

# ACTIVE COMMUNITY



## Communities are stronger when people are informed and active.

Being a citizen or being civic-minded is more than calling a country one's own. It is when people come together as a community to improve their quality of life through shared ideas, dedicated efforts, and infrastructure.

Civic engagement and social capital is about how we see ourselves in, and connected to, our community.<sup>7</sup> As a democracy, we believe in people involving themselves in the community at various levels—neighborhood, county, city, state and federal. At the same time, we understand and respect that individuals have different levels of participation at which they feel they are contributors to the community. This participation can be defined into three levels of civic engagement or citizenship.<sup>8</sup> A 'personally responsible citizen,' is one who pays taxes, obeys laws and helps people in emergencies. A 'participatory citizen,' is a person who is informed and engages at a variety of community levels (local, state or federal). A 'justice-oriented citizen' is one who looks for the root of a problem and works to create solutions by critically assessing situations and making change. Each of these types of citizens adds value to a community and all are needed. Engaged and active individuals and communities are characterized by successful outcomes.

### SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES EQUAL STRONGER COMMUNITIES

- Each person recognizes one's personal responsibility and respects oneself and others.
- Individuals believe their actions are important and trust that an individual can affect change.
- Everyone is an active participant at some level of their community (neighborhood, county, city, state, nation).
- People advocate for issues important to them.
- Individuals support and actively influence the social and political success of the community.
- Individuals critically analyze what happens around them and make choices

to support or challenge concepts that affect their community.

### STRATEGIES

Communication is a key component to an active community. Language is a tool, and it is power. A more connected and active community is created through acquisition of knowledge via flyers, advertisements, other media and exchanges with other people. Individuals with stronger literacy skills will be better informed, and:

- Read and follow the news and what is happening in the community;
- Write a letter to the editor or a county council person adding their voice to the conversation;
- Participate in a community forum, focus group or debate.

"I wanted to tell people why Rockville Senior Center is important, so I emailed the city to tell them that when I came to the United States in November 2011 to stay here forever with my family, I could not talk, and understand English, and my daughter was my translator in all of cases, doctors, pharmacies, shopping, barbers, and etc. But now I can do all of them by myself, and I can talk, read books by taking help from dictionary. That is the reason why I am happy. English can help me talk with everybody, and understand them, do my daily contacts and prepare for the citizenship test. I am happy and glad, when I can talk with my American friends, read books and newspapers."

— Azad, Rockville Senior Center

### ENGLISH LITERACY MAKES OUR COMMUNITY STRONGER

If a learner is in class for 6 hours a week for 40 weeks a year, he or she can...

#### IN A FEW MONTHS :

- Read a recycling postcard with many visuals sent out by the County.
- Greet and exchange limited small talk with a neighbor in English.

#### IN A YEAR OR TWO:

- Volunteer in a community and understand basic directions given to them.
- Understand a TV ad with vocabulary support and make a choice on an issue.

#### IN TWO OR THREE YEARS:

- Read a newspaper on their own in English.
- Follow a community meeting discussion and participate in it.
- Write a letter to advocate for or against an issue.

### FURTHER READING:

7. Putnam, Robert. "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life." *The American Prospect*. N.p., 19 Dec. 2001. Web. 15 June 2015. <http://prospect.org/article/prosperous-community-social-capital-and-public-life>

8. Mattson, Kevin. *Engaging Youth: Combating the Apathy of Young Americans toward Politics*. New York: Century Foundation, 2003. Print.

Nawyn, S. J., L. Gjakaj, D. L. Agbenyiga, and B. Grace. "Linguistic Isolation, Social Capital, and Immigrant Belonging." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 41.3 (2012): 255-82. Web.