



Making LA the Best Place to Connect

A Deep Dive on Civic
Engagement in LA and Beyond

LA2050



Overview

We believe in the power of Angelenos to realize a shared vision for the future of Los Angeles and that enhancing our civic infrastructure can unleash that power.

The Brain Trust

In July 2017, LA2050 convened local leaders from diverse industries to explore best practices for creating strong civic communities in Los Angeles.

We Asked Two Major Questions:

WHAT TACTICS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR ENGAGING RESIDENTS LOCALLY?

WHAT CAN WE DO IN LOS ANGELES TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

The following white paper explores themes and ideas that emerged from that conversation and the tactics needed to boost civic engagement in LA.



HOW CAN WE ADDRESS LA'S BARRIERS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

LA has a number of unique challenges that influence how Angelenos engage in civic processes. Here's what our brain trust thought would help inspire greater civic participation and break down barriers to engagement:

KEYS TO GREATER ENGAGEMENT



REMEMBER THAT ISSUES-NOT VOTING-ARE DRIVING PEOPLE

Want Angelenos to vote in elections? First, spend time engaging them on issues they care about. Voting should not be considered the first on-ramp to civic engagement. Rather, we can all help Angelenos move up the civic engagement ladder by focusing on the issues they care about then build up to voting.

Also remember that issues are not siloed. For example, health care is influenced by other determinants, including transportation options and housing affordability. We can help Angelenos become better advocates by making clear connections across issues that are seemingly unrelated at first glance.



ENGAGE NONVOTING POPULATIONS

In some cases, the populations that would be most impacted by the outcomes of our elections (youth, undocumented immigrants, incarcerated individuals, and parolees) do not have the power to vote.

Still, there are a variety of opportunities that allow all residents to meaningfully participate in our civic processes and shape policy. For example, engaging incarcerated individuals to share their personal stories provides an avenue to involve them in advocacy efforts to end the school-to-prison pipeline.



WORK WITH BASE-BUILDING ORGANIZATIONS

What happens before and after an election? Organizations like **California Calls** are responsible for building a base of supporters year-round, not just when an election is on the calendar.

Base-building organizations provide access to information and actionable opportunities that sustain civic action, resulting in the long-term engagement needed to drive higher rates of participation.





IRL TO DIGITAL, AND VICE VERSA

Translate in-real-life (IRL) engagement to digital engagement. Don't discount the need for in-person events to create more accessible, real-time engagement opportunities, while building a digital community.



THINK OF THE 2020 CENSUS AS THE GREAT EQUALIZER

The 2020 Census is just around the corner and has huge implications for LA. The decennial census is responsible for the allocation of billions of dollars in funding that can benefit the region--if we're counted accurately.

Organizations throughout LA should invest in Census outreach and consider how civic engagement can influence the count. By starting now, we can test the partnerships, brands, and channels that will result in an inclusive, effective approach to outreach.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO IN LA:

ONE

Make voting easier! Expand programs that allow voters to cast their ballot at any polling location.

TWO

Ensure that voter registration rolls are updated, especially for youth who pre-register to vote.

THREE

Provide neighborhood councils a budget to engage in meaningful community outreach.

FOUR

Create connections between neighbors. LA feels fragmented. However, with some intention, we can build bridges across communities.

FIVE

Get beyond the loudest residents; those who are most vocal about issues do not necessarily represent the opinions and interests of the general population.

SIX

Increase the diversity of appointees to LA's commissions and boards and reduce the amount of time that these positions stay vacant.



Photo by Green Dot Public Schools

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START YOUNG. ENGAGE THE UNDER 18 POPULATION TO INSPIRE A LIFETIME OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

LA2050's mission is focused on the future, so who better to include in the conversation about LA's potential than our region's youth? Yet as a measure of engagement, voter turnout among youth in Los Angeles and California remains low. That underrepresentation means that young people have far less electoral clout than older voters.

In fact, according to an evaluation of electoral clout, voters 65 and older have 11x the electoral power of young voters aged 18-34 in Los Angeles.¹

So, who has great ideas for getting young people involved?

¹ <http://www.whovotesformayor.org/cities/57559f54db1eab405dd5f176>

Green Dot Votes

Green Dot Public Schools launched the **Green Dot Votes** campaign after learning that less than 1% of registered parents with children enrolled in the school network actually voted in the 2012 general elections. In other words, 14 of the 1,600 registered Green Dot families actually voted. Green Dot's program sought to make voting a community act and to create a link between policy and citizen engagement.

