

ADVOCACY CHART

What does it mean to be civically engaged? Young people and adults hear about the importance of “getting involved” or “being a good citizen,” but what does it mean in practice and how does one “get involved?”

Advocacy, or engaging in the act or process of supporting a cause or a proposal,¹ is at the heart of what it means to be civically engaged. Civic engagement and advocacy mean identifying an issue that one cares about within your community and taking informed and direct action to address the issue. A healthy democracy relies on informed people participating in community affairs, however, even though adults and young people have community concerns or opinions, they choose not to get involved because they feel like their opinion doesn’t matter, that one person can’t make a difference, that “you can’t fight city hall,” or that they don’t know how or what to do.

History has shown that the above excuses for not getting involved are just that – excuses. Whether it is one person who refused to sit in the back of a bus and launched the civil right movement, a school teacher’s idea to convert abandoned rail lines in DuPage County to create what is now the Prairie Path, or an idea to protest the Vietnam war by wearing a black armband to school that changed the landscape of the First Amendment - the opinion of people matter. One person can make a difference, people can impact decisions within city hall, and once people are informed and take effective action, they are powerful.

All civic engagement takes is education and thoughtful planning. Below is an Advocacy Chart to help people get started. The Advocacy Chart is a brainstorming tool to identify issues, resources, and potential actions that an individual or group may want to take. *This is a brainstorming activity, so it is very important when filling out this chart not to censor your ideas or thoughts.*

Responses to the Advocacy Chart from various communities will be used at the DuPage County Regional Office of Education’s Second Annual Civic Summit.

Definition Section:

- **Identify Issues of Public Concern:** An issue of public concern is one that impacts more than one person. For example, issues of public concern could be a school policy, a state law, a community project, or an idea for a new policy, state law, or a community project.
- **Identify Resources:** Resources can be people, money, the Internet, other policies or laws already in place.
- **Identify Decision-Makers:** Who can say “yes!” to address the issue? Is it an administrative person like a principal or a city manager or is it a public body like a school board or city council?
- **Actions to Take as an Individual or Group**
 - **Educate Yourself and Your Group:** What information is necessary to become informed on your issue? Identify where you need to go to get the information needed to become an expert to educate the decision-maker(s) that are going to have to be influenced.
 - **Utilize the First Amendment Freedoms:** Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of the Press, Freedom to Petition Government, and Freedom of Religion.
 - **Utilize the Media** to generate awareness of the issue, contact reporters, use the Internet, write letters to the editor.
 - **Coalition Building:** Be sure to think “outside the box” and identify people who might be sympathetic to the cause that might not come to mind immediately.

¹ Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary

ADVOCACY CHART

Identify Issue of Public Concern	Identify Decision Maker(s)	Identify Resources	Identify Actions
<p>Building a skate board park to give young people someplace safe to go after school and on weekends.</p>	<p>Park Board</p>	<p>People: other young people, parents, public officials who have an interest in young people activities. Other Communities: that have built skateboard parks Internet: generate awareness.</p>	<p>Educate: Get information about what other communities have skateboard parks and how they were built. Educate: If the decision-makers are opposed to your idea find out what the specific problem is. Freedom of Speech: attend a Park Board meeting and make a public comment. Freedom of Speech: Write letters to the editor. Freedom of Assembly: Organize a rally to support the idea of skateboard park and have speakers attend. Coalition Building/Freedom of Assembly: Build a coalition with students, parents, public officials, and business people to speak with a unified voice. Freedom of Petition: Organize a meeting with a Park Board member. Freedom of Petition: Circulate a petition for a skateboard park in the community. Freedom of Petition: Get a question on the ballot asking people if they want a skate park. Media/Freedom of Press: Call the media and ask them to report on your issue.</p>