

## Civic Engagement Survey Results

I want to say a big THANK YOU to the 16 localities that completed the recent Civic Engagement Survey conducted by the Civic Engagement Committee. We conducted the survey to be able to share with you some of the great work that other localities around the Commonwealth are doing around civic engagement.

Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we are doing all we can to engage our communities. There are more roadblocks for civic engagement in place now than in any other time in recent history. I cannot remember another time that we have shut the public out of our buildings. This has forced us to get creative and find ways to get information to our citizens and to get input from them even though we cannot meet face to face. This is evident in the fact that 49% of you are tracking your civic engagement initiatives through social media as compared to only 22% through attendance at board/council meetings.

I hope that you are able to use some of the information that we gathered through this survey to help engage your citizens in a meaningful and fruitful way. The results flyer and the raw data will be posted on the civic engagement page of the VLGMA website for your use. Thank you again to everyone that participated in the survey.

# 2021 VLGMA Civic Engagement Results

Out of 133 localities, 16 localities participated in a survey that was administered on November 2020 and remained open until January 2021 to the VLGMA Listerv. The survey focused on how localities engage residents, collect engagement data, and enact DEI efforts.

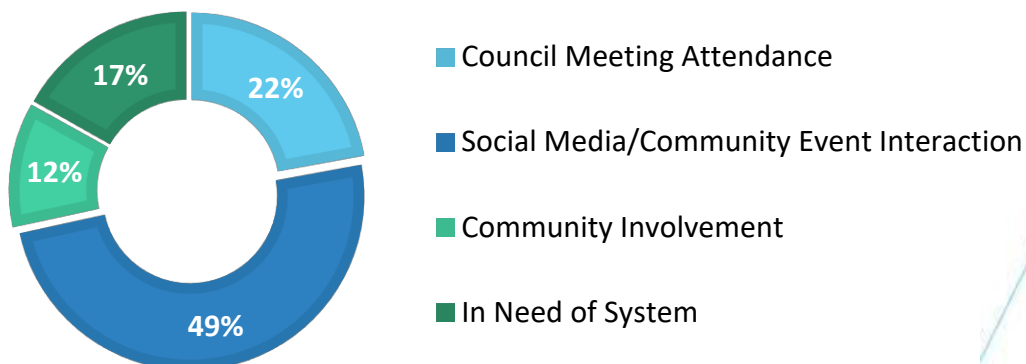
The survey results in their entirety can be found here: <https://icma.org/vlgma/civic-engagement>

## HOW CIVIC PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES ARE ADMINISTERED

Survey respondents describe how civic programs and activities are administered:

- Department Directors
- Community Centers
- Community Development Department
- Economic Development Department
- Parks, Recreation, & Tourism Departments
- Fire & Police Departments
- Cooperative Extensions
- Workforce Development Programs
- School Systems
- Student Government
- Libraries
- Churches
- Social Media
- Local Partnerships

## HOW LOCALITIES ARE TRACKING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES





## VLGMA Civic Engagement Survey Results 2021

### General Questions

What does civic engagement mean in your community?

- Civic engagement can be seen by the various volunteer activities such as the food pantries; being part of town meetings and expressing opinions; participation in events such as the downtown Small Business Saturday.
- All town departments and town council make a deliberate and genuine effort to engage with our community and civic organizations daily.
- In our community, civic engagement means ensuring all citizens have access to information about Town initiatives, and ensuring that all boards, commissions, and committees have membership that is representative of the demographic makeup of our community.
- For Pittsylvania County, civic engagement involves providing the public with the resources and information they need to know what is happening with their local government and giving them a way to get involved in that process.
- Community members having access to their government and government working to meet people where they are.
- Learning from our community what next steps the community needs to take to create the future they wish to see.
- Civic Engagements means being involved with different committees and/or organizations that provide services or information to our community.
- It means hearing from all aspects of the community.
- Civic engagement means educating our community about local government (services, programs, taxes, etc.) and encouraging citizens to participate in government (boards, committees, voting, public hearings, etc.).
- Creating opportunities and providing information in many varied and inclusive ways. Bringing everyone to the table so we truly have a representative government and community.
- Getting out pertinent information to the public in a timely manner; using available tools in the process such as social media, civic alert through Civic Plus, advertisement of major governmental decisions; agenda and event sharing announcements during public meetings. Also means providing updates on major community and economic development projects and county-wide community events that meet public social, recreational, health and welfare and public safety needs and interests.
- Providing opportunities for members of the public to give input or feedback on proposed or on-going Town government initiatives, programs, and activities, and being responsive to that input or feedback.
- As a small, low income, rural community, volunteerism is our most prevalent form of civic engagement. This takes place through the Town, churches, civic groups, and local nonprofit organizations.