Green Dot took the effort a step further, registering and mobilizing students to vote. In June 2016, Green Dot built excitement for first-time voters by hosting voting parties and providing transportation for students to their polling places.

Liberty Hill and the California Endowment

Los Angeles funders Liberty Hill and the California Endowment reached out to young people via bots and text messaging tools like Hustle. These tools generated messages informing them about the election and encouraging them to hit the polls. These organizations now use these tools to provide regular opportunities to engage these digital natives on the issues they care about.

Takoma Park

In 2013, Takoma Park, MD became the first city in the US to **extend the voting age**, allowing 16 year-olds to participate in local elections.

The measure came at a great time. Although voter participation was the lowest it had been in 20 years with a turnout rate of 11%, youth participation reached a high-- 44% of registered voters under the age of 18 voted in the city's election.

WHAT'S THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LOS ANGELES?

Exciting news! In California, 16 and 17 year-olds are now able to pre-register to vote. Once they turn 18, their registration is automatically activated. With the 2018 gubernatorial election just around the corner, there's a great opportunity to engage soon-to-be voters and help young people become civic actors sooner in life.

Also, did you know that you can run for neighborhood council at 18 and vote in the elections at 13? Neighborhood councils can be an effective first engagement opportunity for LA's youngest voters and help diversify the councils. We can do more to get young people engaged via these avenues. The City of Los Angeles has launched **Civic Youth** in partnership with Empower LA to prepare young leaders to engage with neighborhood councils.



Photo by City Fabrick

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PUT THE FUN BACK INTO VOTING

Would more people be inclined to vote if it were fun? We think yes! And, the good news is that there's data to back this up.

Longtime civic engagement researcher, Dr. Donald Green, has been investigating the impact that voting celebrations--parties and festivals near polling places--have on voter turnout. Turns out they work! Voting parties boosted turnout by **four percentage points**, increasing participation "substantially and cost-effectively."

Across LA, we have some great examples of how this gets done:

Placemake the Vote

Through the Knight Cities Challenge City Fabrick piloted **Place-make the Vote**, a series of pop-up parties at polling places, and developed a toolkit to share their strategy and results for boosting civic engagement. In partnership with The Long Beach City Clerk, Long Beach Rising! and the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office, City Fabrick activated six locations with traditionally low turnout, using urban design strategies, food trucks, games, and branding to encourage voter participation. Prior to election day, they focused on community outreach, hosting live webinars, wayfinding, pushing messages out on social media, and engaging local business owners.

As a result of Place-make the Vote, the locations selected had higher voter turnout in the 2016 general election and significant increases in provisionally balloting. In fact, one location – an affordable housing community had one of the highest reporting precincts in the city.

#PartyatthePolls

In Spring 2016, the Goldhirsh Foundation launched **#PartyatthePolls**, a mini-grants program that offered organizations grants of \$3500 to host events and parties that incentivized and rewarded voting. The foundation supported eight vote activations --ranging from sewing banners that inspired neighbors to vote to throwing a big block party to celebrate voters.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN LOS ANGELES

Civic Nation has partnered with Dr. Green to launch **#VoteTogether**, community-organized events across the country to throw celebrations at polling places. They're building a movement, and **you can sign up** to host a voting celebration. City Fabrick has produced a **toolkit** that can serve as your voting party inspiration.



Photo by Center for Urban Pedagogy

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BUILD CIVIC LITERACY

Our group remarked many times that we cannot assume that Angelenos already know how to engage with our (sometimes complicated) civic processes. And we agree--even the most engaged of residents do not always know whom to contact to address a pothole or what process to pursue to add an item onto a city council agenda.

Fortunately, Angelenos have great models to understand how to participate in creating community change:

Center for Urban Pedagogy

Based in New York City, the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) uses art and design to help people navigate systems. CUP's **highly engaging materials** help the public understand how to participate in civic processes by breaking down complex policy and planning issues for a broad audience.

In Spring 2017, students created **Zoning It In...**, a guide to neighborhood rezonings, which outlined the impact rezoning has in New York and how communities can be involved in the process. CUP has also worked with the Street Vendor Project to produce a poster in five languages that helps street vendors in NYC understand how to avoid frequently violated laws, some of which come with \$1,000 fines.

The programs help residents communicate in the language of decision makers when discussing neighborhood change.

