

Civic Learning Partnership Toolkit

Findings from Pilot Civic Learning Partnerships

Each chapter correlates with the Civic Learning Partnership Checklist

Introduction

“The strength of our democratic institutions relies on the public’s understanding of those institutions.”

Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye

One of the cornerstones of our public education system is to prepare students for civic life. In 2013, the California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning—appointed by Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson—issued a comprehensive set of recommendations to make quality civic learning available to all of California’s students. Civic Learning Partnerships (CLPs) formed in counties around the state to promote the adoption of the Task Force’s recommendations at a local level and help to prepare *all* their students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding that they will need to participate in our democracy.

The information included in the toolkit was compiled after analyzing the six pilot CLPs in Alameda, Butte, Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego Counties. Each partnership generally used a three-pronged approach: recognizing schools’ efforts, communicating about the importance of civic learning with education decision makers, and serving as a conduit for free, nonpartisan civic learning models and resources that can be accessed by all. As California has one of the largest and most diverse student populations in the country, and each county has its own set of challenges and opportunities, tools in this kit are presented as samples only, and will likely need modification for specific communities.

Disclaimer

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Additional Assistance

For more information on Civic Learning Partnerships, visit the Power of Democracy website: www.powerofdemocracy.org

Pre-publication format

For full toolkit with chapter for each checklist item:

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Sample Civic Learning Partnership Checklist

Based on successful Pilot Civic Learning Partnerships

- Leaders:** Establish a small team of partnership leaders. Pilot Partnerships typically had three leaders: a superintendent of the county office of education or his or her designee, a judicial officer, and a business leader representing the Chamber of Commerce.
- Staff and Volunteers:** Identify at least one staff member or volunteer to assist with implementation of partnership goals and administrative tasks.
- Goals:** Draft overarching long-term goals and principles for the initiative; and measurable, achievable goals for each year.
- Kickoff Partnership Meeting:** Invite a broad group of leaders from education, business, law, government, and civic organizations to learn more about revitalizing civic learning in the county.
- Partnership Activities:** Engage in activities that support the partnership goals and capacities, such as promoting civic learning school board resolutions, Civic Learning Awards, and civic learning opportunities for students.
- Regularly Convene and Communicate:** Provide updates, meet to assess progress, adjust plans and goals as needed, and develop next steps.
- Continue Outreach:** Invite others to partnership meetings and events.
- Consult:** Confer with other partnerships on lessons learned.

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Leaders

Overview

Establish a small team of partnership leaders.

- Pilot Partnerships typically had three leaders:
 - Superintendent of the county office of education or his or her designee
 - A judicial officer
 - A business leader representing the Chamber of Commerce
- Pilot Partnership leaders were high-level, well-respected nonpartisan countywide leaders
- Pilot Partnerships sometimes expanded to include a steering committee of 5–10 leaders, who included leaders from areas such as philanthropy, health, and local bar association and civic education organizations.

Findings

Pilot Partnership leaders developed an understanding of each of their respective roles and constraints. Following is a sample outline.

Judge

- Articulated why civic learning is important to the **judiciary**
 - Courts rely on educated citizenry to participate as jurors, witnesses, and litigants
 - Californians have greater access to justice if they understand the role and function of the courts and concepts such as impartiality, the rule of law, and constitutional rights
- Convened stakeholders
- Facilitated meetings
- Provided education about the courts/court tours/guest visits to classroom/lessons
- Recognized teachers and students for civic learning
- Modeled and represented the political neutrality of the group

Limitations and Considerations

Judges must adhere to a [code of ethics](#), which includes but is not limited to the following provisions:

- Cannot fundraise
- Cannot lobby
- Cannot accept gifts

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- Must be neutral and appear to be neutral

Business Representative

- Articulated why civic learning is important to the **business community**
 - Develops critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration skills
 - Upholding the rule of law creates a stable environment in which to do business.
 - For more information, [see article by Allan Zaremborg](#), CEO of the California Chamber of Commerce.
- Convened stakeholders
- Facilitated meetings
- Recognized teachers and students for civic learning

Limitations and Considerations

Business leaders do not have limitations on fundraising or lobbying.

County Superintendent (or his or her designee)

- Articulated why civic learning is important for **students**
 - Role of public education is to prepare students for college, career, and civic life, as reflected in our state framework.
 - Students will have greater access to their democracy, and have their voices heard, through civic learning
 - Civic learning can improve school climate and meet other Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) goals.
- Provided opportunities for teachers to learn about research-based best practices in civic learning as well as policies and documents that promote civic learning, such as the recently updated [California History–Social Science Framework](#) for curriculum
- Included civic learning on meeting agendas with superintendents, school site administrators, and teachers
- Provided superintendents, school site administrators, and teachers with access to nonpartisan educational lessons and methods as featured on [My Digital Chalkboard](#)
- Provided professional development opportunities for teachers in civic learning
- Recognized site administrators, teachers, and students for civic learning
- Emphasized the importance of equity and access to civic learning

Limitations and Considerations

Superintendents must work to support both state and local education policies, procedures, and priorities.

