrates the power of community engagement in creating impactful, local journalism. We provide a proven framework to build resilient information ecosystems that directly serve community needs.

ABOUT THE INFORMATION FUTURES LAB

Founded in 2022, the Information Futures Lab at Brown University is a new type of university hub. Interdisciplinary researchers work alongside organizations, journalists, civic society leaders and other sources of trusted information to respond to the information crisis as a civic and public health threat. Recognizing information as a social determinant of health, we create an evidence base and work with our partners to improve information ecosystems and strengthen the capacity of citizens to effectively access, create and make sense of information that is crucial to their wellbeing.

ABOUT PRESS FORWARD

Press Forward is a national coalition investing more than $500 million to strengthen local newsrooms, close longstanding gaps in journalism coverage, advance public policy that expands access to local news, and to scale the infrastructure the sector needs to thrive.

HOW THE INDEX DEFINES KEY TERMS (GLOSSARY)

- **Civic Health:** Civic health is the overall wellbeing of communities and how people participate in them.

- **Civic Infrastructure:** The places, policies, programs and practices that support civic health. From public parks to voter registration laws to newsrooms, civic infrastructure is a key facilitator of civic health.

- **Civic Information:** Any form of communication that is vital for people to make crucial decisions about their lives, that strengthens the social bonds within a community, and that creates a strong sense of civic engagement among its residents.

- **Civic Life:** The public life of citizens concerned with the affairs of the community and nation.

- **Civic Media:** Techniques and organizations that generate and share civic information in democratic societies. Civic media can include traditional newsrooms focused on local reporting as well as journalism start-ups building community power and citizen-run initiatives focused, for example, on connecting people with resources and opportunities.

- **Community Power Building:** A set of strategies to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people to advance community-led goals. In Community Power Building, people act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers.

- **Information Ecosystem:** A complex network of individuals, organizations, technologies, and practices that interact to create, share, and consume information, often compared to biological ecosystems due to information ecosystems' complex, interconnected and dynamic nature. An information ecosystem includes word of mouth, trusted community leaders, local media, local authorities, social media and/or other "infomediaries" as well as channels, formats and behaviors that drive highly participatory, distributed information flows.

- **Index:** A way of looking at or combining different data sets to measure an outcome in a standardized way.

> "Establishing this as an ecosystem is essential. We need to measure things that aren't currently being measured to understand their true impact on community health and engagement."

Matt Leighninger, Director, National Civic League

COLLABORATION IS KEY

21 INDICATORS

3. THE INDEX FRAMEWORK

The National Conference on Citizenship defines civic health as "the degree to which citizens participate in their communities, from local and state governance to interactions with friends or family. Civic health relates to the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states and the nation."

The Civic Information Index makes this foundation — the overall well-being of neighborhoods, communities, states and the nation that fosters freedom and collective self-governance — visible and measurable in new ways.

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our **Index dashboard.**

DRIVERS OF ENGAGED, INFORMED, EQUITABLE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

NEWS AND INFORMATION

CIVIC PARTICIPATION ECOSYSTEM

EQUITY AND JUSTICE
(Structural Determinants)

HEALTH AND OPPORTUNITY
(Social Determinants)
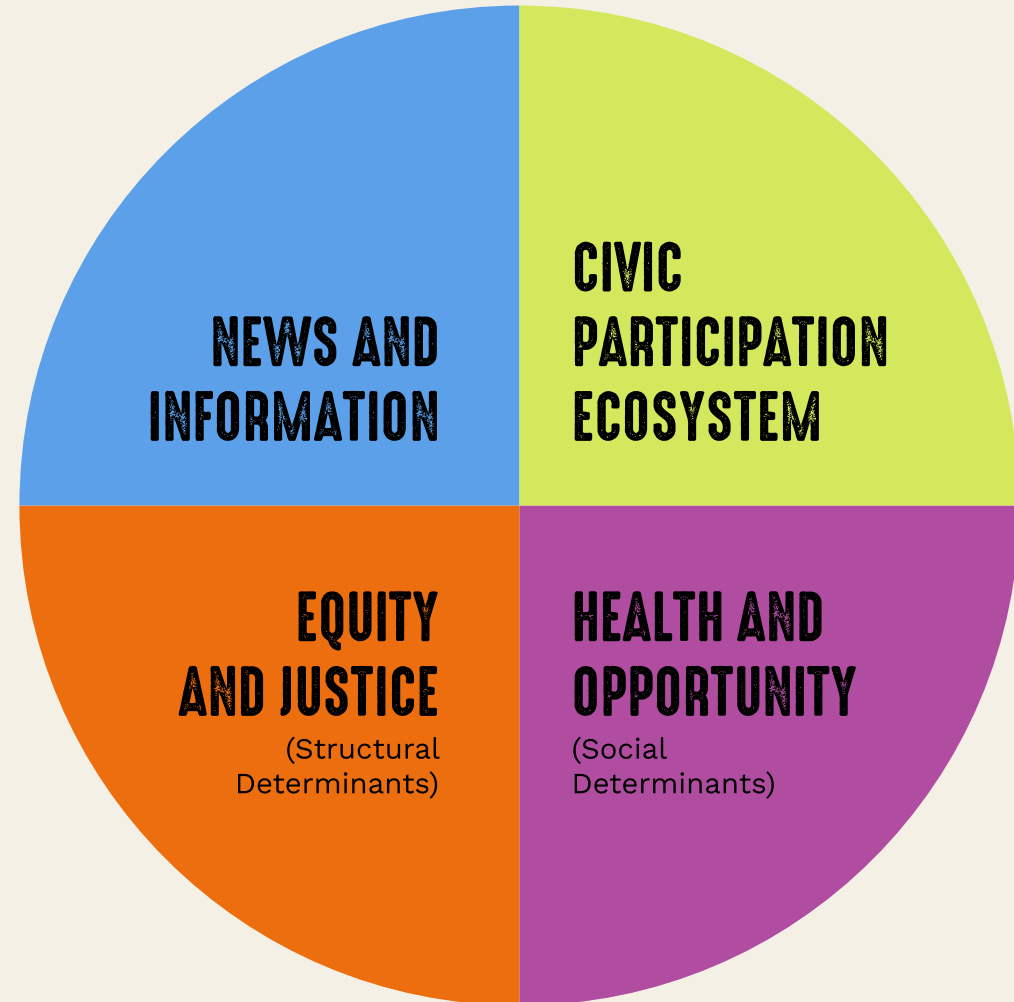
To do so, the Index is based on a conceptual framework that organizes the civic health ecosystem into four pillars: Traditionally, assessments of civic health have included basic components of civic engagement such as voter participation and charitable donations. More recently, advocates from different groups have highlighted the importance of including measures such as news deserts and broadband access, housing insecurity, or disconnected youth.

By recognizing and connecting these often-siloed efforts, the Index framework provides a more comprehensive view of the drivers of civic health, and what it takes to build engaged, informed, healthy and equitable communities.