- Transparency, accountability, accessible and balanced participation, informed participation
- Voicing opinion on behalf of others, showing up to events, and participating in local government meetings and on boards and commissions - giving back to community

How do you track, evaluate, and present data for your civic engagement initiatives?

- For certain activities, a tally of participants is reported such as the number of merchants participating in an event, or it is the number of food boxes distributed; the comments made at meetings and comments positive and negative that are reported directly to town hall or via social media.
- It is reported at monthly town council meetings and recorded in the official minutes
- We currently do not formally analyze our civic engagement initiatives.
- Frankly, this is something we are still figuring out. One of the easiest things we do is watch analytics for our governmental social media posts and how we are increasing the number of viewers, particularly for livestreams of meetings.
- In CD, we look at standard metrics such as survey response rates, open rates on e-newsletters, people at events, and number of people in meetings; however, the mayor created a Community Outreach Committee, and they will be honing in on connecting with those folks in the community with whom we do not often connect - such as high school aged young adults and our elderly community.
- Community Conversations, Citizen's Satisfaction Survey, Comprehensive Plan and report out through City Council Meetings, online and through social media
- Communication with each other; advertise; and show up to support different events for the County citizens.
- Citizens surveys, advisory groups.
- We provide sign-up sheets to record attendance for meetings, but engagement is not formally tracked and evaluated from the perspective of civic engagement.
- Monthly Reports to our Board of Supervisors and Administration, social media and e-blast Insights, Google Analytics, annual evaluations, regular team meetings. social media engagement review and planning.
- Civic Clerk tracks citizen request for information through the civic clerk website; currently not evaluating or tracking data.
- It depends on the initiative. For example, we track our social media account activity on an on-going basis. For specific engagement efforts (like the Town Plan Update), we ask the consultant to track outreach events and responses.
- We evaluate our civic engagement by the involvement of the community. The volunteers determine the success of these efforts.
- There is no central clearinghouse, each department does this for specific issues or projects and the City's PIO using various social media tools to gauge overall engagement performance. Each department typically uses the City's website to track and present data.
- Keep log of activities and involvement of self and others

Please explain how civic programs and activities are administered.

- Activities are administered online and in person by City staff
- Our Community Engagement and Public Information tagline is "Inspiring YOU to build a thriving community." CE&PI Coordinates with our local school system and coordinates the actual community usage of the school buildings for programs. Parks, Recreation and Tourism (Trips, Sports, Recreation and Hobby), Library Programs, Economic Development E- Blast, Partnerships with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Association, and others.
- The Youth Commission is administered through the Parks and Recreation department.
- In person classes, online resources, expos, fairs,
- The Public Information Office administers the Town's social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor). For project specific efforts, department staff administer with assistance from the Public Information Office.
- It depends on the activity. Most are face-to-face interactive programs.
- The Police and Fire summer camps are run by each department. The City's Economic Development Department has worked with businesses to set up the internships and then those are run by the individual businesses.
- Department heads, mainly police, parks and rec and community center are responsible for initiating civic engagement by their collective staff. They report their activities at weekly leadership meetings.
- It gives them something to do after school and builds their character.
- Through schools
- The programs I have listed are administered almost exclusively through the Community Development Department, with occasional support from other departments.
- Currently through participation in Student Government for a Day Program, Youth and Family Resources, Cooperative Extension and Workforce Development, Reading with the Rec, Community Partners Meetings
- Civic programs and activities are administered through the Town as well as local civic groups and churches. Within the Town, these activities are carried out through the Community Development Program which works under the Town Council.

