



Civic Media Project Learning Guide



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About This Learning Guide

This learning guide is designed to assist educators, students, and practitioners in exploring the intersections between media, engagement and civic life. This guide includes layered discussion questions and activities for exploring topics of interest and creating original media. Civic life is inherently social, so readers will benefit from scaffolded group work that integrates individual and group thinking, such as think-pair-share, gallery walk, fishbowl, and jigsaw activities. The sections offer mainly discussion questions or guide lines for media creation, and it is the choice of the teacher and students to make a number of decisions about the structure of the activities: Which activities are best done in groups versus as a whole class? When is it more useful to cycle through work-presentation-feedback-revision versus simply explore an issue through a single discussion or assignment? When would a written reflection or homework assignment to internalize content be useful?

University educators may want to give their students free reign to choose particular case studies to analyze and present to the class. High school educators will be best served by first reading a given case study on their own and then assigning the most accessible segments to their students. The discussion questions are clear, accessible, and provide plenty of opportunity for high school and university students to dig deep and think critically.

High school educators will also find it helpful to know that these activities address a number of Common Core English Language Arts and Mathematics standards, Next Generation Science Standards' Science and Engineering Practices, and National Council for Social Studies' C3 Framework.

These activities require students to analyze writing and images, communicate clearly, engage in reasoned argument and democratic deliberation, and collaborate successfully. Students identify and define problems, pursue research, compare different sources, and develop and implement strategies to promote the common good.

Each section should take a class of students one to two hours. Linked activities take varying amounts of time, as noted below, and come from our Emerging Citizens curriculum on digital media literacy and from the By Any Media Necessary project, an online resource about digital media and participatory youth culture.



Preface: What Is Civic Media?

Civic life is comprised of the attention and actions an individual devotes to a common good. Participating in a human rights rally, creating and sharing a video online about unfair labor practices, connecting with neighbors after a natural disaster: these are all civic actions wherein the actor seeks to benefit a perceived common good, beyond the boundaries of their intimate or professional spheres.

Civic media are the practices of designing, building, implementing or using digital tools to intervene in or participate in civic life. The Civic Media Project (CMP) is a collection of short case studies that each present a unique portrait of engagement in civic life, and the learning guide applies differently to each one. You can use this resource to learn about the proliferation of digital media and the changing nature of civic engagement. To begin, explore the prevalence of social media in our lives with [this activity](#) (two hours).



1. Discussing the Case Studies

The Issue and the People

In this case study, what is the problem or topic of interest? Whom does it affect? Who are the individuals, groups, and institutions involved? To dive deeper into critical analysis of the featured media, explore activities from our media literacy curriculum about understanding the media's context and intentions and evaluating its potential impact and credibility (each is one hour).

Media Strategies

Identify a part of this case study in which you learn about someone's personal perspective. Identify a part of this case study in which someone creates a public message. In this case study, how do personal perspectives and public messages influence each other?

What tools and strategies are used by the people involved?

Engagement and impact

How do these tools and strategies engage other people in the cause? Media scholar and activist Ethan Zuckerman offers useful concepts to distinguish among the approaches taken by different civic media: Some strategies require a rather "thin" engagement, characterized by little thought and creativity on the part of the public, while other approaches demand a much "thicker" engagement, rich in thought and creativity. Signing your name on a petition for a longer recess is rather thin compared to redesigning the school schedule to make this possible. Giving money to someone on the street is thinner than figuring out which organizations do the best job of reducing hunger in your city. What are the pros and cons of thin versus thick approaches? Where does your case study fall on this continuum?