The Index framework also acknowledges that civic engagement should flow from a foundation of equity, not injustice. Civic engagement, for example through power building, can thrive in response to injustice. As such, some measures of civic engagement may be high in some communities where people are speaking up and building resilience to the adversity they face. This is essential to self-advocacy and democratic change. It should be regarded as a necessary path to equity, not a constant. The ultimate goal of a free and fair democracy is for civic health to flourish from a foundation of equity.

By including structural determinants such as neighborhood poverty, youth disconnected from school or work and life expectancy, the Index is built to capture such dynamics and show where outcomes are inequitable. (See "Understanding and contextualizing local outcomes" in section 4 for a concrete example.)

"It's time for news organizations to think beyond just reporting. They should be part of the community, engaging and gathering feedback, and helping to build a healthier information ecosystem."

Amanda Zamora, Co-Founder, The 19th

THE FOUR PILLARS OF CIVIC HEALTH

The Index framework provides key data points — also called indicators — within each of the four pillars of the civic health ecosystem. Better outcomes on these indicators means a community has higher civic health. Sometimes, an indicator was found to be essential to civic health — such as people's sense of belonging — but no quality data to measure it was available for all or most counties in the U.S. In these cases, the indicator is still included in the framework but marked as "not currently measured." Local efforts should find out if nationally missing data may be available for their communities.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

People have access to and engage with trustworthy, credible information about issues affecting their lives and communities. Information is available in ways that meet community members' cultural context, consumption habits, languages spoken and information needs — and is delivered by sources they trust. The information infrastructure promotes an inclusive and equitable public sphere. Digital and media literacy are part of public education and support for public service media is sufficient to meet community information needs. Journalism is independent, journalists are safe, and the media landscape is representative of and supported by the community.

How the Index frames and measures news and information:

CATEGORY	INDICATOR
Lack of local news sources / presence of "news deserts"	Total news outlets per 10,000 population
Broadband access	Percent of households with broadband of any type
Library utilization	Library visits per 10,000 population
Vibrancy of online engagement on local issues	The number of Facebook Pages predicted to be "Public Good" pages based on page title, category, and other page characteristics, per 10,000 users in the county
Language access / English language proficiency	Percent who speak a language other than English at home
Literacy levels	Average adult literacy scale score
Community diversity represented in newsroom staff / news coverage	Not currently measured

CIVIC PARTICIPATION ECOSYSTEM

People have opportunities to participate in civic life and they do so with some frequency. People are represented equally, their voices are heard, and they are able to shape programs and policies that affect them. The community is governed by a functioning, representative government and elections are free and fair. Processes are in place for all community members to be able to provide input on a sustained basis and access information that connects them to basic public services. People feel connected and know how they can get engaged — be that in the political process, volunteering, community engagement, advocacy, or other ways to serve, lead and affect change.

How the Index frames and measures civic participation and civic life:

Category	Indicator
Engagement with political process	Voter turnout (votes/citizen voting age population)
Community centers / places where people come together	Number of membership associations per 10,000 population
Volunteering	Percent of state residents who formally volunteered
Giving & philanthropy	Percent of adjusted gross income that are charitable contributions
Opportunities for participation in government / ability to inform government policies	2020 Census self-response rate
Community power-building organizations	Not currently measured
Social connectedness & people's sense of belonging	Not currently measured
Civic education & civic attitudes	Not currently measured
Representation in positions of power	Not currently measured
Community members' sense of what is important for the community	Not currently measured

EQUITY AND JUSTICE
(STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS)

People are free of structural barriers to civic engagement, accountability and change. Regardless of race or ethnicity, physical or mental abilities, age, gender or other factors, all people have equal access to civic life and opportunity. Structural racism, ableism, economic discrimination and other forms of oppression are dismantled, and all members of a community are able to thrive.

How the Index frames and measures equity and justice:

CATEGORY	INDICATOR
Life expectancy	General life expectancy at birth
Medical debt	Percent of people with a credit bureau record who have medical debt in collections
Youth disconnected from work and school	Percent of youth ages 16 to 19 who are not working or enrolled in school
Neighborhood poverty	Percentage of the population living in high-poverty neighborhoods, defined as census tracts with a poverty rate of 30 percent or higher
Historical news deserts	Not currently measured
Cost of Voting	Not currently measured
People working two or more jobs	Not currently measured

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our **Index dashboard.**

HEALTH AND OPPORTUNITY
(SOCIAL DETERMINANTS)

People have access to the basic foundations of a healthy life, which are essential to people's ability to sustainably participate in society. This includes economic stability; community connection and safety; access to healthcare, education, transportation and basic needs (housing, food, clean water and clean air); and environmental disaster resilience.

How the Index frames and measures health and opportunities:

CATEGORY	INDICATOR
Economic stability	Percent of population unemployed
Access to healthcare and preventative care	Percent of <65 population uninsured
Access to education and lifelong learning	Percent of 25+ population with bachelor's degree or higher
Access to basic needs: housing, food, clean water and clean air	Median gross rent as a percentage of household income in the past 12 months
Access to basic needs: housing, food, clean water and clean air	Percentage of population who lack adequate access to food
Access to transportation	Percent of households with no vehicle available
Environmental disaster resilience*	Not currently measured

*NOTE: The Index does not currently include direct indicators of environmental or climate-related threats or readiness, such as tree cover or access to clean air. Once a full dashboard is developed, it will allow users to overlay Index scores with available data on factors such as extreme heat, fire, floods, storms, sea level rise.

WELCOME!

REFORD...TION

JOIN US!

12

4. HOW THE INDEX MEASURES CIVIC HEALTH

For each county in the United States, the Index measures civic health on three different levels:*

1. An overall Index score is provided to show the performance of the civic health ecosystem in the selected county.
2. Sub-scores are provided to indicate a county's performance for each pillar.
3. Results are shown for each indicator within a pillar.

There is also a map view, allowing users to see differences across regions, states and the nation. (For insights on national Index findings, see section 5.)

***Note** that missing data points listed in the framework above are not included in the Index dashboard, which shows results using existing data.

