

Enhancing Civic Engagement

***HOW CAN CANADA DEVELOP THE MOST
ENGAGED CITIZENS IN THE WORLD?***



CONTENT MANAGEMENT GUIDE

June 2005



Dear Reader,

This guide was developed for the participants of the Roundtables that are part of our 2005/06 National Policy Project. It is meant to be a starting resource for people who wish to learn more about Civic Engagement. It is by no means the definitive resource about civic engagement. Where possible we have included links to additional resources that we feel you would be well-served to take a look at. We strongly encourage you to check them out.

If you have any questions, comments or additional resources please do not hesitate to email engagement@canada25.com

Thanks – and happy reading!

National Organizing Committee

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE FOR PARTICIPANTS

This guide is meant as a resource to stimulate your thinking and help you envision the countless interesting facets of civic engagement in Canada. Nothing written here is intended to constrain your thinking. It is your unique viewpoint that *Canada25* values. The research team of the national organizing committee for this year's series of roundtables has compiled this information to provide you with some quick-to-locate resources, and, because all delegates will have read this short guide, it will provide a set of shared ideas from which to begin your deliberations. You may find that the categories as mapped out here are not the ones that intrigue you most. Perhaps there are much more pressing issues surrounding civic engagement in your region that are not receiving enough attention. Please be creative in your thinking. Let your thoughts hit all levels, broad and narrow. Keep in mind that all methods of engaging have a similar purpose in some ways. They grow out of our desire to play a role in our societies, to be "citizens," and to help shape the meaning of that word, and what it means for the rights and responsibilities of Canadians.

Each roundtable will result in unique ideas, because it will grow from the unique perspectives of those who attend. Tell us about the Canada you want to see. Help us create the most engaged citizens in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the closely related issues of citizenship, civil society and democracy is strong across the country, and strengthened by ongoing concerns related to the political process, perceptions of democratic deficit, and the understanding that governments and markets cannot provide all that is necessary to make Canada a "good" society. Seeking to reach beyond common questions of electoral politics, *Canada25* has set out to chart how young Canadians experience and understand the issue of civic engagement. Three overarching goals will guide our efforts:

1. Provide thoughtful perspectives on the issue and articulate a shared vision of civic engagement in Canada.
2. Articulate recommendations that suggest ways to improve Canadian public policy and public life.
3. Develop practical and actionable policy initiatives that *Canada25* members can champion in partnership with other organizations and the media to enhance civic engagement in Canada.

THE ISSUE

Civic engagement in Canada - How can we create the world's most engaged citizens?

Through participation in a series of regional roundtables, *Canada25* members will enhance their understanding of this topic in the Canadian context, and shape prescriptions for increasing civic engagement. By combining research and experience, participants will explore the factors that prompt people to become and to stay engaged. They will also carefully examine the reasons people choose not to become engaged, and tailor solutions to address these obstacles.

Our initial ideational framework provided a series of categories and questions designed to stimulate thinking on civic engagement. Roundtables are encouraged to contemplate civic engagement in the context of some or all of the eight primary modes of civic engagement identified by the national organizing committee:

- Political Engagement
- Social Activism
- Volunteerism
- Religious and Cultural Engagement
- Play and Expression
- International Engagement
- Virtual Engagement
- Philanthropy

Discussions on each mode of engagement should focus on some key questions:

- Why do we, or do we not, become engaged?
- Does the engagement meet our expectations?
- What is our goal when we seek to make improvements?
- What makes engagement more, or less, meaningful?
- How can we encourage greater involvement?

The overall goal is to identify meaningful similarities and dissimilarities between the modes of engagement. Through the identification of crosscutting themes, we hope to arrive at the fundamentals of civic engagement in Canada today, including:

- A realistic definition of civic engagement,
- An understanding of the incentives and obstacles to engagement,
- Elements unique to the Canadian context,
- Good examples, upon which we can build.