San Fernando Valley Council of Government

The San Fernando Valley Council of Government's **Mobility Academy** aims to demystify government agencies, processes, and funding streams that impact mobility. This five-week interactive program teaches 30-40 people the history of mobility issues, as well as the current status of issues impacting funding, and future regional plans.

People's Planning School

The People's Planning School through Building Healthy Communities: Long Beach has helped local residents connect with government and community-based organizations through a **6-week planning workshop**. The workshop culminated in a neighborhood action plan to identify resources for parks and open space programming, as well as a resident-led advocacy action day. This action day helped residents advocate for parks as a budgetary priority.

AN UPCOMING OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD CIVIC LITERACY & MAKE AN IMPACT IN LOS ANGELES

The redrafting of LA's community plans presents the region with an opportunity to build civic literacy about the importance of zoning and community planning on improving residents' quality of life. LA's community planning process will dictate how our neighborhoods will look and function for decades.

Particularly for the most marginalized communities, educating residents about why these plans matter and the institutions involved in drafting them can help them be more actively involved in how they are crafted.

Here at LA2050, we're intentional about using data and information to drive conversation on issues impacting LA's future. We will discuss solutions for those issues and connect Angelenos with opportunities to take action. Stay tuned for more information about this!



Photo by Harry Potter Alliance

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LEVERAGE CULTURAL AFFINITIES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Cultural affinities create an opportunity for authentic engagement. The idea here is to tap into personal interests and hobbies in order to reach audiences that would not be traditionally targeted in civic engagement outreach. These affinity groups can serve as trusted messengers for issue advocacy.

Here are some great examples of how it's done:

Harry Potter Alliance

Who knew that Harry Potter fans were social justice advocates?

Andrew Slack, an avid Harry Potter fan, mobilized other fans to be civic actors by drawing connections between the fictional stories in the series and the real injustices taking place around the world. Local activations resulted in the formation of the **Harry Potter Alliance**, an international organization with local chapters focused on advancing equality, human rights, and literacy.

Culture Group

The Culture Group worked with artists to produce **#GoVote** posters that encouraged participation in the 2014 election and beyond. By identifying micro-communities and **customizing graphics** to tap into each community's identity, **#GoVote** took off, engaging high schools, sports teams, and colleges while raising the profile of the election for those respective audiences.

NALEO & Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA

NALEO and Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA brought together immigrant organizations, Spanish language media anchors, and media representatives from the Asian community to **coordinate messaging** that promoted citizenship to those eligible for naturalization. Under the coordinated campaign, ¡Protégete!...¡Ciudadanía Ya! (Protect Yourself! Citizenship Now!), the various media outlets used the same branding, logo, and messaging that were developed by community-based organizations.

The campaign was later translated into a voter education effort and continues to evolve, most recently focusing on helping immigrants learn their rights.

Midnight Ridazz

Midnight Ridazz was borne out of LA's punk culture and grew through a series of organized late night bike rides. The bike rides challenged the notion that the primary mode of transportation in LA must be the automobile. While not overtly an activist organization, Midnight Ridazz is part of the fabric of LA's bike culture and helped give rise to the cycling zeitgeist in Los Angeles that is reshaping mobility in the region.

The Burrito Project

The Burrito Project, **a collective that feeds homeless people** in LA, similarly grew out of a punk ethos. 10 years and running, the organization--not a nonprofit or a charity--creates a space for "like-minded people to just hang out and talk about current events."



Voted in
Participatory
Budgeting

Photo by pblongbeach.org

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GET CREATIVE WITH LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Long Beach

In Long Beach, **two council members** used participatory budgeting to help decide how funding would be allocated in their districts. During the participatory budgeting process, residents brainstorm ideas for community improvement projects, develop these ideas into full proposals, then vote on the projects that will be implemented.

Liberty Hill

Liberty Hill's commissioner training program strives to ensure that strong civic leaders serve on the region's boards and commissions, thereby accelerating progress on issues critical to the LA region. The training program has resulted in LA's fiercest social justice advocates serving on some of the region's most influential boards and commissions. The commissioner training program also helps to address a larger concern about vacancies and diversity on LA's boards and commissions.

Atwater Neighborhood Council

The Atwater Neighborhood Council required its board to survey residents on community priorities to guide the council's agenda and mandated a four percent constituent response rate. The survey and participation requirement pushed the council to respond to the community's concerns in spite of having limited resources for outreach.

Thanks to our brain trust for contributing to the conversation!

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