Civic Information Dashboard
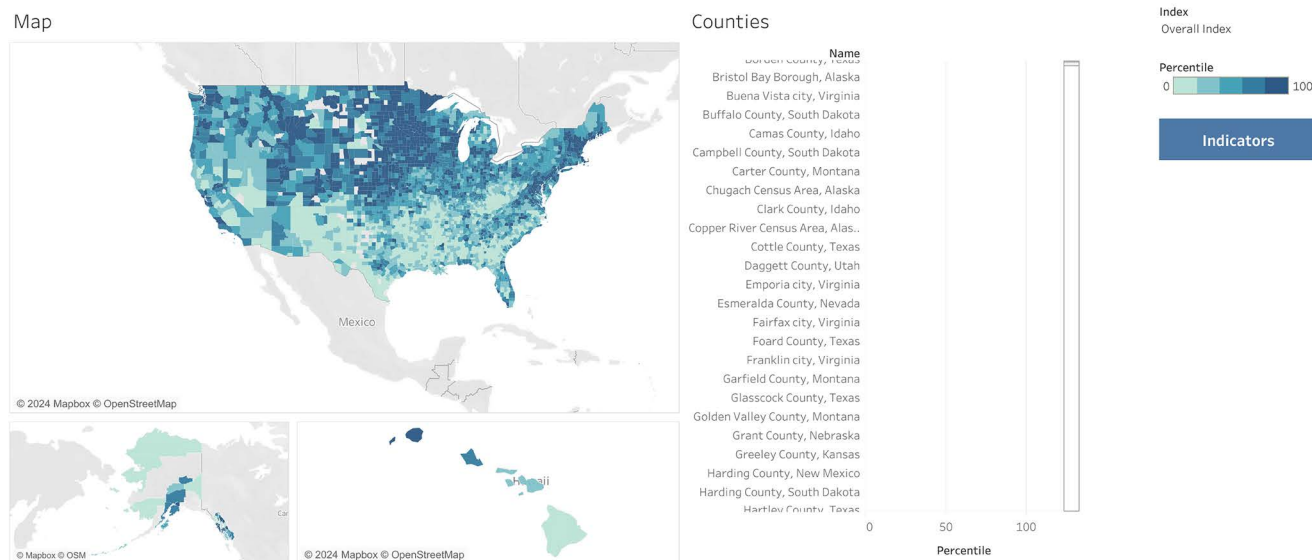
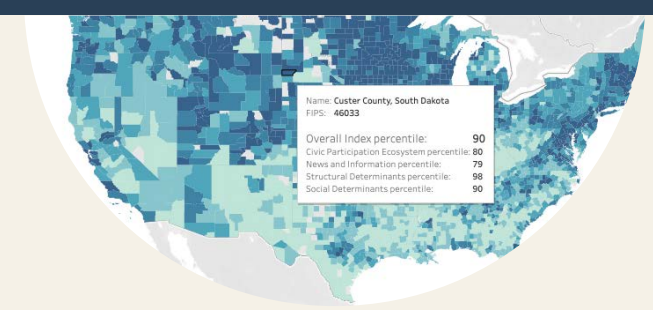"This work is huge. The Index can help us understand the broader context and show the connections between different data points. It's a tool for investigating, inspiring coverage, and understanding the unique needs of different communities. And it serves as a common language and a starting point for collaborative efforts to improve civic health."

Mazin Sidahmed, Co-Executive Director, Documented

# WHAT INDEX RESULTS LOOK LIKE: CUSTER COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA

Name: Custer County, South Dakota
FIPS: 46033

Overall Index percentile:	90
Civic Participation Ecosystem percentile:	80
News and Information percentile:	79
Structural Determinants percentile:	98
Social Determinants percentile:	90

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE:

Composite Scores

	Percentile
News and Information Index	79
Civic Participation Ecosystem Index	80
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	98
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	90
Overall Index	90

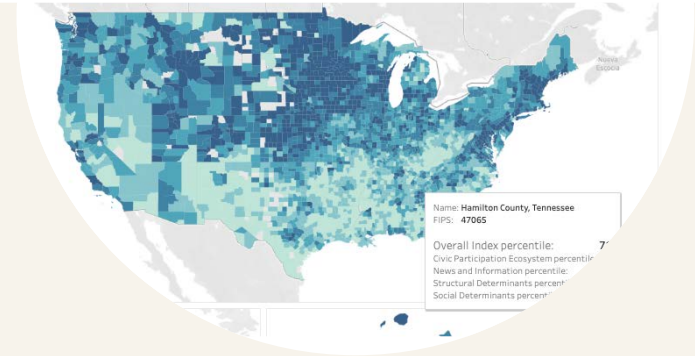| Pillars and Indicators	Data point per indicator	Percentile ranking compared to all other Index counties
News & Information		
Total news outlets	1.0	40
% of households with broadband	83.1	48
Library visits per 10,000 population	32,106.9	88
Public good Facebook pages per 10,000 users	392.3	96
% who speak a language other than English at home	4.4	58
Average literacy score	274.6	88
Civic Participation Ecosystem		
Voter turnout (%)	73.5	79
Social associations per 10,000 population	11.6	58
Volunteer rate (%)	34.2	94
% of AGI that are charitable contributions	1.1	68
Census response rate (%)	59.8	46
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)		
Life expectancy	80.9	95
% with medical debt	2.3	97
% of youth ages 16 to 19 who are not working or enrolled in school	2.5	90
% in high poverty neighborhoods	0.0	100
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)		
Unemployment rate (%)	2.5	86
% uninsured	13.8	28
% with a Bachelor's degree or higher	30.5	80
% of income spent on rent	22.4	88
% without adequate access to food	9.1	73
% with no vehicle available	0.7	100
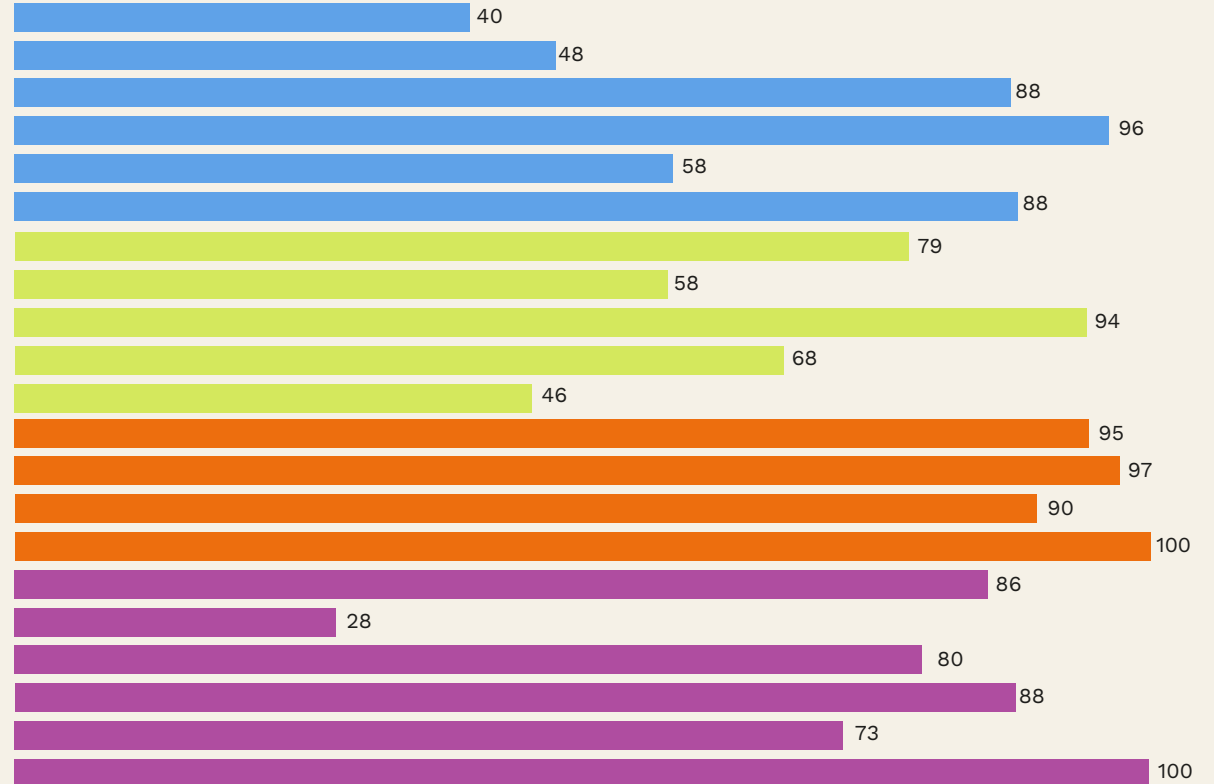
UNDERSTANDING AND CONTEXTUALIZING LOCAL OUTCOMES

To investigate and contextualize local outcomes, users can start with the overall Index score, which is shown in comparison to all other counties in the U.S. For example, Hamilton County in Tennessee has an overall Index score of 71, indicating the county has civic health strengths and some challenges, and performs better than 71 percent of counties in the nation.