How are you incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion in your engagement efforts?

- We are attempting to produce information via electronic and paper means. We review all materials to ensure that there is no bias and all photos are reviewed to ensure that multiple groups are represented.
- We certainly do not exclude any individuals or groups in our engagement efforts; however, we could improve on intentional engagement with minorities and protected groups.
- We attempt to incorporate diversity through appointments to various committees, boards and commissions that serve the town.
- We have recently been taking time to identify different communities within Pittsylvania County and try to find ways to reach them. For instance, we will soon be establishing a weekly radio segment on a radio station that primarily goes to the African American community. We are also working with the local extension agency to ensure that we are getting pertinent information out to the farming community - many of whom do not have internet access or use the computer much. These are examples of the segmented approach we are taking because we understand that we cannot rely on a singular communication channel to reach and engage with everyone. Many of the boards and commissions and authorities are experiencing some turnover, so we are looking to broadcast the application process more in our communities.
- We have been making a special effort to train and then implement strategies around DEI, including working to hire people of all types who represent different aspects of our community. Having a diverse work force will ideally make us more accessible to everyone in our community. We also support events that appeal to lots of different tastes (i.e., Cinco de Mayo, various musical styles for Front Porch Fridays, dedication of the state marker for the old African American School) and go to school functions that reach families of all types. We work to recruit diverse populations for our Community Advisory Team and for Council's Community Outreach Committee. I will note that there has been a little pushback from some of our elected officials around collecting demographic information from survey participants, but staff has been able to keep it in so far.
- The City of Manassas has initiated an Equity and Inclusion task force that meets to discuss this exact topic. The City's website can be translated into multiple languages and has an accessibility widget for multiple disabilities.
- We invite everyone to our different civic engagements, ensuring we have something to share of value that makes everyone feel included and important.
- We try to reach out to traditionally underrepresented communities.
- There is no formalized program for incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Our website is accessible, public meetings are live streamed online and available on our PEG Channels. They are uploaded to our meeting portal and PEG Channel the day after the meeting. We live in a rural area with some broadband challenges, so send out a quarterly direct mailer to every address in the community with pertinent County, community and non-profit information, an e-blast that goes out weekly with County

and local information. We regularly publish PSAs and partner with our local and regional media outlets to share information with those who may not have access to other means.

- We utilize multiple platforms to reach a wide range of the citizens, however, we feel more can be done to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Our Diversity Commission helps to promote engagement opportunities within the various communities. Where practical, we provide Spanish language versions of materials.
- The Town is an equal opportunity provider.
- Previously we focused on engaging different segments of our community in their places - where they gather, where they worship, etc. A new Equity and Inclusion Task Force will be determining if more needs to be done.
- Everyone is included-no one left out, only if they individually chose to not participate

What kind of resources does your locality have to support your civic engagement efforts?

- Unfortunately, with COVID-19, the engagement has been limited; but our outreach via livestreaming of meetings has been well received.
- We have a stable budget and capable staff which helps ensure that our engagement efforts are consistent and productive
- N/A
- We do not have a specific line item for this, so the CD Department has carved out about \$5,000 to use for outreach initiatives, plus we try to incorporate as much as we can into our community events.
- The City hosts SeeClickFix on our website to speak directly with concerned residents to help resolve issues quickly and efficiently. The City has a social media presence in multiple formats that is answered quickly and efficiently. When the City was working on a new Comprehensive Plan, our Community Development team decided to go to where the people were and held multiple community conversations in locations where our residents were already gathered to make conversations flow naturally. Conversations were held at Farmer's Markets, at schools, in bars and restaurants and a few in meeting rooms. These were well received by our residents.
- If we do not have resources in-house, we will contract someone with the knowledge and experience to lead the effort.
- Website, Social media, Local newspapers, flyers.
- There are no resources specifically targeted for civic engagement.
- Community Engagement Coordinators in the 5 elementary schools and 2 middle schools. We utilize social media and e-blasts, as well a modern and up-to-date website, the Gloucester Resource Council (a consortium of non-profit and human services organizations), the Gloucester Public Library, Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism and their respective channels and partnerships. Continuously working on growing and fortifying many methods to provide information to the public, including print, electronic, or broadcast.