The following pages briefly define the eight main modes of engagement suggested for roundtable discussion. They are intended to provide a very brief introduction to the topics, giving delegates a few shared ideas with which to begin their exploration.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Participation in the political process is perhaps the best-known and most widely discussed form of civic engagement. Canada's federal system presents Canadians with a number of opportunities to engage in the political process. Voting, the most widely acknowledged and popular mode of political participation, is but one of the means of engagement. Other common forms of political participation include joining a political party, contributing to a political campaign, and running for political office. Beyond the selection of political leaders, Canadians also have an opportunity to engage in the Canadian political apparatus by participating in the public consultation process that accompanies many legislative initiatives. Finally, many Canadians choose to become day-to-day participants in the political process by working for in some capacity for the federal, provincial, or municipal government, be it as a civil servant, or in the office of an elected official.

Since the 1990s, political participation appears to have suffered a precipitous decline. In the 2004 federal election, voter turnout was the lowest in Canadian history; only 61% of eligible voters turned out to vote, down from 70% in 1993. Since 1993, a greater percentage of Canadians have opted not to vote than have voted for the party forming government. A survey conducted in 2000 found that voter dissatisfaction with the choice of candidates, and an inability to cast a vote on election day, were the two largest factors contributing to non-participation.

Other forms of political participation have experienced a similar decline. A survey conducted in 2000 found that, down from 37% in 1980, only 18% of respondents identified "very strongly" with their federal political party. Similarly, only 2% of Canadians belonged to a political party, the lowest level in Canadian history.

Underlying the decline in political participation are two disturbing trends. First, Canadians' trust in political institutions and leaders continues to decline. Confidence in the House of Commons and political parties, despite modest gains after the rejection of the Charlottetown constitutional process in 1992, remains low, particularly in comparison to two or three decades ago. This decline in confidence is coupled with strong beliefs that political leaders behave dishonestly, and that government does not generally care about the average Canadian.

Second, younger Canadians are choosing not to engage in the political process; there is a particularly notable decline in youth participation in voting and joining political parties. Despite representing 40% of the population, only 5% of Canadians under thirty years of age belong to a political party. The bulk of Canadians who belong to parties are those of retirement age. Today's younger Canadians, when surveyed, appear to be less interested in politics, and have the poorest voting record in Canadian history. This noted lack of youth participation is somewhat curious, given that some surveys demonstrate that Canadian youth are no more skeptical of political leaders and institutions than the general public.

The decline in political participation rates has inspired a proliferation of reform proposals aimed at persuading Canadians to re-engage in the political process. Electoral reform has garnered the most attention; proposals have come from across Canada pushing for greater proportional representation. Other proposals call for greater accountability among political leaders, and enhancing citizen access to decision makers.

Some might argue that the decline in political participation is hardly a cause for concern. On the one hand, some pollsters contend that the decline in voter participation reflects a “new consensus” about the need for smaller government, and acceptance on the part of the electorate of “life after electoral politics.” On the other hand, some researchers and political scientists call the decline in political participation a crisis of legitimacy, effectively threatening Canada’s sense of political community.

Sources on Political Engagement:

André Blais, Louis Massicotte, Agnieszka Dobrzynnska, Why is Turnout Higher in Some Countries Than Others? (Elections Canada: March 2003) available at:
<http://www.elections.ca/loi/tur/tuh/TurnoutHigher.pdf>.

Center for Research and Information on Canada, Voter Participation in Canada: Is Canadian Democracy in Crisis? (October 2001) available at:
http://www.cric.ca/pdf/cahiers/cricpapers_nov2001.pdf.

Center for Research and Information on Canada, Citizen Participation and Canadian Democracy: An Overview, (August 2003) available at:
http://www.cric.ca/pwp_re/cric_studies/citizen_participation_and_cdn_democracy_aug_2003.ppt.

Center for Research and Information on Canada, Canadian Democracy: Bringing Youth Back Into the Political Process, (December 2004) available at:
http://www.cric.ca/pdf/cahiers/cricpapers_dec2004.pdf.

Henry Milner, First Past the Post? Progress Report on Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces, (IRPP: September 2004) available at: <http://www.irpp.org/>.

