Supporting Civic Engagement in the Library
The Skokie Civic Lab Model

Amy Koester
Skokie Public Library
Hi there!

I’m Amy Koester, and I’m the Learning Experiences Manager at the Skokie Public Library.
On Our Agenda Today

1. Libraries & Civic Engagement
2. The Civic Lab at Skokie Public Library
3. Choosing Topics for Civic Engagement
4. Designing Civic Engagement Opportunities
5. Engaging Staff & the Community
6. Time for Final Questions
Libraries & Civic Engagement
Libraries aren’t neutral.
How do we define “civic engagement”?

Civic engagement refers to the programs and opportunities that promote and facilitate:

• a deeper, more critical understanding of how civic institutions operate;
• a broader, more empathic knowledge of how issues, policies, and decisions affect lives; and
• an increased awareness of and confidence in one’s ability to take an active role in civic discourse and participate in community decision-making.
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What do we hope to achieve with civic engagement?

Patrons will be able to make up their minds on issues based on:

• credible information
• critical reflection
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As one patron put it:

“You need to have good information in order to make up your own mind. If you have bad information, someone else is making up your mind for you.”
We apply a civic engagement lens to our work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge-building Opportunities (e.g., learn something)</th>
<th>Youth Ages 0-6</th>
<th>Elementary-Age Youth</th>
<th>Junior High Youth</th>
<th>High School Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific-themed storytimes</td>
<td>Adventure Club, BOOMbox drop-in discussions/micro workshops, BOOMbox drop-in discussions/micro workshops, Great Debate Club, Break the Election</td>
<td>Know Your Rights Clinics</td>
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<tr>
<th>Skills-building Opportunities (e.g., acquire a skill)</th>
<th>Youth Ages 0-6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional skills focus in storytimes</td>
<td>Voting activity at youth desk</td>
<td>Neutral Zone; JH Council; Great Debate Club; Community Tech Volunteers; SkokieWiki Volunteers</td>
<td>Neutral Zone; HS Council; Community Activist Volunteers; Community Tech Volunteers; SkokieWiki Volunteers</td>
<td>Oakton Citizenship Education Classes</td>
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<th>Pop-up Events</th>
<th>Youth Ages 0-6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Lab-related pop-up storytimes</td>
<td>Civic Lab</td>
<td>Civic Lab; JHZ afterschool activities</td>
<td>Civic Lab</td>
<td>Civic Lab; Voter Registration</td>
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<th>Passive Experiences</th>
<th>Youth Ages 0-6</th>
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<td>HSL Whiteboard Questions</td>
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<th>Service Opportunities</th>
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<td>Citizen Science-related programs like Be the Scientist</td>
<td>Teen volunteer program; Friend Squad; Junior High Council</td>
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<td>Knit and crochet-a-thon; 1 on 1 volunteers</td>
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<td>Together at the Table</td>
<td>Together at the Table; Neutral Zone; Friend Squad</td>
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<td>Together at the Table; What Every American Should Know; Great Decisions Discussion Groups; Pages Through History; Friday Night with TED; Let’s Talk at Lunch</td>
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Poll:
For what audiences do you currently offer civic engagement opportunities?
The Civic Lab at Skokie Public Library
Together at the Table
News Discussion Groups
Choosing Topics for Civic Engagement
What’s relevant to your community?

• Check in with patrons
• Connect with your colleagues
• Consider what’s happening locally
What’s relevant to your community?

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• Connect with your colleagues
What’s relevant to your community?

- Check in with patrons
- Connect with your colleagues
- Consider what’s happening locally
How do you stay informed?

• Differentiate types of news
• Try different formats
• Consider international outlets
• Recognize systemic bias in coverage
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How Civic Lab Topics Have Come to Be

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| Issues in the News               | Narratives of Gun Violence      
|                                  | Talking About Suicide          |

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Question:
What’s a current topic of interest in your community that could be addressed through civic engagement programming?
Designing Civic Engagement Opportunities
How do you structure dialogue & exploration?
What do developmentally appropriate activities look like?
Engaging Staff & the Community
How do you support staff to engage in civic conversations?
How do you activate staff?

• Consider personal experiences
• Transfer ideas from programs
• Consider all staff roles
• Create a cross-departmental team
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How do you involve the community?

• Respond to patron suggestions
• Pop up in community spaces
• Share with local institutions
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Poll:
What are your next steps with what you’re learning today?
Let's wrap it up.
What are your questions?

Consider me a resource:

amy.e.koester@gmail.com

Find all Civic Lab handouts:

https://skokielibrary.info/resources/civic-lab/