- Social media platform, Everbridge Alert system for emergency notifications, civic alert software, agenda management software, automatic calendar updates; local newspaper, some direct mail when warranted.
- Public Information Office staff, Town website, social media accounts, GovDelivery
- As a small, low income, rural community, our financial resources are very limited and made up for by our volunteers' efforts and donations.

## Adult Civic Engagement Questions

Please provide a list of civic engagement activities offered by your locality directed at adults.

- Town Hall Meetings, Public Hearings, Community Conversations, Listening Sessions, Online Submission of Comments, Social Media
- Community Use of schools coordinated by the Community Education and Public Information Department (literacy and GED programs, continuing education, County Departments) Parks, Recreation and Tourism (Trips, Sports, Recreation and Hobby), Library Programs, Economic Development educational and networking events, as well as Business mentoring, and Zoom meetings. Through various partnerships with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Association, and many others, we provide a wide variety of civic engagement activities.
- Most of our opportunities to get involved are in public safety. Crime Stoppers Neighborhood Watch Project Lifesaver CERT We are also trying to open up the application process and encourage qualified candidates to apply to serve on some of the boards and commissions we have.
- Healthy Family Parenting (Autism, Obesity); Hidden in Plain Sight
- Other than social media, our efforts tend to be project specific. Two recent examples include soliciting input on the Town's ADA Self-Evaluation and the Town Plan Update. For most capital projects, neighborhood meetings are held before the project enters the design phase to educate the public about the project and get their feedback.
- Social Media, public meetings, Town hall meetings for specific projects.
- Hosted Town Hall Meetings (by election district), sole subject public hearings (for example, Disposition of a Confederate monument), attendance/participation in local civic organizations and HOA meetings, citizens task forces
- Community Conversations, Citizen's Time at each Council Meeting, City Leadership Class (hosted annually), Boards, Committees and Commissions, and any number of volunteer civic organizations, like the ad hoc arts committee.
- Voting in our community center, VDOT driver license renewal and test at community center, blood drives, garden club, numerous committees managed by the town which allow and encourage public participation. Parks and Recreation offers numerous activities from fitness, hiking, trips to sporting and arts events
- Yearly the County has a Volunteer Recognition Program recognizing people that volunteers, outside concerts with all types of genre, Health Expo's, Senior Citizen's Banquet.

- Open door community meetings
- Cupid's Market Shamrock Block Party
- Float, Fish, Fry for Father's Day
- Front Porch Fridays
- Vintage in the Valley Harvest Festival
- Pints for Paws
- Grilled Cheese + Tomato Soup Festival
- Hot Cocoa Concoctions
- Small Business Saturday
- Mural Tours
- 4th of July Farmers' Market
- Board of Supervisors Meetings, multiple boards and commission meetings, parks, and recreation events (youth and adults), farmers market events, Food Giveaways, Assistance Programs through Social Services

Please provide a list of civic education/training programs offered by your locality directed at adults.

- Academy CLA (City Citizen Leadership Class)
- Community Use of schools coordinated by the Community Education and Public Information Department (literacy and GED programs, continuing education, County Departments) Parks, Recreation and Tourism (Trips, Hobby), Master Gardeners, Library Programs, Economic Development educational and networking events, as well as Business mentoring, and Zoom meetings. Through various partnerships with local organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Association, and many others, we provide a wide variety of civic education and training opportunities.
- Participation in Chamber of Commerce Leadership program,
- City Leadership Academy, BCC Training
- Health Fair, Senior Health Expo, At Home Nurse Program, C.E.R.T (Community Emergency Response Team).
- Workshops on matters of interest
- None but looking to do this in the future
- Workforce Development training (i.e., computer, resume writing, job fairs and employment searches)

## Youth Engagement Questions

Please provide a list of civic engagement activities offered by your locality directed at youth aged 17 and younger.