A look at the scores for each pillar shows a higher performance on the news and information measures (74), and the lowest performance on the structural determinants (52). Does this mean there may be equity challenges in this county? And what are the county's information ecosystem strengths that local efforts can build on?

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE:

What Index results look like: Hamilton County, Tennessee

Name: Hamilton County, Tennessee
FIPS: 47065

Overall Index percentile:
Civic Participation Ecosystem percentile:
News and Information percentile:
Structural Determinants percentile:
Social Determinants percentile:

Composite Scores

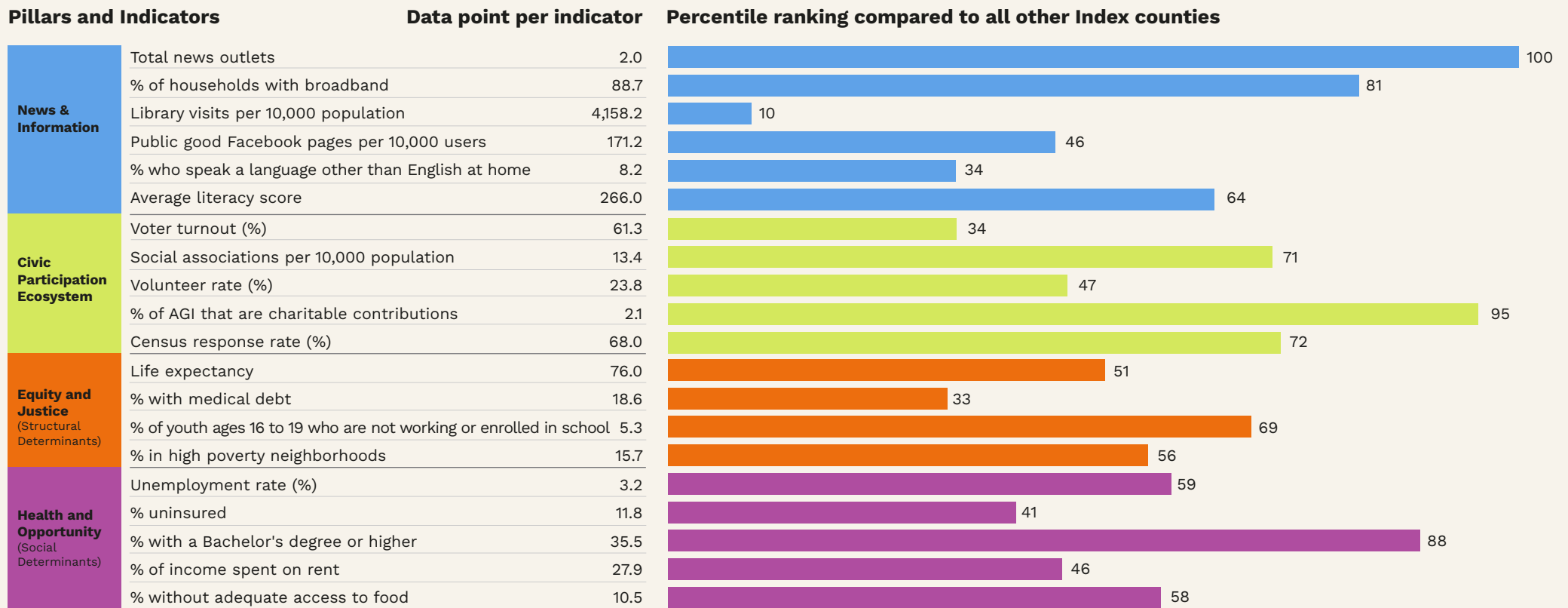|	
News and Information Index	74
Civic Participation Ecosystem Index	73
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	52
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	69
Overall Index	71

"Our greatest challenge is that our civic infrastructure — all the institutions and organizations that give people opportunities to solve problems, build community, and help make public decisions — is out of date. To update it, we need to know how people are thinking about those opportunities, how they are working, and why they are valuable."

Matt Leighninger, Director, Center for Democracy Innovation, National Civic League

For example, Hamilton County has two or more news outlets, a high literacy score and 88.7 percent of households are connected to broadband, indicating clear strengths in these areas. But the data also shows a higher number of community members who speak a language other than English at home, indicating that the information ecosystem needs to consistently provide culturally competent content in languages other than English. And broadband data needs to be contextualized — in the digital age, the goal should be that 100% of households are connected.

On the structural determinants, nearly one in five community members struggles with medical debt. Is this a recent trend? Who is affected? How are people coping? Are there ways to support people in understanding how to respond to high medical bills? These are immediate questions to explore.

Pillars and Indicators | Data point per indicator | Percentile ranking compared to all other Index counties

Pillar	Indicator	Data point per indicator	Percentile ranking
News & Information	Total news outlets	2.0	100
	% of households with broadband	88.7	81
	Library visits per 10,000 population	4,158.2	10
	Public good Facebook pages per 10,000 users	171.2	46
	% who speak a language other than English at home	8.2	34
	Average literacy score	266.0	64
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Voter turnout (%)	61.3	34
	Social associations per 10,000 population	13.4	71
	Volunteer rate (%)	23.8	47
	% of AGI that are charitable contributions	2.1	95
	Census response rate (%)	68.0	72
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	Life expectancy	76.0	51
	% with medical debt	18.6	33
	% of youth ages 16 to 19 who are not working or enrolled in school	5.3	69
	% in high poverty neighborhoods	15.7	56
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Unemployment rate (%)	3.2	59
	% uninsured	11.8	41
	% with a Bachelor's degree or higher	35.5	88
	% of income spent on rent	27.9	46
	% without adequate access to food	10.5	58

How MLK50 Investigated a Local Equity and Health Data Point, Medical Debt

In 2019 the Memphis based outlet MLK50: Justice through Journalism looked at the impact of one local hospital's policies that led to high rates of medical debt, specifically in lower-income communities. The hospital sued 8,300 patients over medical bills they could not afford to pay during a five-year span. The outlet obtained and reviewed those legal documents, and began publishing stories, partnering with the national investigative outlet Pro-Publica. Within five weeks hospital officials eliminated $11.9 million in debt for more than 5,300 patients.