Jon H. Pammett, Lawrence LeDuc, Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters, (Elections Canada: March 2003) available at:
<http://www.elections.ca/loi/tur/tud/TurnoutDecline.pdf>.

Miriam Wyman, David Schulman, Laurie Ham, Learning to Engage: Experiences with Civic Engagement in Canada, (CPRN: August 1999) available at:
<http://www.cprn.com/en/doc.cfm?doc=86>.

Roderick Bennis, “StatsCan reports Canadians embrace aspects of civic engagement,” [axiomnews.ca](http://www.axiomnews.ca), 9 July 2004 available at:
<http://www.axiomnews.ca/2004/July/July09.htm>.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Social activism is a form of citizen engagement where participants are interested in creating social change or advancing a particular cause or interest. Activities include developing and promoting alternative social policies, protesting, signing petitions, boycotting, lobbying key decision makers, and raising public awareness about social issues. While social action groups seek to change society's laws and norms, they prefer to influence the attitudes of the public and political decision makers, rather than engaging directly in political institutions by running for office or joining political parties.

A review of the literature on activism from D-Code's 2003 Citizen Re:Generation, Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations report suggests that since the 1970s, Canadians' confidence in traditional political institutions and authorities has steadily declined, which in turn has spurred the growth of participation in alternative forms of civic engagement, such as social activism, where participants can "live their politics". Young people in particular are drawn to this form of civic engagement where they feel as if they have a real influence and can pursue tangible results related to the causes that matter most to them.

The literature also suggests that today's youth are more interested in social activism as a means of discovering and advocating solutions to problems, rather than simply rebelling against traditional authorities. The groups in which youth participate tend to be less hierarchical, more inclusive, and more results-focused than those in society in general.

The media also play an influential role, both in terms of mobilizing social activism and in skewing popular perceptions of social activism. Often, the activities of "radical groups" earn more media attention than those of other, less vocal groups, despite the fact that less vocal groups may be equally or more influential.

Survey data demonstrate the importance of social activism to Canada's youth. According to Statistics Canada (2003), Canadians 15-29 years of age were the most likely to have searched for political information (33.2%), signed a petition (29%), or participated in a demonstration (9.9%). In general, when asked about their participation in various political activities, 27.5% of respondents had signed a petition during the previous 12 months, 21.3% had attended a public meeting, 19.7% had boycotted or chosen a product for ethical reasons, 12.5% had contacted a newspaper or politician, and 6.2% had participated in a demonstration or march.

Social activism as a form of civic engagement offers participants a means to express their values and contribute directly to promoting social change aligns with these values. This is appealing to youth and other social groups who are otherwise often marginalized by traditional forms of civic participation. The question is, How can we encourage social action that contributes positively to society? Are some forms of social activism, such as violent protests, counter-productive? Can social action groups serve as models for effectively engaging youth in traditional organizations and institutions?

Sources on Social Activism:

Barnard, Robert, et al. "Activism," Citizen Re:Generation, Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations, Toronto: 2003, D-Code. Retrieved April 30, 2005 from <http://www.d-code.com/citizenregen.html>.

Statistics Canada. "2003 General Social Survey on Social Engagement, Cycle 17: an overview of findings" Statistics Canada Daily, July 6, 2004. Catalogue no. 89-598-XIE2003001. Retrieved April 30, 2005, from <http://www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=89-598-XIE2003001> .

Valpy, Michael. "A Generation Defines Civic Society" Globe and Mail, Saturday June 21, 2003.