- Park planning workshops, comprehensive plan workshops
- Parks, Recreation and Tourism (Sports, Recreation and Hobby), Library Programs, Partnerships with local organizations, Community Engagement Coordinators being in the school systems, School Use by volunteers and organizations, Field Trips
- The primary opportunity is the Youth Commission, which is made up of seven high schoolers representing each of the seven-election district.
- Youth Council (through Office on Youth); Tobacco Prevention Activities for Families; Rev your Bev (promotes nonalcoholic and non-sugary drinks); Safe Driving (preventing drinking and driving)
- None specifically directed at youth.
- Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Program, coordination with Schools to provide speakers (Career Day, Government/Civics classes, etc.), Plastics Recycling Program/Competition in Elementary Schools
- Summer Police Camp for incoming Freshman, Summer Fire & Rescue Camp for incoming Freshman & Sophomores (2 camps), Fire & EMS classes in high school.
- Organized sports, athletic equipment, basketball courts and parks for youth to gather and engage.
- After school program, Youth Basketball, Youth Baseball,
- Local Government Youth Day and meeting opportunities
- Father's Day Front Porch Fridays Harvest Festival National Night Out GCTSF Hot Cocoa Concoctions 4th of July Farmers' Market Job Fairs
- Internships (summer youth) with local government offices; VA Cooperative Extension, 4-H programs in family and consumer science, agriculture, and natural resources; environmental clean up
- The Town coordinates with our local high school to host regular "Community Volunteer Days." The Town has an established tradition of families introducing volunteering to their youth with some activities benefiting from four generations of volunteers from the same family.

How does the civic engagement activity offered benefit youth development?

- Youth are encouraged to help plan the parks that they use for example an elementary school planned a playground renovation and saw it installed; a group of teenagers planned a skateboard park through to construction; these projects offered skill building in teamwork and project design and budgeting
- Opportunities to connect with their community. Physical and intellectual growth and development. Opportunities for adults to connect with the youth and inspire children.
- Though small, this group gives local students the opportunity to learn more about local government operation by serving as liaisons between the student body and the Board of Supervisors.
- Promotes Tobacco Free Lifestyle; Healthy Lifestyle Promotion; Preventing Drinking & Driving
- It educates them on local services, programs, taxes, ordinances, etc.
- These camps and classes have helped to offer a direction to students who may not feel they have a path in life. Getting to ride in a police car and operate a radar gun is a thrill few students get to experience. Riding on a Fire truck or pulling apart a car to extricate a "victim" has led to several of these students becoming career Fire & Rescue personnel. One thing it has done is helped the graduation rate for these students as they learn that to have any of these jobs, you must graduate high school.
- Organized sports can help youth development, learning teamwork and the how to face winning and losing which will be necessary and useful skills as an adult.
- It gives them something to do after school and builds their character.
- Teaches them about their community and local government
- At some events, children have an opportunity to operate a booth, turning them into young entrepreneurs; they learn about first responders; they learn about art, music, growing food, volunteerism, working for local government, history, and just general care for one another.
- Internships for instance allow youth the opportunities to see how local government operates and sparks their interest in community engagement. Other programs tend to provide a variety of education and life learning experiences.
- These efforts provide ties to the community for the youth that they can carry forward in life, and often return to the community in the future.

Please provide a list of civic education/training programs offered by your locality directed at youth.

- Parks, Recreation and Tourism (Sports, Recreation and Hobby), Library Programs, Partnerships with local organizations, Community Engagement Coordinators being in the school systems to coordinate partnerships listed above.
- Youth Commission
- Tobacco Prevention; Healthy Community Action (Obesity Prevention); Rev your Bev
- Chamber of Commerce Youth Leadership Program, coordination with Schools to provide speakers (Career Day, Government/Civics classes, etc.), Plastics Recycling Program/Competition in Elementary Schools
- The City of Manassas has teamed up with area businesses to help start internship programs where students with talents outside the collegiate scope can gain talents that may lead them in a direction that helps them choose a future that is more beneficial.
- CPR/AED
- After school program, youth cheerleaders
- Schools offer local government education and participation
- None currently, but looking to do so in the future
- Lunch Buddy, Precious Jewels for Middle Girls, Boyz to Men for middle school men, Teen Cuisine Cooking classes, Youth Citizens Services Board, 4-H Camps.
- The Town does not have specific programs it offers to youth, they may get involved the same as adults.