thin



thick

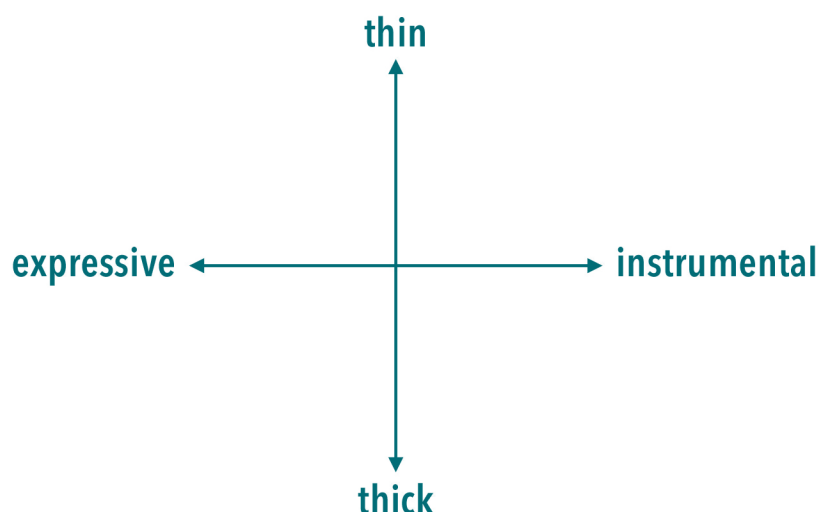
Engagement draws in the public, and impact addresses the problem. Digital media allows people to speak up about the problem, which is a more "expressive" type of impact, and well as achieve more easily measurable, "instrumental" outcomes, such as changes in laws and policies, or actions as immediate as serving meals to the homeless. Posting a photo to instagram of trash in your neighborhood is more expressive, while a more instrumental ap-



Retweeting a piece of news about carbon pollution is expressive, and convincing your school or community organizations to reduce their energy consumption is instrumental. Where do you think signing an online petition would fit in? What are the pros and cons of expressive versus instrumental approaches? Where does your case study fall on this continuum? What are the pros and cons of expressive versus instrumental approaches? Where does your case study fall on this continuum?

expressive ←————→ **instrumental**

Here is a picture of these two continuua combined.



Where would you place particular strategies used in your case study? You may discover arguments for putting it in more than one quadrant of the graph. If you have room, you can interact with the axes physically, by drawing these axes across the floor, standing on the spot you think represents your chosen case strategy, and making an argument from that location. If you don't have room, just draw the axes on paper and use post-its to place ideas within the quadrants.

Who is affected, and how large is the scale? For example, does the action affect a person, group, community, institution? People near and far away? Consider how different people might respond differently to the strategies and the media they use? How could these strategies help you take action in the communities of which you are a part?



1a. Discussion Online and Face-to-Face

The Disqus tool is the grey box that appears to the right of the case study text. Use Disqus to share your ideas in a public forum. (Remember: comments are completely public, and will be seen well beyond your classroom.) Reflect on what else you might like to know about the case study. Are there questions you have about the media strategies used, or the impact created? Do you wish the case had covered additional or different content? Does the case study remind you of similar issues in your own community?

Bridging and bonding through dialogue

Before you dive into discussion, consider that it can be challenging to have conversations across any kind of difference in identity or background, such as race and ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, age, geographic location or even social circles. We all have multiple identities, affiliations, and commitments. Here are some guidelines for creating meaningful, vibrant dialogue that can bridge this kind of difference without denying or overlooking it.

Before participating in the online discussion, consider the following two questions, e.g., via a think-pair-share activity that develops into a larger group discussion: Identify when you have felt comfortable sharing your ideas and questions in a group. What happened in those moments to help you feel comfortable? Identify when you have had ideas or questions but have not shared them. Why not? What was happening at those moments?



From reflection to investigation

After reflecting on your own experience, consider these guidelines for participation in dialogue: Differentiate between opinion—which everyone has—and informed knowledge, which comes from sustained experience, study, and practice. Hold your opinions lightly and with humility. Identify where your learning edge is and push it. For example, whenever you think, “I already know this,” ask yourself, “How can I take this deeper?”

To help implement these guidelines, here are some discussion starters to frame your discussion of the case studies.

- From my experience/perspective as [identity], . . .
- This is what I understand you to be saying: . . . Is that accurate?
- I’ve been wondering about how we are using [term] in this discussion . . .
- I have always heard that [X]. What are your thoughts on that?
- Is [X] a good example of what the author was saying?
- How does [X] affect relationships between [Y] and [Z]?
- This perspective is new to me, but I’m wondering if it is accurate to say that . . . ?