Alternative media:

Independent Media Centre - www.indymedia.org

Adbusters - <http://adbusters.org>

Examples of Canadian activist organizations:

Animal Alliance of Canada - www.animalalliance.ca

Canadian Civil Liberties Association - www.ccla.org

Canadian Council of Chief Executives - www.ceocouncil.ca

Canadian Housing & Renewal Association - <http://chra-achru.ca>

Canadian Labour Congress - www.clc-ctc.ca

Canadian Taxpayers Federation - www.taxpayer.ca

Canadian Unity Council - www.cucweb.ca

Egale Canada - www.egale.ca

Native Women's Association of Canada - www.nwac-hq.org

The Raging Grannies - www.geocities.com/raginggrannies

Real Women of Canada - www.realwomenca.com

The Sierra Youth Coalition of Canada - www.syc-cjs.org

VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteering is a planned form of helping others, which takes place over a period of time, in an organizational setting, and for which the volunteer expects no direct compensation. Canada has one of the largest voluntary sectors in the world. We are home to 6.5 million volunteers, and 1.3 million people are employed in the sector. Canadians contribute over 1 billion hours annually in volunteer time to charities and non-profits. However, just 11% of Canadians perform 51% of the volunteer work nationally.

Volunteerism is an important part of Canada's economy and society. Perhaps the largest-scale study of Canadian volunteerism is the Statistics Canada National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The survey found that Canadian volunteers represent a broad cross-section of Canadian society. Higher incomes and levels of education are associated with higher rates of volunteerism, but a causal link between demographic characteristics and volunteerism has not thus far been established.

Other researchers have suggested six psychological functions that can be met through volunteering: achievement of altruistic values, exposure to new learning experiences, creation of relationships with other people, development of career-related skills, prevention of feelings of guilt, and encouragement of a positive mood. Canadians list commitment to a cause and ability to enhance personal and professional skills as the top reasons for volunteering.

Several challenges to volunteerism in Canada have been identified, including:

- The changing nature of government funding and public policy;
- Declining numbers of volunteers and stagnant donorship; and
- A lack of strategic thinking and forward planning.

Sources on Volunteerism:

Government of Canada and Canada's Voluntary Sector, www.vsi-isbc.ca. The website of the Canadian Voluntary Sector Initiative.

Imagine Canada (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy), www.nonprofitscan.ca. Be sure to check out new research, the Canadian findings from the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, which places Canadian volunteerism in an international perspective.

Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Viewed by many as a seminal work on volunteering and civil society.

Statistics Canada, Volunteer Canada, www.givingandvolunteering.ca. A website dedicated to providing information about the National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating. Watch for a new survey in late 2005.

Canadian Policy Research Networks, www.cprn.ca.

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Religious affiliation and participation are influenced by factors including demographics, immigration patterns and cultural background. At an aggregate level, the religious affiliation of Canadians is shifting. While 45% of Canadians identified themselves as Roman Catholic in 1991, and 35% as Protestant, these numbers fell to 43% and 29% respectively in 2001. Those reporting no religious identity increased from 12% to 16%.

Immigration was a significant contributing factor in this shift. While nearly 80% of immigrants to Canada prior to 1961 identified themselves as Roman Catholic or Protestant, between 1991 and 2001, only 23% identified themselves as Roman Catholic and 10.7% as Protestant. In addition, 15.0% identified themselves as Muslim, 6.5% Hindu, 4.6% Buddhist and 4.7% Sikh; another 21.3% affiliated themselves with no religion.

Participation in religious services is declining. Data from the 2001 General Social Survey show that 43% of Canadian adults had not attended religious services during the previous year, compared to 26% in 1986. Frequency of attendance at religious services or meetings is strongly associated with age: while nearly ½ of seniors attended religious services at least once a month over the previous year, this was the case for less than ¼ of individuals between the ages of 15 and 34.

Results from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) identified a strong correlation between religious commitment and volunteering, with those who regularly attend religious services being more likely to volunteer than other Canadians, and volunteering more on average. Linking religion to ethnic and cultural background, the survey found that immigrants to Canada devoted more of their support to religious organizations than did Canadians generally, but the likelihood of donating and the average amount donated increased with the length of time immigrants had lived in Canada. New immigrants were less likely to donate, and less likely to volunteer. Possible explanations include participation through informal networks, or the need to save money for personal and familial needs.

Results from the 2001 Census indicate that Canada was home to more than 200 ethnic groups at that time, with 18.4% of the population reporting birthplaces outside of Canada (second in proportion only to Australia). Sixty-one percent of those who immigrated during the 1990s used a non-official language as their primary home language. Among immigrants arriving from the People's Republic of China, 29% were unable to conduct a conversation in either official Canadian language.