Looking across the four pillars allows us to see that the county also performs lower than average on health insurance coverage — 11.8 percent of the population don't have health insurance — and that voter turnout is low at 61.3 percent, putting the county near the bottom third of counties on this measure. In addition, the Index shows that the county has fewer library visits than 90 percent of counties.

These data points provide opportunities for local newsrooms to investigate potential structural barriers to health, civic participation and information affecting some communities more than others. When reporting on these trends, local newsrooms can also use these insights to ask: How do we reach community members who are not connected to broadband, don't visit a library, may not be able to pay for news and speak a language other than English at home?

RECOGNIZING CRITICAL DATA GAPS

As a tool aiming to compile data for all counties in the nation, an Index inevitably misses some more nuanced data that may be available at the local level. At the same time, there are crucial data points — such as how many people are working two or more jobs — that to our knowledge are not currently collected. That's why we think of this Index as a starting point that provides a framework for local leaders across the civic health ecosystem to connect, collaborate, identify, share and generate additional, locally meaningful data. We look forward to working with many users on enriching and adding to the data provided in the Index.

"It is essential to highlight the need for more localized data. This focus is key to effectively communicating the true impact of this data."

Andrea Wenzel, Associate Professor of Journalism, Temple University

TRIBAL
ELECTION
DAY
POLLS OPEN 8AM TO 9PM
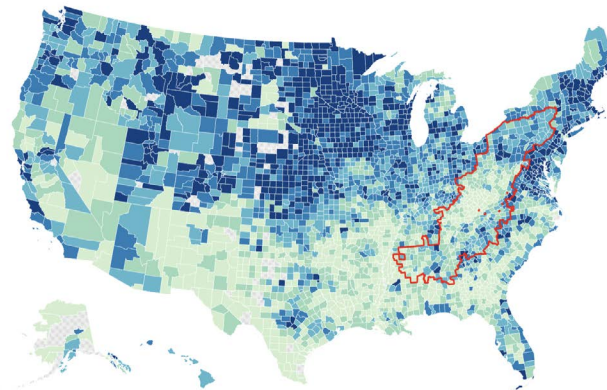
5. NATIONAL INDEX FINDINGS

Given the diversity of communities, opportunities and challenges present across the United States, the main purpose of the Civic Information Index is to allow localized assessments of key factors that drive civic health. By showing data at the county level, the Index supports civic information entrepreneurs and their partners across the civic health ecosystem with insights on where a specific community may be struggling, and where its opportunities are.

At the same time, the Civic Information Index reveals significant regional disparities in civic health across the United States. Lower Index scores often correlate with regions historically affected by racial and economic discrimination.

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our **Index dashboard.**

Overall Civic Health Index
Appalachian counties circled

20 40 60 80 100

Overall Civic Health Index
Counties where at least 30% of the population is Black circled

20 40 60 80 100

APPALACHIA

The Index reveals the profound civic health disparities in Appalachia, a region historically impacted by economic hardship and geographic isolation. Despite its rich cultural heritage, the area struggles with lower civic participation and access to critical resources, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Economic stability and access to information remain significant challenges for these communities.
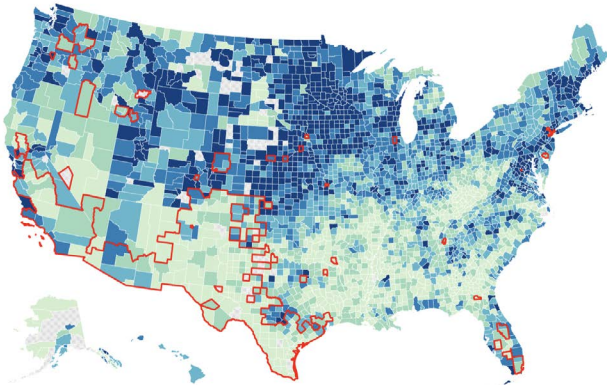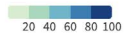
BLACK COMMUNITIES

Black communities, particularly in the South, exhibit stark disparities in civic health due to centuries of systemic racism and disenfranchisement. The Index highlights these regions, showing how historical marginalization continues to affect civic engagement and access to essential services. Voting rights and civic participation remain critical issues, as these communities face ongoing barriers to full civic involvement.
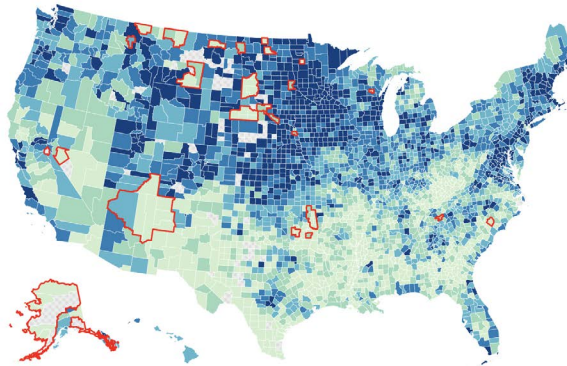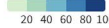
Overall Civic Health Index
Counties where at least 30% of the population is Hispanic/Latino circled

20 40 60 80 100

Overall Civic Health Index
Counties where at least 20% of the population is American Indian/Alaska Native circled

20 40 60 80 100

Overall Civic Health Index
Midwestern counties circled

20 40 60 80 100

HISPANIC/LATINO COMMUNITIES

Hispanic and Latino communities, especially in the Southwest, face significant challenges in civic health, often exacerbated by language barriers and immigration status. The Index maps reveal these communities' struggles with lower access to information and civic participation, calling for inclusive and culturally competent solutions. Factors such as the percentage of families who speak languages other than English at home and access to broadband are crucial indicators in understanding these disparities.
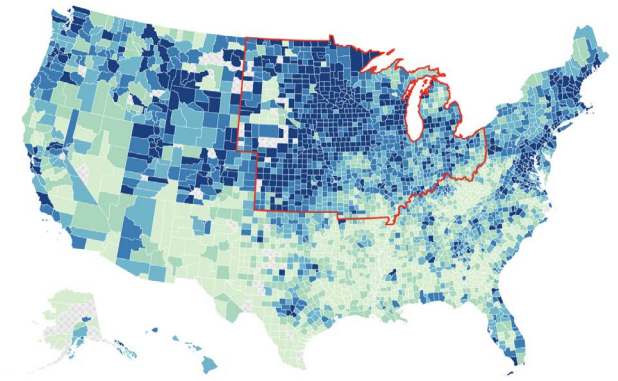
NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Native American communities, particularly those on reservations, display some of the lowest civic health scores in the Index. Historical and ongoing marginalization, along with geographic isolation, contribute to these disparities, highlighting a critical area for civic and policy interventions.

