

RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

HOW DO WE WORK ACROSS
DIFFERENCES TO CREATE A FUTURE WITH
ALL PEOPLE AND PLACES THRIVING?

LISTENING & RESPECTING

BELONGING

CONTRIBUTING



RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

TROUBLING TRENDS

The global Democracy Index has officially downgraded the United States to a “flawed democracy”¹

Loneliness was a rising public health threat before 2020—the pandemic has made it 34% to 47% worse^{2,3}

Over the last 5 years, hate crimes have increased in the United States⁴

Legacies of residential segregation continue to fuel racial and wealth achievement gaps⁵

80% of American adults believe the country is “spiraling out of control”⁶

CIVIC LIFE IS ABOUT LIVING, LEARNING, AND WORKING TOGETHER, as shared stewards, to shape our common world. It encompasses the infinite ways that people may connect and contribute to their community and society: from voting in an election, organizing a neighborhood arts festival, standing up for a just cause, or doing everyday work with pride in its public impacts and civic significance.

For the last several decades, many democratic norms and structures have been decaying, while mistrust has been rising. Pernicious forces, such as systemic racism, hyper-individualism, and partisan division are also causes and consequences of declining civic life. The physical distancing of COVID-19 reminds us that we are social beings. The crisis has revealed a civic silver lining, shown in an outpouring of civic generosity and mutual aid. However, public displays of racial injustice remind us of the many ways we are not yet in right relationships with each other.

This is a legacy moment, an opportunity to reimagine and renew our civic life. We have a chance now to embrace our interdependence and strengthen the civic muscle we need to create just and productive communities. Success depends on our ability to create pluralistic spaces that foster relationships of belonging, ensuring everyone has the privilege and motivation to contribute to a thriving community.

SIGNS OF MOMENTUM

- **Increasing perception that “we are all in it together”** (up from 62% in the fall of 2018 to 90% in April 2020).⁷
- **9 out of 10 American workers are willing to earn less money** to do more meaningful work.⁸
- **43% of young Americans say they will likely vote in their party’s primary or caucus**, up from 36% four years ago.⁹
- **Since 1949, the National Civic League has recognized more than 500 communities** that leverage civic engagement, collaboration, inclusiveness, and innovation to successfully address local issues.¹⁰
- **Communities are working across sectors to build inclusive**, welcoming public spaces like parks, playgrounds, and riverfronts.¹¹
- **There is resurging interest** in the role that libraries, small businesses, and community-oriented schools play as civic anchors.¹²
- **Support is growing for robust national service** that ties service opportunities to possibilities for meaningful careers.¹³
- **Anticipating post-election conflict on November 4, 2020** (regardless of who wins), people and organizations are pre-committing to hold *With Malice Toward None* events sponsored by Braver Angels.¹⁴


LEGACY QUESTIONS

FOR RENEWING CIVIC LIFE

How do we listen differently **with respect for the humanity and value** of those who differ from us?

How do we make sure that every person has a **genuine sense of belonging**?

How do we make sure that every person has **multiple ways of contributing**?



Fox Cities has a vision. It has a true north and a sense of belonging is right in the center. You're seeing a hospital, two different foundations, nonprofits, and businesses working together to try to work on how we really connect with people in our community. The more you do that, the more you have the muscle, the more you practice, the more you can make an impact.

JASON SCHULIST, BOLDT

TREND BENDERS

LISTENING & RESPECTING

HOW DO WE LISTEN DIFFERENTLY WITH RESPECT FOR THE HUMANITY & VALUE OF THOSE WHO DIFFER FROM US?

Seek or create spaces to encounter ideas different from your own.

Stay curious, ask questions, and prepare to listen differently, especially to youth, elders, everyday workers, and those who experience racial injustice every day.

Remain open to the possibility that people with strongly opposing partisan views can still respect their shared humanity and value.

BELONGING

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT EVERY PERSON HAS A GENUINE SENSE OF BELONGING?

Tell a new story in which human differences are a collective strength, not a cause to separate from or destroy each other.

Reshape neighborhoods, organizations, and public spaces to be open, inviting, exciting, and also free from segregation, violence, or neglect.

Uphold, enforce, and expand both social norms and legal safeguards against discrimination in all forms.

Make investment more fair through targeted universalism (i.e., pursue universal goals with investments targeted toward those who have been excluded and left furthest behind).

Convey the dignity and civic value of work through fair pay and safe workplaces.

CONTRIBUTING

HOW DO WE MAKE SURE THAT EVERY PERSON HAS MULTIPLE WAYS OF CONTRIBUTING?

Encourage all forms of civic contribution, including voting, volunteering, engaging with government, and looking for the civic significance in everyday work.

Innovate new ways for people to participate in civic governance (e.g., by helping to frame problems and solutions, contributing their civic energies and talents, and influencing judgments about how to invest resources).

Bridge the digital divide and support the free exchange of ideas, art, and cultural expression.

Inspire a new generation of civically engaged professionals who are not detached, but connected to the lives and cultures of the places they work.

Shift authority to local communities for direction and accountability, along with incentives to contribute through national service.

Defend democracy against disinformation and authoritarianism.



MEASURES THAT MATTER

Listening & Respecting

- Trust
- Disconnected youth
- Diffusion of stewardship mindsets and actions

Belonging

- Sense of belonging
- Connection to government
- Social vulnerability
- Residential segregation
- Area deprivation
- Violence and hate crimes
- Incarceration rate

Contributing

- Strength of civic muscle
- Civic indices (agency, capacity, engagement, learning)
- Job satisfaction, purpose in work
- Civic associations
- Social capital
- Voting rate
- Volunteering rate
- Digital divide
- Democracy index
- Engagement with public officials and institutions

In 2017, 32 community stewards launched **Imagine Fox Cities** (WI), a regional network designed to create the future of Fox Cities together: What do you want Fox Cities to be like for your kids and grandkids?

To understand the concerns and ideas of the community, the Imagine Fox Cities team: conducted 3,000 surveys, facilitated 81 conversations, and held a 300-person summit. The team identified a central theme: the importance of belonging. In response, the Imagine Fox Cities team developed the Belonging Working Group.

“The purpose of the Belonging Working Group of the Imagine Fox Cities initiative is to serve as a catalyst for creating a community in which all who live in the region see themselves, their needs, contributions, and culture represented every day in the life and work of their community. Our efforts are intended to increase the ability of individuals to belong across all the constituencies within the Fox Cities region.

Our objectives are to (1) educate the community about what it means to belong and strategies to promote a sense of belonging; (2) provide opportunities for active engagement in activities on the part of individuals, groups,

and institutions that facilitate greater empathy, trust, mutual understanding, and cooperation among community members; and (3) monitor and share our progress by identifying measures of belonging for the community as a whole and across various segments on a regular basis.

Our ultimate goal is to promote positive change that enhances the well-being of all who live and work in the Fox Cities by convening, catalyzing, measuring, connecting, and influencing members of the community to enhance the sense of belonging of everyone in our community.”

BELONGING WORKING GROUP IMAGINE FOX CITIES