

Worksheet: Understanding Democratic Participation

Definition #1

Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) Definition of Democratic Engagement

Democratic Engagement means being involved in advancing democracy through political institutions, organizations, and activities. A society that enjoys a high degree of democratic engagement is one where citizens participate in political activities, express political views. A healthy democracy needs citizens who feel their votes count, are informed, participate, debate, and advocate. It needs governments at all levels to be transparent, inclusive, consultative, and trustworthy.

Key elements of CIW's definition:

- Citizens participate in political activities, institutions and organizations
- Citizens can express their political views
- Citizen feel their vote counts
- Citizens are informed and participate
- Government is transparent, inclusive and trustworthy

Definition #2

Simon Fraser University's Strengthening Canadian Democracy Project

The five principles for democratic engagement provide a guide for designing and evaluating a range of democratic processes, from public participation in government decision-making, to civic education, local community action, and the ways we share and discuss information. (1) Build capacity to participate; (2) Be inclusive and accessible; (3) Deepen relationships and social connection; (4) Foster commitment to democratic values; (5) Establish accountability

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Key elements of CIW's definition:

- People participate in political activities, institutions and organizations
- People are involved in decision-making and local community action
- People are committed to democratic values
- Information is openly shared and discussed
- Government is inclusive, accessible and accountable
- Social connections are strong

Definition #3

City of Vancouver's Engaged City Task Force Final Report

An engaged city brings people together for conversations to address issues of common importance, to solve shared problems, and to bring about positive social change. It involves people in the decision-making process such that it improves the resulting decision and, over time, builds the trust that is needed for fully empowered communities to actively create a common future. The four building blocks for an engaged city are: (1) Building knowledge; (2) Building capacity; (3) Building trust; and (4) Building power.

Key elements of CIW's definition:

- People come together for conversations of common importance
- People solve shared problems
- People are involved in decision-making
- People work together to build knowledge, abilities and trust