

EVALUATING ADOLESCENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NEW MEASUREMENT TOOL AVAILABLE

Evaluating the levels of civic engagement among teenagers requires appropriate methods and tools. In CIRCLE Working Paper #55 "Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents' Civic Engagement" Connie Flanagan, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Michael D. Stout provide a rich set of civic measures with good psychometric properties that are appropriate for use with young people ages 12-18. These measures tap aspects of adolescents' civic behaviors, opinions, knowledge, and dispositions. They are easy to administer and can be used by educators, staff of community-based organizations, program evaluators, and scholars.

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The data used to derive the civic measures were gathered from two waves of surveys with 1,924 students ages 12-18 from 88 social studies classes in the Northeastern United States.

CATEGORIES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The civic measures are divided into 14 broad categories, allowing them to be used in a variety of ways. Organizations wishing to assess the overall civic engagement of their participants may choose to administer all of the measures in a pre/post test manner. Others who are interested in certain components of civic engagement may use questions from one or more of the following 14 categories (see below).

14 CATEGORIES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • civic behaviors • elected officials and government • conventional civic engagement • alternative civic engagement • political efficacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equality and injustice • citizenship types • parents' civic engagement • political conversations with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • values • media consumption and perceptions • school climate • personal beliefs • civic knowledge
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THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING THE CIVIC MEASURES FOR EVALUATIONS

The civic measures can be easily administered and can be used by a variety of groups. When interpreting the results of the measures it is important to note that all measures are based on students' self-assessments. This means that participants are being asked to evaluate themselves, and not all participants will evaluate themselves the same way every time. Furthermore, when using the measures to evaluate program effectiveness, it is important to be aware that the measures do not correct for issues of self-selection (students who are highly motivated may "self select" into a program, thus making it appear that the program causes participants to be civically engaged). Finally, it is important to highlight the future orientation of many of the items in the constructs. For example, several of the questions ask students to estimate the likelihood that they will engage in various community and political activities after high school. Other items ask students to rate their perceived ability to respond in various ways to a hypothetical scenario (e.g., illegal drugs being sold near a school).

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The complete report can be downloaded at www.civicyouth.org. 

EXAMPLES OF CIVIC MEASURES

CATEGORY: CONVENTIONAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

When you think about your life after high school, how likely is it that you would do each of the following?

- Vote on a regular basis.***
- Wear a campaign button to support a candidate.**
- Volunteer for a political party.*

*Items drawn from the California Civic Index (Kahne, Middaugh, & Schutjer-Mance, 2005).

**Items adapted from the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002.)

***Items adapted from the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001.)

CATEGORY: ALTERNATIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

After high school, would you consider doing any of the following?

- Trying to talk to people and explain why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates during an election? **
- Expressing your views about politics on a website, blog, or chatroom? *
- Participating in a poetry slam, youth forum, live music performance, or other event where young people express their political views? *
- Working as a canvasser (i.e., someone who goes door to door) for a political or social group, or candidate? **

*Items drawn from the California Civic Index (Kahne, Middaugh, & Schutjer-Mance, 2005).

**Items adapted from the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002.)

CATEGORY: SERVICE-LEARNING

The questions below ask about your experiences in the last 3 years.

As part of a class, have you worked on a service or volunteer project? Students who responded “yes” were then asked to provide an open-ended response to the question “What did you do?” They were then asked to answer the four dichotomous (Yes/No) questions listed below.

- Did you have an opportunity to think and talk about your experience with other students in class?
- Did you apply information learned in class to your service project?
- Did you learn about possible causes of and solutions to social problems you were addressing in your service project?
- Did you discuss what the government could do to solve the problem?

CATEGORY: EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?

- It makes me angry when I think about the conditions some people have to live in.
- When I think about the hard times some people are going through, I wonder what’s wrong with this country.
- I get mad when I hear about people being treated unjustly.

Source: CIRCLE Working Paper #55 “Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents’ Civic Engagement” by Connie Flanagan, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Michael D. Stout