



Resources for Educators: Using the CIRCLE Data Tool

What is CIRCLE's Youth Voting & Civic Engagement in America data tool?

The electoral and civic participation of young people is shaped by the environmental (political, socioeconomic, and community) contexts of the places where they live. [This CIRCLE data tool](#) offers a unique way to explore the relationships between voting and other forms of civic participation, and some of the conditions that shape such engagement. It features more than 40 unique indicators and includes data at the national, state, congressional district, and county levels, which users can select and filter to analyze and understand the realities of their community and of others across the country.

Why is it important?

Context matters: income disparity, racial segregation, education level, political polarization, and the work of nonprofits—among many others—make up the “civic ecosystem” in which youth do or do not have the opportunities to participate in civic and democratic life, or to build the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary to do so. At the same time, research has shown that communities where young people vote, volunteer, help their neighbors, and belong to groups or associations can be more prosperous and resilient places. These dynamics are multifaceted and far from straightforward; it is essential to understand them in order to help advance more and more equitable civic opportunities for youth.

How can I use this with my students?

You might consider starting by grounding students in a few important definitions so that they can best make sense of the tool's purpose, structure, and scope. Perhaps solicit students' own definitions before sharing CIRCLE's (below).

Civic engagement refers to the wide range of actions and behaviors that improve communities and help solve problems.

Electoral engagement refers to the act of being involved in work related to elections, whether through voting or other activities.

Read [this “About” page](#) for more details on the tool's background and the “How to Use the Tool” section for best practices for use. Check the instructional ideas on the following pages for pedagogical suggestions to try next.

Question Formulation | *Social Studies, Geography, Sociology*

Start by asking students to read the description of the CIRCLE data tool's purpose on the [tool's landing page](#) and to spend 10 minutes developing a list of as many questions as they can which are sparked by the brief introduction they just read. Introduce the idea of closed questions (soliciting a brief response with a limited set of possible answers) and open questions (which entail more thought and explanation), and ask students to categorize their list of questions. Then offer 5 minutes for students to change some of their questions from open to closed or vice-versa. Once they're done, have students identify their 3 favorite questions.

Unleash them to explore the data visualization tool to find evidence with which they may answer their questions. They can start by reading [this introductory overview](#) and then digging into the tool's various data sources and geographic filters. Students' final product should include their question list, revised question list, top questions, and an attempt at answering each of their top questions using the tool. Their responses should reference specific data points and sources, as well as offer ideas about other data points or sources they might search for elsewhere if this tool didn't offer direct or complete answers to their questions.

Community Profile | *Art*

Invite students to assemble and create a civic profile of their community. They may choose the city or town they live in now, a place within the United States they've lived in previously, or somewhere they hope to live in the future. Students should first explore the [CIRCLE data tool](#) and make a list of interesting data points about their chosen community by exploring the data at various geographic levels: assembling data about their state in comparison to others, their state at large, their congressional district, and their county. Ask students to then select at least three "Youth Voting and Civic Engagement" data points and at least three "Conditions that Shape Youth Engagement" data points to include in a final Community Profile product, which may take the form of an illustrated poster, Powerpoint, or other medium of their choosing. If you're interested in helping students make photo portraits, video interviews, or a series of GIFs or memes as part of this activity, see [CIRCLE's Youth Media-Making Toolkit](#) (starting with [this how-to page](#)) for lesson plans with detailed instructions and resources.

Graphing Civic and Electoral Engagement | *Math, STEM*

This activity is designed to give students the chance to practice constructing graphs using information of interest to them and relevant to their communities. Allow students to explore [CIRCLE's data tool](#) and to hone in on a community they're interested in. Students should select the state and then county filters of the community they picked, then identify one "Youth Voting and Civic Engagement" and one "Conditions that Shape Youth Engagement" indicator for which the county, state, and national averages are offered (which should appear once they select the indicator).