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Steering Committees or Committee Chairs

Some Pilot Partnerships benefited from bringing in other leaders as a small steering committee. Some of the leaders come from the following groups:

- **Local government:** Is increasingly committed to civic education, and leaders from local government were able to provide leadership, communication, and civic engagement opportunities for youth. The Institute for Local Government, through the Government Engaging Youth (GEY) grant, is developing a toolkit so that local governments can engage student interns. City or county staff who are affiliated with GEY or other efforts, such as a mayor or a representative of city council, could serve on a steering committee. Considerations include whether drawing from a particular city makes the partnership seem focused on that city rather than countywide; and whether the nonpartisan nature of the group can be maintained.
- **Nonprofit civic education groups/leaders:** Some counties are fortunate to have knowledgeable, experienced civic education leaders in their communities and Pilot Partnerships have found that involving a representative on the steering committee benefits all involved. Considerations include whether choosing one representative will seem to favor or endorse one group over another.
- **Higher education:** Many institutions of higher education have a commitment to civic engagement, and a professor and/or administrator may be able and willing to provide leadership and expertise.
- **Foundations:** One county had a foundation that was already funding in civic engagement.
- **Bar associations:** Several counties have bar associations that are involved in the schools and civic education, and lead attorneys from those efforts have been active members of several steering committees.

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Staff and Volunteers

Overview

Leaders identified at least one staff member or volunteer to assist with/implement the following partnership goals and administrative tasks:

- Meeting notes
- Meeting logistics
- Draft agendas
- Communications with list of partnership members
- Maintain and update list of partnership members
- Follow through on initiatives of the partnership

Findings

All Pilot Partnership leaders found it essential to have at least one staff member or volunteer to assist with implementation. The assistance sometimes came from staff at the county office of education, especially when that staff member already held a related position such as History-Social Science Consultant. Others came from the ranks of retired civic educators who were able and willing to be volunteers; and one came from the court. In some counties, partnership members or the leaders themselves performed some of tasks listed above.

The following are various ways in which the tasks were handled:

Meetings

- Meeting notes—A member of the partnership took notes at meetings; staff edited/finalized notes and sent them to members.
- Meeting logistics—Once the group found a suitable meeting place, meetings tended to recur at that location; staff or a volunteer often sent out the notice.
- Agendas—Once the group established the first few agendas for the meetings, leaders can and did modify them and staff or a volunteer sent them out.

Communications

- Several partnerships emailed updates to their members; these were often drafted by staff or a volunteer and approved by the leaders.
- Staff or a volunteer maintained the email distribution list, which required continual updating.
- Staff or volunteers also drafted letters to be signed by the leaders.

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Follow-through and Implementation

- While leaders often did initial outreach, staff or a volunteer often followed up. For example, some leaders sent out a letter promoting the Civic Learning Awards, and staff at the county office of education worked with schools to assist them in completing the applications.

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Goals

Overview

Leaders drafted overarching, long-term goals and principles for the initiative and measurable, achievable goals for each year.

- The overall long-term goal of the Pilot Partnerships was to provide a high-quality civic education, inclusive of the courts, to all the students in their counties
- The Pilot Partnerships' measurable yearly goals were to:
 - Achieve a minimum of three school boards passing resolutions endorsing civic learning resolutions
 - Provide school districts with free, nonpartisan civic learning lessons and resources for their classrooms, inclusive of the courts
 - Have at least one school apply for and win a Civic Learning Award
 - Host a year-end civic learning showcase, similar to a science fair

Findings

Many of the goals were based on the [California Task Force on K-12 Civic Education](#) final report: *Revitalizing Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action*, which emphasized:

- **All Students:** Pilot Partnerships embraced the goal of expanding civic learning to include students in vocational education, English language learners, special education, foster youth, and court-involved youth.
- **High Quality:** Pilot Partnerships found it helpful to promote [The Six Proven Practices](#) identified by researchers, and as listed in the report; these practices are also reflected in the [California History–Social Science Framework](#).
- **Inclusive of the Courts:** There are many aspects of civic education, from learning about checks and balances, to constitutional issues, and the role of Congress. As judges were part of the Pilot Partnerships, and the courts are often the least understood of the three branches of government, there was an effort to include education about the courts.