MIDWESTERN COMMUNITIES

Conversely, Midwestern communities generally fare well in the Index, reflecting strong civic health indicators in many areas. While some rural regions still struggle with declining populations and access to services, many Midwestern counties show higher levels of community engagement and economic stability. This variability highlights the importance of localized approaches to maintaining and improving civic health.
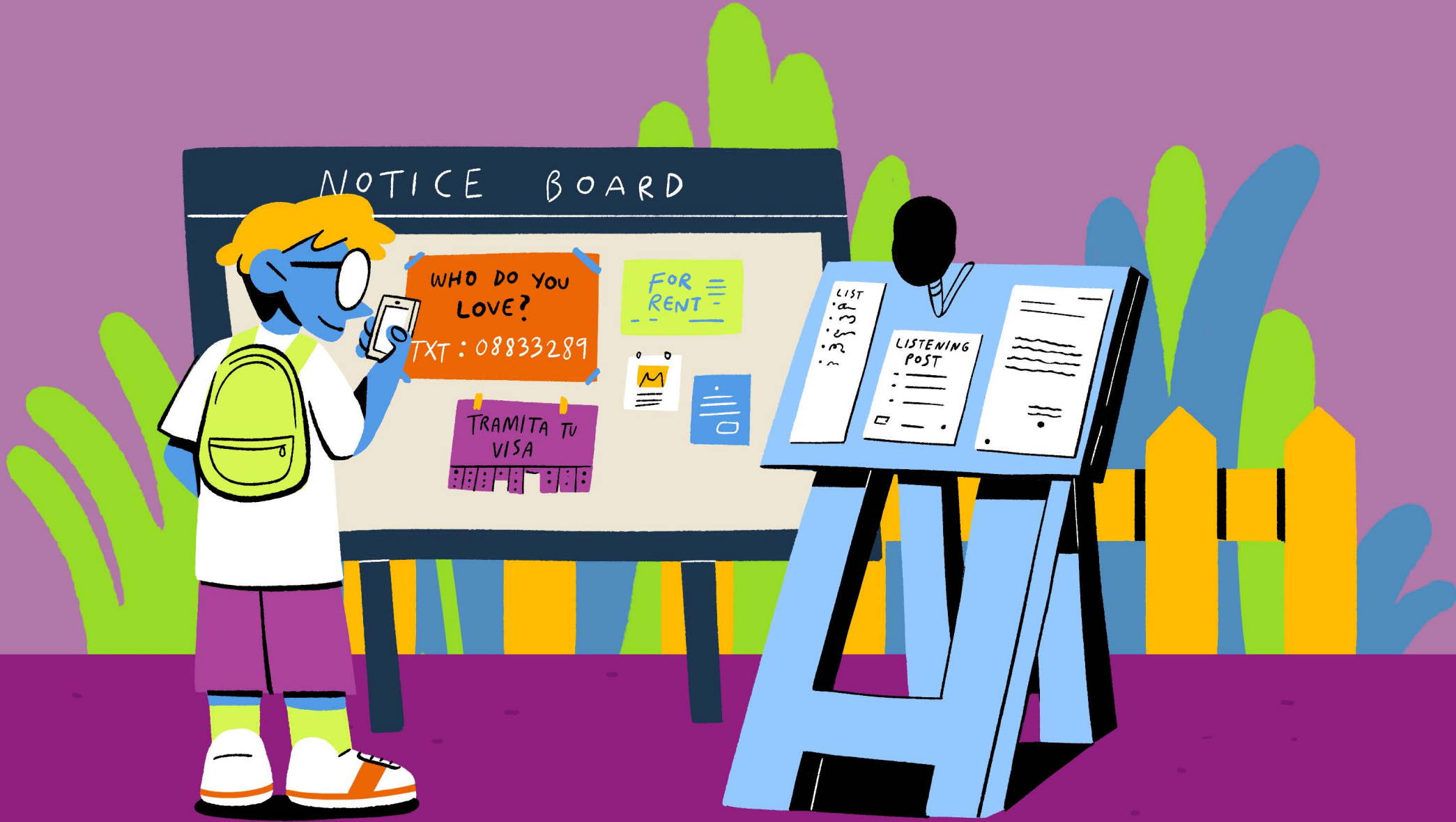
6. KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Civic Information Index allows a fresh look at the cumulative impact of how different policies, local cultures, and the ways in which we design our systems — such as the political or information ecosystem — are impacting people and communities.

"We need an annual index to see how we are doing. A one-time index is great, but a perpetual index is what the nation needs to identify patterns and trends that will foster greater collaboration or strategic responses. It is crucial for understanding what is working and driving continuous improvement in civic health."

Loris A. Taylor, President & CEO, Native Public Media

These are the 12 most important insights we gleaned from the Index project so far:

A HIGHER NUMBER OF MEDIA OUTLETS DOES NOT EQUAL BETTER CIVIC HEALTH:

The existence of lots of media outlets does not necessarily mean a community is better informed, more engaged, or has better civic outcomes. Language, platform, literacy, history and many other factors can impact effectiveness and trust within local information ecosystems — and information ecosystems are only one part of local civic health ecosystems.

NEWS MEDIA IS A PART OF THE CIVIC HEALTH ECOSYSTEM:

This index frames News and Information as one of four key domains that drive civic health. To contribute to the collective goal of better civic health, media practitioners benefit from recognizing their work as part of this collaborative effort, alongside other civic actors such as power-building organizations, local funders and community health workers.

FOCUSING ON OUTCOMES CREATES A SHARED LANGUAGE:

This Index provides funders, media outlets, community stakeholders and others with a common language, and allows actors across the civic media ecosystem to recognize each other's efforts, how they are connected, and how they can support each other. For example, a news outlet might work with a community organization serving unsheltered people on better understanding how a local increase in heat waves is impacting this population, and what government action may be needed to better prevent an increase in hospitalizations and deaths. Similarly, the Index also introduces language that is likely more familiar to community members, which will support newsrooms in communicating about the importance of news as a critical part of local infrastructure.

LISTENING TO DATA MATTERS:

By assessing local Index scores for their communities, media innovators and their partners can discuss the findings and dig deeper on what drives each outcome and the challenges and opportunities it represents. For example, a community might struggle with high poverty neighborhoods or food insecurity, but it also might have robust engagement with the local library, identifying libraries as an important space to engage community members. Collaborators can further investigate what additional data might be available locally, and what other quantitative and qualitative data can or should be collected.

THE INDEX IS A STARTING POINT AND A RESOURCE TO BUILD ON:

The Index serves as a guide for targeted action around how to better assess and execute efforts to strengthen local information ecosystems and improve civic health. Local engagement with and contextualizing of the data is essential to understanding local realities and adding to the Index's findings.

"I think this is a great opportunity to bridge silos. There are so many organizations and agencies beyond journalism that have been thinking about and doing this work. This index can help highlight and bring together these efforts."

Madeleine Bair, Founding Director, El Tímpano

COLLABORATION IS KEY.

The Index was created through a collaborative process and is designed to foster more collaboration. It provides news media, communities and funders with a starting framework as they build equitable and purposeful partnerships to assess and enhance civic engagement and information ecosystems across the U.S.

SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN CIVIC HEALTH TAKE TIME.

As updated data becomes available over time, this Index will allow communities to assess if civic health outcomes are improving. This process will take time, however, and early localized efforts may manifest in smaller, incremental successes.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN LOCAL ASSESSMENTS EMPOWER COMMUNITY ACTION.