Immigrants are likely to report a strong sense of belonging to their cultural or ethnic group. Patterns of engagement appear to shift after arrival. While 6% of immigrants were members of, or participated in, ethnic or immigrant associations, that number falls to just 2% of first generation and 1% of second-plus generation Canadians. However, when broadening the focus to other groups or organizations such as sports teams, clubs and community organizations, those who had immigrated to Canada in the past decade were less likely to participate in groups or organizations in Canada than were immigrants who had lived here for more than 10 years and people who were born here. Recent immigrants often settle in the same areas as family and friends, who are likely of the same ethnic or cultural background, and many maintain close ties to their countries of origin during an initial settlement period.

Diasporic communities may form as a reflection of particular immigrant needs or values, providing social services and maintaining ethno-specific cultural identities. The local participation of individuals may be rooted within an ethnic community, and may also be transnational in scope, linking to homelands. It is difficult to fully measure such engagement, as the networking patterns and social ties of recent immigrants may be informal; their extent may not be accurately reflected within formal institutions or systems.

Sources on Religious and Cultural Engagement:

Statistics Canada (2003), Ethnic Diversity Survey: Portrait of a Multicultural Society
(<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-593-XIE/89-593-XIE2003001.pdf>)

Statistics Canada (2003), 2001 Census: Analysis Series - Religions in Canada
(<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/pdf/96F0030XIE2001015.pdf>)

Statistics Canada (2003), 2001 Census: Analysis Series – Canada’s Ethnocultural Portrait: A Changing Mosaic
(<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/pdf/96F0030XIE2001008.pdf>)

National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participation (NSGVP), 2000 Fact Sheets
“The Giving and Volunteering of New Canadians” (www.givingandvolunteering.ca)

Larry McKeown, David McIver, Jason Moreton, and Anita Rotondo (2004), “Giving and Volunteering: The Role of Religion” (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and Volunteer Canada (<http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Religion.pdf>))

Metropolis (http://canada.metropolis.net/index_e.html)

Bibby, Reginald, (2004) *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Novalis)

PLAY AND EXPRESSION

The play and expression mode of engagement encompasses all types of artistic and sporting activities that involve interaction with the community or society. In the arts category, this includes performing or displaying art for others, attending arts events, volunteering for arts organizations or events, lobbying for arts groups, and other similar activities. Examples of sports engagement include playing on or coaching a team, organizing or attending sporting events, and working to help create and increase awareness of health and fitness opportunities.

Advocates of arts and cultural engagement believe that artistic expression gives people a voice in their communities, allowing them to creatively explore ideas on what is unique and meaningful in their lives. They believe that artistic expression is also a way of reaching beyond the present reality of a community to imagine ways it could be improved. Participation in arts and cultural events, whether it be passive attendance or the concentrated activity involved in planning and performing, can play a valuable role in creating and strengthening a community. Max Wyman, one of Canada's most ardent supporters of the arts, explains the civic engagement potential inherent in arts activities: "People who would not have had much to do with each other before were suddenly working and playing together – and these relationships have lasted well beyond the end of the project."

Many supporters of the arts and cultural sector make the case that through art and culture, Canadians understand what it means to be Canadian, and how our history and perspectives are unique in the world. This is vital to our sense of civic and national identity and stimulates us to become involved in our communities to celebrate and preserve these unique qualities. This may be even more vital in Quebec, where the preservation of indigenous language and culture are a crucial link to the francophone heritage. The artistic expression of immigrant groups also contributes profoundly to Canada's rich multiculturalism.

Richard Florida (www.creativeclass.org) argues that arts, creativity and innovation are major factors in creating the kind of communities in which more and more people want to live. The generous presence of these things in a city, he says, correlates strongly with the presence of more inclusive and tolerant citizens. It is now widely agreed that city planners worldwide who ignore Florida's ideas do so at the peril of the vibrancy of the communities they represent.