## COVID-19

Describe how COVID-19 has impacted your civic engagement initiatives.

- All engagement has moved online
- Due to the requirements of social distancing and limitation of group sizes, it has been more difficult to hold activities on a town-wide level.
- They have become primarily virtual, forcing many departments to come up with innovative ways to deliver engagement opportunities. Innovation has been a key factor to the current COVID-19 situation, and as a result, we leverage technology in ways we never would have before! (Zoom, Teams, Jabber) We look forward to having more in person events, and a return to programs and civic engagement for all. COVID-19 has been an incredible time to be in Public Information and Community Engagement, and we have pivoted and learned many tremendous lessons.
- COVID-19 has slowed down some civic engagement efforts and made it clear how creative we need to be. With Pittsylvania County being such a rural locality, many of our citizens do not have internet, so we cannot simply use Facebook and our website and expect to reach everyone. And we cannot just depend on in-person activities. We have tried to encourage citizens who wish to speak during public hearings at meetings to submit written comments, but that has not been widely adopted.
- We have really struggled; most are shut down due to facility and in person gathering limitations.
- We have had to take most in-person meetings (like neighborhood meetings for upcoming capital projects) virtual.
- It has forced us to embrace more digital presence and online efforts.
- Some programs have been put on hold (participation in civic organization meetings) and some programs have continued to move forward with modifications to safeguard participants and staff
- We have had to put a halt to most of them. No camps, no City Leadership course.
- Very much so. Most events have been canceled over the past 8 months while those we have held have been significantly modified. Staff have to be creative with each activity to ensure safety.
- During COVID-19 we have been interacting via Zoom, riding bicycles outside on the Virginia Capital Trail with the kids; not much face-to-face interaction.
- It has limited engagement
- It is pretty much grounded it completely, although we have taken as much as we can online or shifted it to individual engagement.
- Fewer activities as all Parks and Recreation activities ceased during COVID; virtual programs replaced in person programs impacting participation.
- COVID-19 has crippled our civic engagement activities, dramatically reducing our efforts.

Describe how COVID-19 has impacted how you communicate with your community.

- COVID-19 has enabled us to be in greater communication with our community.
- It has both enhanced and made it more challenging - virtual meetings have increased participation but may be leaving some people out.
- The communication with citizens has been increased by offering online services on a broader scale, social media has been used as a tool and livestreaming of meetings on the website, as well as a new quarterly newsletter have improved communications.
- Strong reliance on mass media and electronic communications, less in-person interaction. More frequent PSAs and Public Information, and strong partnerships with Virginia Department of Health and Emergency Management. The Coordinators' roles in the school system have been incredibly important in getting the word out to families. Continued push for more broadband access. CARES Act funding has brought many devices into the hands of children and families who may not have had them before. Social media continues to grow in importance.
- COVID-19 has made us realize the importance of getting messages out multiple ways and offering different ways for citizens to engage. Particularly when it comes to promoting services like relief funds and utility assistance, we have had to be creative and utilize every resource we can to spread the word. From leveraging local media outlets to using social media to targeted ads to print documents to newsletters, we have tried to think outside the box in the way we communicate with our citizens.
- Due to budget constraints, the quarterly newsletters are now digital-only. We previously mailed a copy to every residential address in town.
- Same as above.
- More use of online communications
- This year we have communicated more than ever with the community as there has been more information to share and frequency has been the key in relaying the information. Not everyone has wanted to hear it, but it is important to put it out.
- We now communicate much more frequently. COVID updates go out at least weekly, which often initiates other non-COVID communications as well. So overall communication has increased and improved.
- We use Civic Plus to send out a phone call on different events (date and time); and we advertise on the County webpage. We have been holding meetings and events virtually via Zoom and/or YouTube. We actually have had more people attend meetings because they do not have to leave home.
- Less opportunity to engage person to person and due to lack of connectivity even virtual has been a challenge
- It has severely limited how we connect with our community in person, but it has expanded the community's willingness to connect virtually.
- COVID forced us to find innovative ways to engage the community and forced communication such as social media and virtual meetings to best engage.
- The Town maintains its' communication activities through the local paper, social media, the Town website, and call-in meetings.