



The Rewards of Civic Engagement

The opportunity for civic engagement is something that no American should take for granted!

Regardless of which political party you align yourself with, it's important for each of us to stay active and involved in our own modern democracy. I've been participating in our system of self-governance on various levels for many years. Here are some ways to stay engaged:


1

be informed

An important part of staying in touch with our government is to stay informed about current events in our government system. Are there issues that are coming up for a vote? Are there issues being discussed that you feel passionately about? Reading local and national newspapers, and getting your news from a wide swath of non-partisan news sources is key to staying informed. Visiting sites like [AllSides.com](https://www.allsides.com) can give you an all-around vision of current government affairs.

Another way to stay informed is to visit the nonpartisan, non-profit site, [VoteSmart.org](https://www.votessmart.org). This site offers facts about local, state, and national politicians, their perspectives and initiatives, current legislation under their consideration, and recent and past voting records.

If you're concerned about the accuracy of the political news you're reading, or if you're unsure of whether your news source may be biased in any way, go to [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org). This is another nonpartisan, nonprofit website that discusses recent politicians' statements and media coverage. It offers fact-checking in each of these areas.



Civic engagement is the glue that holds self-government together.

2

vote



To begin, it's important to know whether or not you are registered to vote in your local, state, and federal elections. If you'll be 18 before an upcoming election, or if you are already over the age of 18, you are likely eligible to vote on each of these levels. You can use your ballot to vote on which officials you'd like to see in office as well as current initiatives you may or may not support. To find out if you are registered to vote, visit [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov). If you find that you aren't yet registered to vote, you can visit your local elections office or go online to register quickly at [TurboVote.gov](https://www.turbovote.gov). Voter registration takes just minutes to complete and renews every year up until the time you move out of the district in which you've registered.

Know your state's procedures for voting. Does your state practice in-person voting at nearby polling centers, or do voters mail in or drop off ballots that are sent to their residences? You can find out how your state votes by calling your local library or visiting [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov).

One of the most important aspects of casting your vote is to know when the elections are happening. You can find out this information by visiting the U.S. Vote Foundation's website and entering in your state.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead



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engage

Remember that our democracy is a system of self-governance and that your voice matters! If you want to reach out and have discussions with your elected officials, you can find out their office's contact information by visiting USA.gov. Additionally, each elected member of government has their own website that outlines their platforms and gives you information on ways to contact them. You can write emails and letters, call or visit their offices or, oftentimes, reach them on social media. Facebook and Twitter offer direct messaging options to government officials' offices.

Did you know that you can attend meetings where your government officials are scheduled to speak and engage with your community in a shared conversation? Many public officials hold board meetings or town halls. Attending these events will allow you to make your voice heard while participating in discussions with your voting community.

Join a political campaign. Is there a candidate running for office who you support? Pitch in to help support their campaign! Some ways through which you can get involved in political campaigns are to display signs, run phone banks, or speak with members of your community.

4

build community

Civic engagement can extend beyond politics. Here are some ways that you can engage with and give back to your community:

- Volunteer with an organization that speaks to you or that you support;
- Run for a position of leadership in an aspect of your community;
- Organize a team to conduct a local clean up of parks or public spaces;
- Plant trees;
- Support local teachers and community leaders by lending a helping hand where needed;
- Contribute time or resources to local foodbanks and shelters;
- Help raise money for a local cause;
- Be a good steward of social media.

Remember that ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. You can be proud that as Americans we live in a democracy. Find a way to be involved!