Public art plays a vital role in urban centres. Almost invariably, the art stimulates discussion, giving city-dwellers a point of shared interest, despite the potential for highly polarized public opinion. Recent reactions to a large sculpture of a nude male in Penticton, BC (The Baggage Handler) demonstrated the disagreement public art can create, but also the valuable dialogue such art can produce. Respectful discourse helps create an engaged community able to cope with divergent views.

Sporting activities are a very common form of civic engagement. Sports are interesting because they teach elements of civility and community involvement through a process centered almost solely on recreation. This makes sports a great introduction to civic engagement for young people or those who might not be interested otherwise. Sports teach the fundamentals of being a good member of society: working together with others to pursue a goal within a set of rules, and knowing how to disagree with the rules or their interpretation in a respectful manner. Engagement in sports benefits not only those who actively participate, but also those who come

out to support their favorite teams. Cheering for a team with others is one of the most widespread and easily accessible ways of building community bonds.

One of the most important aspects of sports in relation to civic engagement is its inclusiveness. “Sports is a language that everyone understands, regardless of race or religion,” says one Canadian sports development organization. This factor makes sports particularly important in multicultural settings, helping minority groups and newcomers feel at home. Participants in a recent Vancouver workshop noted that, “In many immigrant communities, sports represents a major element of community building and homeland attachment; just as often, sports constitutes a bridge to new activities, friendships and loyalties for newcomer communities.”

The Olympic movement is a great example of optimism regarding the power of sport. The website for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games states, “The Olympic movement is about more than just the elite athletes. It’s about fair play, team spirit, and the ability of sport to bring about peace.” An important part of Vancouver’s winning bid was its emphasis on the benefits that large sports events bring to a community, especially younger members, through a legacy of participation and volunteerism.

It is important to note that not all people value arts and sports engagement to the same degree. There is, for example, widespread skepticism concerning the ability of events like the Olympics to generate social cohesion. At a more local level, the social benefits of sporting events differ widely according to the reaction of the spectators, and whether they respond in a sportsmanlike fashion to all teams, rather than just those which they have come to support. And arts programs are frequently criticized for using funding that might otherwise be directed to what are seen as more concrete and immediate social issues such as poverty.

Sources on Play and Expression:

For Richard Florida’s ideas on creative cities in the Canadian context, go to www.creativeclass.org/acrobat/ontario_report.pdf.

For Max Wyman on why culture matters, see www.tabaret.ca/article_e_231.html.

For a short discussion and video on public art, check out www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/Greaterdot_wa and click on ‘What is Public Art?’

The value of the artist in Canada is enshrined in the Canadian Status of the Artist Act (1992): <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/S-19.6/index.html>. See especially Part I, General Principles.

See www.2010legaciesnow.com for ideas on building community through art and sports in the context of the upcoming Vancouver Olympics. Also explore the Vancouver 2010 Olympic bid and learn about the priorities of the organizing committee at www.winter2010.com.

Canadians are using sport to build community around the world. Go to www.commonwealthgames.ca and click on ‘International Development through Sport.’

For an in-depth look at the arts and civic engagement in Canada, check out Max Wyman’s book, “The Defiant Imagination: Why Culture Matters” (2004).

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

To say that Canadians increasingly live in an internationalized community is stating the obvious. Much attention has been paid to the rise of both economic and cultural globalization, and the concomitant decline in relevance of national boundaries. These important developments have significant consequences for Canadian volunteerism.

Jagdish Bhagwati defines global non-governmental organizations as bodies that “address global issues, including those raised by the activities of international institutions such as the IMF, WTO and World Bank.” NGOs have demonstrated their capacity to mobilize global public opinion and shape critical international negotiations. The international campaign to ban landmines is just one striking example of this mobilization. The benefits of the work undertaken by NGOs continue to gain increasing recognition from the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

The effects of globalization on international social organizations remain uncertain. While some would suggest that a global civil society will bring with it increased understanding and pluralism, others argue that globalization has caused increasing social fragmentation and segmentation. Canadians can participate in global civil society in many ways: by engaging locally in issues of international significance; by moving out of the country and participating in international volunteerism projects; or by moving out of Canada and maintaining volunteerist or philanthropic ties to Canadian civil society.