News media and their local civic partners can play an important role in facilitating community-led data collection and interpretation. By developing tools for community engagement in and feedback on civic health efforts, such as surveys, interviews or town halls and community conversations, and adopting citizen science approaches, news media organizations and their collaborators can empower communities to take the lead in defining and assessing civic health locally, and in shaping community action.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY POWER BUILDING.

Community power building — power that is exercised by residents to influence civic life through a variety of channels — is crucial for increasing equitable civic engagement. This includes creating definitions and frameworks that recognize and highlight diverse community perspectives, especially those often overlooked.

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our Index dashboard.

BY UNIQUELY CONNECTING DIVERSE INDICATORS, THE INDEX PROVIDES NEW WAYS OF LOOKING AT OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL.

This Index brings together existing and novel indicators across the broader civic health ecosystem. By including factors such as language spoken at home, social media data, life expectancy and high poverty neighborhoods, it offers a fresh perspective on the diverse drivers of civic health.

HIGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITABLE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ARE NOT THE SAME.

When assessing the strength of local civic engagement, volume isn't the only measure that matters. Representation of all parts of the community matters. Since underserved populations are often smaller in numbers, local engagement may be high but completely missing voices from some populations. Also, it remains important to elevate the voices of those who are most impacted by negative outcomes.

WE CAN SCALE BY BUILDING UPON EXISTING EFFORTS ACROSS THE CIVIC HEALTH ECOSYSTEM.

The goal of this Index is not to reinvent the wheel, but to connect and add to existing knowledge, partnerships and efforts. Often, what needs to change is the barriers to collaboration — for example, there are still many barriers for journalists to engage more directly at the community level. Together, local media, community-based organizations, academic institutions, government, funders and others can explore how the Index results are resonating, how different organizations might use the Index in their work, what efforts are already underway and how the collective work might best be supported and expanded.

"State-level data is easier to access but often meaningless for truly understanding community diversity. It is terrific that we can achieve county-level data in this Index."

Sema Sgaier, Co-Founder and CEO, Surgo Ventures

CIVIC INFO = CIVIC HEALTH

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on these key insights, we propose the following actions to guide the establishment of more robust, equitable information and civic health ecosystems. These recommendations are tailored to various actors and aim to leverage the Index as a resource for long-term impact.

Recommendations for specific actors:

LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWS OUTLETS

Prioritize reporting that explores important storylines emerging from some of some of the Index data and investigate the civic health of specific regions or communities.

Use the Index and available community information needs data to deliver reporting in more nuanced and equitable ways.

FUNDERS

Prioritize funding for parts of the country in need of investment based on Index outcomes. (Also see section 5, National Index Findings.)

Recognize and fund civic media and information efforts as an ecosystem model. Encourage and incentivize collaboration between outlets, journalism support organizations, civil society groups and academic institutions.

Fund research around civic data identified via this Index as missing but necessary.

Recruit additional funding institutions with expertise outside of journalism to partner in this effort.

JOURNALISM SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Partner with funders and local media and civic society actors to map information needs, including where and how to reach people with information, and build more robust local ecosystems.

Share existing tools and expertise.

Use the Index to foster more collaboration and especially coordination with peer organizations based on specific local needs in different parts of the country.

LOCAL CIVIC SOCIETY ACTORS

Use the Index to advocate for more support in local communities around improving information access to strengthen civic health.

Partner with outside institutions to bring expertise and tools that can benefit local efforts to build sustainable information ecosystems.

Educate funders, media outlets, journalism support organizations and academic institutions on local context for working in specific communities and ground them in an understanding of existing information ecosystem work and gaps.

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Serve as local anchor institutions by providing research support, hosting partnerships between local and outside collaborators, providing monitoring and evaluation of local efforts to build information ecosystems, and publishing local impact assessments related to these efforts.

Consider joining the Index Community of Practice facilitated by Brown's Information Futures Lab, to meet with other academic institutions interested in supporting local partners and help grow the Index both locally and nationally.

"This data is crucial for justifying funding to expand investigative journalism training at HBCUs. It's not just about diversifying newsrooms but inspiring HBCU journalists to strengthen news ecosystems in the South."

Kali-Ahset Amen, Executive Director, Center for Journalism & Democracy, Howard University

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The creation of the Civic Information Index marks a pivotal step toward strengthening civic health across the United States. By building on existing knowledge and fostering collaboration among funders, journalism support organizations, media outlets, researchers and community stakeholders, this Index is positioned to be more than just a tool — it is a catalyst for change. Our focus moving forward will be on maintaining and building out the Index and actively engaging with communities, especially those facing the greatest challenges, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met. Through regular updates and the development of an accessible system for collecting and sharing data, we will ensure the Index remains a dynamic, evolving resource that empowers communities to take charge of their own futures. The work ahead will shape a more resilient and informed civic landscape for communities nationwide.

To explore the Index data for your county, visit our Index dashboard.

APPENDICES

A. DATA SOURCES

Pillar / Domain	Conceptual Categories	Indicator	Description	Source
News and Information	Lack of local news sources / presence of "news deserts"	Total news outlets	Number of news outlets in each county, including newspapers, digital sites, public broadcasting and ethnic media. More news outlets are associated with higher civic health.	Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University
News and Information	Broadband access	Percent of households with broadband of any type	The percentage of households with broadband of any type. A higher percentage is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey
News and Information	Library utilization	Library visits per 10,000 population	The number of annual library visits from all libraries in a county per 10,000 population in that county. More library visits are associated with higher civic health.	Institute of Museum and Library Services Public Libraries Survey
News and Information	Vibrancy of online engagement on local issues	The number of Facebook Pages predicted to be "Public Good" pages based on page title, category, and other page characteristics, per 10,000 users in the county.	The number of Facebook Pages predicted to be "Public Good" pages based on page title, category, and other page characteristics, per 10,000 users in the county. A higher rate is associated with higher civic health.	Opportunity Insights
News and Information	Language access / English language proficiency	Percent who speak a language other than English at home	The percentage of a county's residents who speak a language other than English at home. Due to the challenges and potential barriers in multilingual environments, a lower percentage is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey

News and Information	Literacy levels	Average adult literacy scale score	The average adult (ages 16-74) literacy score according to the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). A higher score is associated with higher civic health.	[Department of Education](#)
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Engagement with political process	Voter turnout (votes/citizen voting age population)	The voter turnout is calculated as a percentage of the citizen voting age population who voted in the 2020 presidential election. A higher voter turnout is associated with higher civic health.	[MIT Election Data and Science Lab, American Community Survey](#)
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Community centers / places where people come together	Number of membership associations per 10,000 population	The number of membership associations per 10,000 population, which includes civic organizations, sports organizations, religious, political, business, labor and professional organizations. A higher rate of membership associations is associated with higher civic health.	[County Health Rankings](#)
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Volunteering	Percent of state residents who formally volunteered through organizations	The volunteer rate is the share of state residents who formally volunteered through organizations as indicated on the Current Population Survey's Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. A higher volunteer rate is associated with higher civic health.	[Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement](#)
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Giving & philanthropy	Percent of AGI that are charitable contributions	The percent of a county's total adjusted gross income that is claimed as charitable contributions. A higher percent is associated with higher civic health.	[IRS Statistics of Income](#)
Civic Participation Ecosystem	Opportunities for participation in government / ability to inform government policies	2020 Census self-response rate	The percentage of housing units who self-responded in the 2020 Census. A higher response rate is associated with higher civic health.	[U.S. Census Bureau](#)
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	Life expectancy	General life expectancy at birth	The number of years an individual in any particular county can expect to live. A higher life expectancy is associated with higher civic health.	[County Health Rankings](#)

Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	Medical debt	Percent of people with a credit bureau record who have medical debt in collections	The percentage of people with a credit bureau record who have medical debt in collections. A lower percentage who have medical debt is associated with higher civic health.	Urban Institute
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	Youth disconnected from work and school	Percent of youth ages 16 to 19 who are not working or enrolled in school	The percentage of youth ages 16 to 19 who are neither working nor enrolled in school. A lower percentage of disconnected youth is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey
Equity and Justice (Structural Determinants)	Neighborhood poverty	Percentage of the population living in high-poverty neighborhoods, defined as census tracts with a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher	The percentage of a county's population living in high-poverty neighborhoods, defined as census tracts with a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher. A lower rate of neighborhood poverty is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Economic stability	Percent of population unemployed	The percentage of the county's labor force population that is unemployed. A lower unemployment rate is associated with higher civic health.	Bureau of Labor Statistics: Local Area Unemployment Statistics
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Access to healthcare and preventative care	Percent of <65 population uninsured	The percentage of the non-elderly (<65) population that is uninsured. A lower uninsured rate is associated with higher civic health.	U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Health Insurance Estimates
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Access to education and lifelong learning	Percent of 25+ population with a bachelor's degree or higher	The percentage of the 25+ population with a bachelor's degree or higher. A higher educational attainment rate is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Access to basic needs: Housing, food, clean water and clean air	Median gross rent as a percentage of household income in the past 12 months	The median gross rent as a percentage of household income in each county. A lower percentage spent on rent is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Access to basic needs: Housing, food, clean water and clean air	Percentage of population who lack adequate access to food	The percentage who did not have access to a reliable source of food during the past year. A lower percentage is associated with higher civic health.	County Health Rankings
Health and Opportunity (Social Determinants)	Access to transportation	Percent of households with no vehicle available	The percentage of households with no vehicle available. A lower percentage is associated with higher civic health.	American Community Survey

B. INDEX METHODOLOGY

THE ROLE OF THE ADVISORY GROUP

We engaged extensively with an Advisory Group of diverse experts throughout the project to co-develop and refine the Index framework and indicator set. Over the course of four advisory group meetings, members actively contributed to shaping and critiquing the model. To facilitate this collaboration, we provided ample pre-meeting materials, engaged in collaborative dialogue, and used Miro boards during meetings to gather input on elements such as the most relevant civic media definitions, the indicators, and data sources.

Once discussions had led to an initial set of indicators, we identified potential data sources and assessed the quality of and level of trust in the data. Several indicators were severely lacking in data, necessitating their removal. We discussed the available and missing indicators with the group again and solicited further input. After finalizing a focused set of four pillars and corresponding indicators, we utilized a Qualtrics survey to gauge the relative importance of both the pillars and the indicators. The survey enabled advisory group members to allocate a consistent number of chips (the number of indicators x 10) among the four pillars and within each pillar, providing a quantifiable measure of importance.

With this input on the relative importance of each indicator as well as each pillar, we created the Index. This collaborative and iterative process ensured the Index is comprehensive and reflective of diverse expert input.

DECIDING ON INDICATORS

Our approach to selecting indicators was thorough and collaborative, drawing on insights from the Listening Post Collective team, the Advisory Group, existing literature and established civic health indices. Initially, we compiled an extensive list of potential indicators. We then refined this list to approximately 40 indicators, emphasizing county-level data for a more detailed and localized analysis. Our priority was to source data that was not only publicly available but also up-to-date and relevant for the majority of U.S. counties.

To achieve this, we primarily utilized data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, leveraging five-year averages from 2018 to 2022 to ensure comprehensive coverage, especially for smaller counties. We also utilized data from sources such as the Department of Education, the IRS, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Urban Institute, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services Public Library Survey. (See Appendix A for all sources.) Despite our extensive search, some indicators were excluded due to the lack of high-quality publicly available data.

Ultimately, our final list comprised 21 indicators, categorized across four key pillars, ensuring a robust and nuanced picture of civic health.

ACQUIRING THE DATA

After identifying the appropriate data sources, we systematically downloaded the relevant data files and processed them using R. This step ensured consistency in formatting across different datasets. We then integrated these files into a comprehensive master file encompassing all 3,144 counties and county equivalents, providing a unified and detailed dataset for our analysis.

CONSTRUCTING THE INDEX SCORES

- **Pre-processing:** Our first step was to adjust indicators where a lower value is preferable, such as uninsurance rates, reversing their direction accordingly. We then calculated Z-scores for all indicators to standardize them to a common unit before combining them into a composite index.

- **Imputation of Missing Values:** Given the nature of the data, some counties had missing values for specific indicators. For counties with only one missing value (n = 408), we imputed this value using the Z-score of the most similar county, ensuring consistency after the pre-processing step. To determine the most similar county, we first selected counties with complete data as our comparison group (n = 2,652). For each county with a missing value, we calculated the sum of the absolute differences across the remaining 20 indicators between the target county and all counties with complete data. Additionally, we assessed the population size differences. We arranged the data in ascending order of the sum of differences and population size differences, identifying the most similar county as the one with the smallest sum of differences and the least difference in population size. We then used the value for the missing indicator from this most similar county, replacing the missing value so that the county initially missing one indicator was no longer missing any indicators. This method ensured a comprehensive and accurate dataset, enabling us to maintain the integrity and reliability of our analysis.

WEIGHTING AND CALCULATING THE INDEX

In collaboration with the Advisory Group, we assigned weights to each indicator within the pillars of the Index. As noted above, we used a Qualtrics survey distributed to Advisory Group members to gather input on the relative weight of pillars and indicators. Through this survey, members were given the chance to distribute "chips" among indicators and pillars, reflecting their perceived importance of each. Each indicator then received a specific weight based on the distribution of these "chips."

After calculating the weighted index for each pillar, we computed a composite index by integrating the weighted indices of all pillars, again guided by the Advisory Group's input. Once we had calculated the indices for each pillar and the composite index, we converted these indices to percentiles. This percentile scaling method allowed us to easily compare counties. For example, an index score of 80 indicates that a county performed better than 80 percent of other counties. This approach provided a clear and standardized measure of performance across all counties, ensuring comparability and clarity in our analysis.

MAPPING THE INDEX

Upon calculating the Index, we utilized Tableau to visualize the data in a comprehensive dashboard format. The main dashboard allows users to view the indices for the four pillars as well as the overall composite index. Counties with two or more missing data points are displayed in gray on the map (n=84).

The "Indicators" tab offers users the ability to search for individual counties and view their specific index values, along with values and percentiles for each individual indicator. This visualization provides a user-friendly interface for exploring the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of the relative performance of each county across various dimensions of the Index.

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