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Short-Term Goals

While it was helpful to have a long-term goal of reaching all students, it was necessary to create interim goals:

- **Pass school board resolutions**

The California School Boards Association created a sample school board resolution. More than 45 school districts across the six pilot counties passed resolutions, which together have jurisdiction over more than 500,000 students. (See Samples A, B)

Pilot Partnerships learned that school districts did not have to pass a school board resolution to make progress on civic learning, but it could be helpful in some cases. The idea behind this goal was threefold:

1. *Respect and protocol*—Before reaching out to the teachers and school site administrators, the Pilot Partnership wanted the school board to be informed of, and send a signal of support for, civic learning.
2. *Resources and reporting*—The superintendent could then designate staff to assist and/or report back to the school board on progress; and/or the partnership could then reach out to teachers and schools with nonpartisan civic education resources.
3. *LCAPs*—These activities could lead to the eventual inclusion of civic learning in Local Control Accountability Plans.

- **Provide school districts with free, nonpartisan civic learning lessons and resources for their classrooms, inclusive of the courts**

[My Digital Chalkboard](#): The Pilot Partnerships pooled their resources to create a new area on this website for civics lessons, curricula, and other educational resources. The resources are free, nonpartisan, and noncommercial, and are searchable by grade level. (See Sample L)

The challenge was getting teachers and schools to access the resources. To get the word out to teachers, a flyer and hyperlinks from the website to individual school district webpages were created. (See Sample M)

- **Have at least one school apply for and win a Civic Learning Award**

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Chief Justice of California sponsor the [Civic Learning Awards](#). The award recognizes schools for engaging all their students in high-quality civic education and identifies models that can be replicated. The award is open to elementary, middle, and

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high schools. Applications are available in the fall on both the [California Courts](#) and [California Department of Education](#) websites.

- **Host a year-end civic learning showcase, similar to a science fair**
Many civic education organizations as well as county offices of education host civic learning fairs where students display their civic learning and explain to the other participants what they have done and learned. Coordinating such events on a single day, or starting one where there has not been one, has been a role of the Pilot Partnerships. (See Sample C)

Surveys

Although several Pilot Partnerships attempted to survey schools about what they were currently doing in civic education, they were not successful. One partnership, for example, created its own survey and sent it out from the county office but received very few responses. Another partnership explored adding civic learning questions to an existing survey, but the school district ultimately determined it was not workable.

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Kickoff Partnership Meeting

Overview

Invite a broad group of leaders from education, business, law, government, and civic organizations to learn more about revitalizing civic learning in the county.

- Leaders set date, time, location, keynote speakers, agenda (See Sample D)
- Leaders developed an invitation list of 30–50 community leaders, with a goal of at least 30 attending
- Leaders identified and developed materials to be provided (See Samples E, F, G, J)
- Leaders planned an opportunity for the meeting participants to “sign up” for the civic learning partnership and to offer assistance (See Sample H)

Findings

- Set date, time, location, keynote speakers, and meeting agenda
 - *Time:* Pilot Partnerships scheduled breakfast meetings; note that the partnerships had grant funding to pay for the breakfast.
 - *Location:* Kickoff meetings were held in free, nonpolitical venues that communicated the spirit of civic learning as much as possible, such as a courthouse, a county office of education space, or a Chamber of Commerce meeting room.
 - *Agenda/Speakers:* Pilot Partnership keynote speakers featured either Superintendent David Gordon (Sacramento County Office of Education) or Justice Judith McConnell (Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District), co-chairs of the California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning.
 - All Pilot Partnerships included a local student speaker who has been involved in civic learning, ideally from a civic learning award-winning school.
 - See sample agenda (See Sample D)
 - See sample PowerPoint slides for meeting (See Sample F)
- Leaders developed an invitation list of 30–50 community leaders, with a goal of at least 30 attending.

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- Leaders often made personal calls and sent personal emails to other respected community leaders to invite them to attend.
- Leaders conducted broad outreach that included, for example:
 - Local and statewide elected officials—or their representatives—from all three branches of government
 - PTA
 - League of Women Voters
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Local bar associations
 - School district (Association of California School Administrators)
 - California Teachers Association
 - California School Boards Association member
 - Local media
 - Student government representative
 - Local civic education groups
 - Local youth organizations, including youth representatives
 - Higher education representative
 - Law school representative (if available)
 - Law enforcement
 - Community groups working with ethnic groups
 - Local members of statewide advocacy groups such as Children Now
- Other
 - Sample invitation (See Sample I)
- Pilot Partnerships provided an opportunity for attendees to sign up as members and to indicate ways they can help. (See Sample H)
- Pilot Partnerships provided handout materials and showed videos that supported their goals, such as:
 - Civic Learning in California and the Power of Democracy: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxFLmlH0wsl
 - County civic learning highlights: <https://vimeo.com/120009251>
 - [California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning](#)
 - [Relevant news articles](#)

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Partnership Activities

Overview

Engaged in activities that supported their goals, such as promoting civic learning school board resolutions, Civic Learning Awards, and civic learning opportunities for students.