Sources on International Engagement:

Johns Hopkins University, Centre for Civil Society Studies. See the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at: www.jhu.edu/~css/.

London School of Economics, Centre for the Study of Global Governance. See especially the Global Civil Society Yearbook at: www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/.

United Nations, “Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector,” available on the UN website.

See also the following organizations, which specialize in international volunteerism:

- Canadian Crossroads International;
- Canadian Executive Service Overseas;
- Canada World Youth;
- CUSO;
- Médecins Sans Frontières;
- Voluntary Service Overseas;
- World University Service of Canada.

PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropic activities center around efforts to improve the happiness and well-being of others, involving the donation of money, or time, or both. The term “philanthropy” is, however, at present most commonly associated with large monetary gifts. Giving five dollars to a local charity is an act of philanthropy, as is donating the land for a new museum, but the latter is much more likely to be described as “philanthropic.”

There are many interesting aspects to consider when examining philanthropy as a form of civic engagement. It is noteworthy that, unlike many other forms of engagement, philanthropy does not necessitate a time commitment. It can make a great difference in society while only requiring of the donor the time it takes to sign a cheque. This is not typically the case, however. Many or most of the most generous philanthropists are more engaged than ever in directing the way in which their money is used. This commonly takes place through the creation of a foundation or endowment. It is also interesting to note the variety of ways philanthropists choose to make a difference. Although both are valuable, a new opera house will affect people’s lives in a much different way than a new homeless shelter.

The world witnessed a curious aspect of philanthropy in the end of 2004. The global response to the victims of the tsunami in Southeast Asia was remarkable in its generosity, and Canadians played a significant role. It is reasonable to question, however, why the tsunami tragedy elicited such giving, when the international community comparatively ignores the tragedy of chronic poverty and malnutrition in much of Africa. The organization Make Poverty History reports that a child dies every three seconds in the world due to easily preventable disease or malnutrition. Ultimately, this is a more serious problem, in terms of sheer numbers of people affected, than any natural tragedy in recent history. It is interesting to note what motivates people to give. The tsunami and African problems illustrate that crises are not equal in terms of philanthropic response. Additionally, it is important to note a contentious debate between those who believe charity should operate internationally in places where it is needed most urgently, and those who seek to keep it closer to home.

The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (www.givingandvolunteering.ca) provides regular overviews of patterns of charitable giving in Canada. The survey notes that 91% of Canadians “made financial or in-kind donations to charitable and non-profit organizations” in 2000, and that “seventy-eight percent of Canadians made direct financial donations totaling \$4.94 billion” that year. The average annual donation was \$259, but this figure does not reflect a large variety of other types of donations, such as those of food and clothing.

Sources on Philanthropy:

For excerpts from the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, see :

http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Where_Canadians_Donate.pdf
http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/reports/Philanthropic_Spirit.pdf
http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/pdf/factsheets/Benefits_of_Volunteering.pdf

For the Charities and Democracy Project at the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society, see : <http://www.impacs.org/charities/regulations>.

Also see:

Youth in Philanthropy Canada at www.yipcanada.org, and

Community Foundations of Canada at www.community-fdn.ca.

VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

The Internet is the result of a relatively simple concept: linking distant computers together. This simple idea is now heralded as a new location for human interactivity, with the potential to revitalize civil society and enhance democratic participation.

Recent history is replete with examples of online, or virtual, engagement. For example, online communities were able to mobilize significant opposition to the 2003 Iraq war. The Internet is touted as a powerful way to reach out to a disengaged younger generation of citizens. Research confirms that, in addition to volunteering online, the Internet can help voluntary organizations recruit new volunteers.

Fundamental to the structure of the Internet is the fact that the technology allows users to voluntarily restrict the information they receive and transmit – transcending ‘real world’ identities through construction. At the same time, concern about the digital divide between the information and technology “rich” and “poor” persists, despite significant expansion in Internet technology. Finally, some have raised concerns about the atomizing influence of Internet technology – the tendency to reduce, rather than enhance the sense of community and the drive to volunteer.