2. Choose Your Issue

You have learned a lot about the civic uses of new media technologies to address a broad range of social problems and opportunities. Draw on your own interests and the content of the case studies you've read to consider which issues you would like to explore in greater depth. It may help to explore your own community in greater depth as well as look through a wide range of issues and frames for defining needs and opportunities.

To ground your choice of an issue, you may want to begin by considering the needs in your own community. You and your peers can use Google Maps to map resources and needs in relation to a particular topic, or interview people you know. Remember, the commonplace challenges that your own community faces often connect to global issues. For example, a question about why people don't exercise may lead you to explore the larger issue of access to green space, athletic facilities, and health education. A question about why people litter may lead you to explore the larger issues of pollution and environmental justice.

To gain a broader perspective, dive into the list of civic topics below to generate ideas about how the needs in your community connect with national and global issues.

- Climate Change, Energy, and Pollution
- Poverty and Sustainable Economic Development
- Health
- War & Violence (War and Conflict)
- Immigration
- Race and Ethnicity
- Gender and Sexuality
- Faith
- Internet access, online privacy and security, and freedom of information

[Here are additional examples of youth media projects](#) to inspire you. As you look through these different topics and projects, consider which different individuals and groups might be affected by each topic? How so? Consider a single group or person. What are the different ways that your chosen topic might affect them? You can choose topics to research ahead of time and split into groups with peers by interest. Each group can work on a separate issue, or the whole class can choose one issue to explore together.



3. Take Action

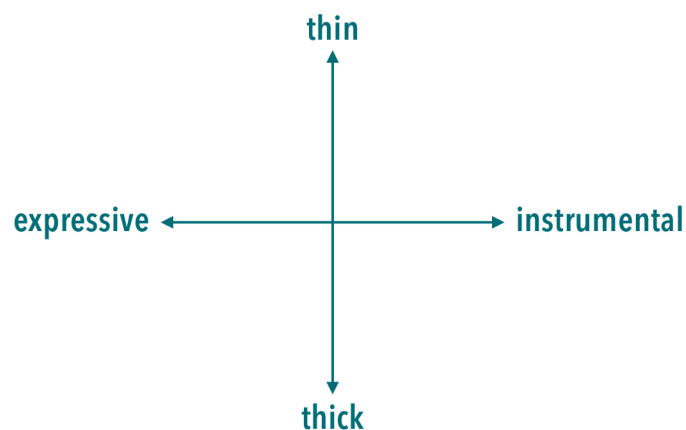
Based on what you have learned through exploring different case studies and your community, what kinds of actions would you like to take? What role can media play in spreading the word about the issue you've chosen and in mobilizing people to take action?

Share the media you make with other users through the Disqus tool. [Here are guidelines for adding multiple media into your Disqus posts.](#)

Based on your choice of an issue and your reading of civic media case studies, what kind of media would help you to create change? Would you like to incorporate online actions as well? A think-pair-share or gallery walk activity would be useful for the class to generate ideas. Brainstorms could take the form of word webs, lists, or collages, for example.

Who is your target audience, and what affect do you want your media and actions to have on them? Perhaps you want to create media designed to share personal stories, like the [It Gets Better Project](#), or document events in real-time, like the twitter feeds and streaming video used by the Occupy movement, or create a space for dialogue and collaboration, [like the website for community engagement](#) in the city planning process of Reykjavik, Iceland.

Where would you like to "locate" your actions on the graph from section 2?



Consider using digital media tools such as Storify, Photovoice, VoiceThread, or blogs to create your message. If you're interested in particular modalities of expression, such as [storytelling](#) (one hour) or [site-specific installations](#) (5 hours), click on the links for supporting activities. For examples of different kinds of actions explore this [media library](#).



After you've designed and implemented your actions, reflect on what you have learned: Did you achieve the outputs and outcomes you hoped? Did the process develop as expected? Were there any surprises? What would you do differently next time? Do you have new ideas about actions to implement or topics to address?