- Leaders solicited input from members about activities to support their goals.
- Leaders leveraged existing resources and opportunities, such as the Civic Learning Awards.

Findings

Pilot Partnerships used some of the following strategies:

- **Civic learning school board resolutions**
 - Provided a sample school board resolution to superintendents and school boards (See Samples A, B)
 - Leaders of the partnership met personally with local superintendents to discuss the reasons they think civic learning is so important
 - Leaders worked with county superintendents of schools and local superintendents to put civic learning on meeting agendas
- **Civic Learning Awards**
 - Leaders and members followed up with local superintendents or their designated staff to encourage them to identify schools to apply for awards
 - Members of the partnership contacted their local schools and teachers to encourage them to apply for award
 - When a school won, partnership leaders and members congratulated the school by attending a related recognition event and/or sending a letter of recognition representing the partnership
- **Civic learning opportunities**
 - Followed up with local superintendents or their designated staff to provide them with specific civic learning educational resources and discuss how best to provide them/engage teachers and students to utilize them

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Regularly Convene and Communicate

Overview

Partnership members provide updates, assess progress, adjust plans and goals as needed, and develop next steps.

- Convened members, typically quarterly
- Emailed all members with meeting notes and updates, typically quarterly

Findings

Convened members, typically quarterly

- One Pilot Partnership established two subcommittees: outreach and implementation. The outreach committee focused on school board resolutions and the implementation committee developed a civic learning showcase for the county.
- Some Pilot Partnerships found meetings essential to keep momentum and engagement.
- Pilot Partnerships found it useful to consider when convening:
 - Are members feeling engaged and following through? Are members clear about the actions they can take and what their roles are? Is there staff and/or a structure that assists with follow-through?
 - Who has the authority to make a needed change, and what is the process for making that change?
 - Does the partnership include a member who has experience with/or can be a guide through such processes?

Communicated with all members with reports/meeting notes

Emails:

- Conveyed the urgency and relevance of civic learning
- Communicated and celebrated progress; recognized the contributions of their members
- Connected with different audiences
- One partnership communicated through social media

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Continue Outreach

Overview

Invite others to participate in partnership meetings and events.

- Partnerships strove to be broad-based and to attract other well-respected leaders in the community.
- Partnerships continually added members by inviting potential members to meetings and events.

Findings

Partnership membership was dynamic, with some members becoming more active over time and others becoming less active.

Personal outreach by leaders to well-respected leaders in the community was effective. Further follow-up and involvement was then conducted via phone and email.

Inviting potential members to meetings and events, such as civic showcases, provided opportunities to inform and inspire commitment.

Partnerships benefited from asking themselves the following questions:

- Who was missing from the membership?
- Does the partnership represent the diversity of the county/community?
- Are there current or emerging changes in demographics to be planned for?
- How could all “corners” of the county be reached?
- Who might help with specific outreach and communication?
- Is our partnership balanced/will others perceive it as nonpartisan?

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Consult

Lessons learned by Pilot Partnerships and other similar educational efforts include:

- Staffing is important to help with administration and implementation
- County school superintendents' support is needed
- Focus on relationship building and conduct personal outreach
- Avoid politicization; find balance
- Seek visibility and positive publicity
- Maintain broad participation
- Build on existing efforts
- Achieve small, measurable successes
- Communicate
- Conference calls are often ineffective
- Much can be accomplished by a small group of 7–10 members
- Groups representing science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and the arts have well-organized efforts to bring these subjects back into the curriculum and can be models, mentors, and partners
- Promoting [The Six Proven Practices](#) in civic learning, and other research-based best practices, advances quality civic education (See Sample K)

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Appendix

- A. [Sample Civic Learning School Board Resolution](#)
- B. [Passed Civic Learning School Board Resolutions](#)
- C. [Sample Civic Learning Showcase Flyer](#)
- D. [Sample CLP Kickoff Agenda](#)
- E. [Sample CLP Guiding Principles](#)
- F. [Sample CLP Kickoff PowerPoint](#)
- G. [CA K-12 Civic Learning Task Force Report](#)
- H. [Sample CLP Kickoff Signup Sheet](#)
- I. [Sample CLP Kickoff Invitation](#)
- J. [Civic Learning Benefits to LCAP](#)
- K. [Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning](#)
- L. [My Digital Chalkboard Flyer](#)
- M. [My Digital Chalkboard Widget](#)