Ask students to create graphic visualizations of each of these indicators, using a bar graph or other simple charts. Students should have a title for each graph, as well as correctly labeled axes, units, and legends, if applicable. If the county's data is relatively good compared to state and/or national averages, students should suggest, at the bottom of the graph, one local activity or condition which might contribute to that success. If the county's data is relatively weak compared to state and/or national averages, students should suggest one idea for improving this indicator.

Civic Reflection | ELA

In the first portion of this activity, students will journal about their reflections on their civic identity. Share the definitions included at the top of this document and then invite students to respond to at least one prompt in each of the sections below:

Reflections on Self

- Who are you?
- How do you describe your identity/identities?
- Would you describe yourself as a civically or politically engaged person? Why or why not?

Reflections on Community

- What communities are you a part of?
- How do you participate in those communities? Why did you get involved?
- How do you take part or see others taking part in improving those communities?

Reflections on Youth Civic and Electoral Engagement

- How does your environment influence what issues you care about or get involved with?
- How would you describe the (range of) civic attitudes of your peers? What do you think influences those attitudes?
- How could young people play a greater role in impacting the health of your community?

In the next portion of the activity, students will research their community using [the CIRCLE data tool](#) to find information that supports or adds news layers with which to understand their experiences. They can start by reading the [overview of the tool](#) and then digging into the data sources and filters offered. They should record at least two observations for each of the following sections, using either lines/quotes from the overview or statistics from the data set:

- MMM/This is a good line or statistic to know: ... it makes sense to me because...
- AHA/This surprises me: ... because...
- HUH/This line or statistic: ... makes me wonder if/think about...

Finally, students should construct a three stanza poem or rap (of at least 5 lines each) which includes ideas for how their community can be improved. They should use their initial reflections, reference at least one takeaway from their research, and use the following stems for each stanza:

- I am...
- My community...
- We must...

Glows and Grows | Journalism

In this activity, students will use interviews with community members and CIRCLE's data tool to identify strengths and areas in need of growth, as well as ideas for improving the civic health of their community. Consider asking students to begin by reading [this overview of the tool](#) (including "Why This Data") and/or [clicking "Get Started" on the tool itself](#) to skim the categories of indicators covered. They may use this initial exploration to construct a list of interview questions designed to solicit others' perspectives on the civic strengths and areas for improvement in their community, or they may use the questions below as a jumping off point for their conversations.

- Youth & Elections: What's your impression of voter turnout in this community, especially among youth? From your experience, what factors do you think make it either easy or difficult to vote here? What compels you (if you're eligible) or your friends/family to vote or not to vote?
- Youth Civic Engagement: How would you describe the level of civic or political engagement of young people in this community? What activities do you engage in or see others engaging in which you think help improve our community or our democracy?
- Conditions that Shape Youth Engagement: What other local conditions do you think encourage or discourage young people from being civically or politically engaged? How would you describe the community in terms of economics, education, infrastructure, housing, partisanship, or safety?

Consider using or adapting [this student-facing Activity Sheet](#) from CIRCLE's ["On-Camera Interviews" module](#) within our [Youth Media-Making Toolkit](#) to share with students tips on facilitating interviews effectively (and recording effective videos, if so desired). Students should interview 2-3 people who live in their community and ideally represent a diverse range of backgrounds (spanning different ages, jobs, races/ethnicities, or religions).

After the interviews, students should review their notes and search for trends across the conversations, including identifying at least three suggested strengths and three suggested areas for growth of the community's civic health. Then, invite students to dive into the [CIRCLE data tool](#) to search for data aligned with the topics of each of those observations. Finally, students should write an article summarizing takeaways from their research, including quotes from interviews as well as statistics gathered from the data tool. The article should highlight strengths of the community's civic health ("glows"), areas for improvement ("grows"), instances where qualitative and quantitative evidence corroborated or refuted each other and potential explanations of why, and ideas for how young people and communities can move forward from here.

Please consider sharing with CIRCLE any products your students create if you do decide to use the activities above as a jumping off point for having students engage with the tool. Send links or attachments to circle@tufts.edu or tag @CivicYouth on social media.