Sources on Virtual Engagement:

Castells, (2002), *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fischer, “Wired War: The Internet opens a new world for the left,” *The Ottawa Citizen*. March 13, 2003, F2.

Government of Canada, (1999), “Building the Technological Capacity of the Voluntary Sector,” Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet) National Advisory Committee Report.

Rainie and Fox (2001), “Online Communities: Networks that nurture long-distance relationships and local ties,” PEW Internet and American Life Project. www.pewinternet.org.

Tsagarousianou, Tambini and Bryan, eds. (1998), *Cyberdemocracy: technology, cities and civic networks*, New York: Routledge.

CONCLUSION:

Cross-Cutting Issues for Civic Engagement

The term “civic engagement” encompasses a broad range of activities undertaken for a variety of reasons. At its heart, civic engagement allows individuals to achieve a sense of belonging by contributing to their community. Bringing the various relevant actors in society together to promote an engaged citizenry is a complex task and presents many challenges. The following critical questions may be useful in generating discussion about the eight main modes of engagement.

What is a Citizen?

The concepts of citizenship and civic engagement are intertwined. When we recognize ourselves as citizens, we recognize that we are part of a collective, and that this entails both rights and responsibilities. Civic engagement is, in part, an expression of citizenship.

- What is a “citizen” as commonly defined in Canada?
- Is this a satisfactory perspective?
- Does it include a balance between rights and responsibilities?
- Does it balance individualism versus community?
- Do Canadians identify with the role of citizen, and how does this affect the health of our democracy?

Defining the Community

Identification with a community plays a significant role in directing engagement. People define themselves in a myriad of different ways. Their ethnicity or religion or age may define their outlook, or they may relate most meaningfully with a municipal, regional or national perspective. Almost always, the community with which people identify is a complex mixture of these and other factors. It is also important to remember that Canada has a large immigrant community, many of whom have had their views on civic engagement and the rights and responsibilities of society members shaped in contexts significantly different from that of Canada. Some questions to consider here include:

- To what degree is it important to be able to define a “community” in order to facilitate engagement?
- Are geographic, temporal, demographic, socio-economic, and other factors relevant in the definition of communities?
- Do people engage most successfully as groups or individuals?

Understanding the Obstacles and Incentives

Promoting civic engagement requires an understanding of why people do not participate. What obstacles prevent people from volunteering, or joining a church group, or casting a vote on election day? Some questions to consider here include:

- Do people require a certain base level of resources (i.e. time, money) to engage civically? To what degree do socio-economic barriers limit participation?
- Is non-participation itself a form of expression of civic discontent, and, if so, how can that expression be better understood?
- What dissatisfies people who are involved and tempts them to become less involved?

- What do people want to achieve on a personal level, e.g. help with career, recognition, etc.?
- Do people want to be involved in a cause-based organization or one with a broader mandate?
- What demographic factors correlate with people getting involved, e.g. education, age, etc.?
- Do friends or family encourage involvement, and what are other sources of encouragement?

Quality and Meaningfulness of Engagement?

When broadly defined, civic engagement can encompass almost any interactive activity undertaken with the goal of creating change. Not all types of engagement have a positive effect on society, though. Joining a radical hate group, although arguably a form of political engagement, is destructive to the shared goals of society at large. There are also more and less meaningful ways to engage, although there is bound to be considerable disagreement on what they are. Some people may envision their bowling league as an excellent source of civic-mindedness, while others would much prefer to devote their time to helping the homeless. Some questions to consider here include:

- To what degree should policies aimed at encouraging engagement guard against activities society may acknowledge as undesirable?
- In terms of policy, can we agree on where to draw the line between worthwhile, constructive and meaningful engagement and activities that do not fulfill the sort of beneficial function in society we typically seek to encourage through civic engagement? In other words, what are the virtues of civic engagement?
- What are the benefits of a more civically engaged population, and are those benefits necessarily tangible?
- Can progress on civic engagement be measured in a meaningful way?