

Form of Civic Participation

Form of Civic Participation	How and When to Use It Effectively
1 Writing a press release	Prepare a notice about an event or issue for distribution to local newspapers, radio and television stations, or Web sites. Use to publicize an event or to make people aware of an issue.
2 Writing a letter to the editor	Draft a short letter to send to a newspaper or magazine expressing a view about a recent article or calling attention to an issue you would like to see covered. Use to express a personal view on the article or issue and to encourage others to share your point of view.
3 Communicating with a public official	Visit, call, e-mail, or write to a public official about an issue or question. Use to share ideas or concerns or to encourage a public official to take a particular action on your issue.
4 Organizing a letter-writing campaign	Convince a large number of people to write letters or e-mails to their elected representatives in support of a specific action item. Use to put pressure on elected officials to pay attention to those issues.
5 Testifying before a public body	Write a short speech about your concerns and deliver it to public officials. Use to voice ideas and concerns in a public forum directly to the people elected or appointed to deal with those issues.
6 Creating an issue ad or Web site	Create an ad, Web site, or social media profile about an issue. Use to inform people about the issue, to gain support for your position, or to point out a problem with the way the issue is being handled.
7 Giving an interview or a speech	Write and deliver a speech to a group of people. Use to inform people about the issue, to encourage others to support your position, or to propose a method of addressing the issue.
8 Writing and circulating a petition	Create a petition that explains how you would like an issue addressed. Gather signatures from supporters in person or online, and present the petition to people in a position to take action. Use to demonstrate support for your plan to address the issue and to encourage implementation of your plan.
9 Creating and conducting an opinion survey	Write a survey and collect the results in person or by phone, mail, or e-mail. Use to gather opinions or information about an issue or to raise awareness of the issue. This is a good starting point if you need to test support for your issue or want data to show that people agree with your position.
10 Joining a campaign or an interest group	Join a group of people who already support a candidate or an issue. Use when groups already exist that are effectively dealing with your issue.
11 Organizing a fundraiser	Organize a fundraising event to ask for donations, seek business sponsorships, or apply for grants from the government, corporations, or foundations to raise money for a cause you believe in. Use when your issue would benefit from additional financial support.
12 Sponsoring a ballot initiative or referendum	Collect the required number of signatures on a formal petition and submit it to the legislature for consideration or to the people for a direct vote. (Not all states offer ballot initiatives or referendums.) Use when you want to create or change a law that pertains to your issue.
13 Organizing a protest or boycott	Organize others in a collective refusal to buy certain goods or use certain services, or plan a protest to draw attention to an issue. Use as a last resort, in an effort to get others to listen to your concerns.
14 Running for public office	Gather support for your candidacy, get yourself on the ballot, and campaign for election. For most local and state offices, you must be 18 to run for office. Use if you are really committed to having an impact on your community.
15 Starting an interest group	Join with others who share your views on an issue to call attention to the issue and, possibly, to back legislation or candidates who support your position. Use when there are no other groups effectively advocating for your issue.

Civic Participation Case Studies

A School for Iqbal

Iqbal Masih was four years old when his father sold him into bonded labor with a carpet manufacturer in Pakistan for the equivalent of \$12. Iqbal worked for pennies a day to repay the debt. Over the next six years, he worked 12 to 14 hours a day, 6 days a week. Sometimes he was chained to the carpet loom, and sometimes he was beaten. When he was ten, he ran away from the factory and joined an organization that fought against bonded labor and worked to educate child workers about their rights.

When Iqbal was 12, he visited the Broad Meadows Middle School in Quincy, Massachusetts, while in the United States to receive the Reebok Human Rights Youth-in-Action Award. There he met with the seventh graders of Ron Adams's language arts class. Iqbal inspired the students by telling them about his experiences speaking out against child labor and working to free other children. In his country, 7.5 million children were enslaved, and there were as many as 200 million more around the world. What Iqbal really wanted was for children to be able to attend school and learn to read and write, not to be forced into bonded labor during their childhoods.

Horried at the idea of parents selling their young children into bonded labor, three of the students composed a letter telling Iqbal's story and asking other students to work to end child slavery. They used the Scholastic Web site to e-mail their letter to 36 other middle schools around the country.

Iqbal returned home to Pakistan, where his fame led to many death threats against him by people who stood to benefit from the current system of child labor. In the spring of 1995, four months after returning home, Iqbal was murdered in broad daylight.

When the students in Mr. Adams's class heard the news, they decided to do something to honor Iqbal's memory. What Iqbal really wanted was a school for children in Punjab province, so the students decided

they would build him one. United behind their new slogan, "A bullet can't kill a dream," the students sent out an e-mail that told the story of Iqbal's short life. This e-mail asked for donations of \$12, both because Iqbal was sold for \$12 and because he was 12 years old when he was murdered. The students worked with volunteers from Amnesty International to create a Web site to educate people about Iqbal and the problem of child labor.

The students received more than 6,000 e-mail replies and more than 3,000 letters in response. Within one year, the students raised more than \$147,000. They worked with a group in Pakistan that administered the building project. In 1996, only a year and a half after Iqbal was murdered, the school opened its doors to nearly 300 students, ages 4 to 12. Though all the students also work, their employers allow them to schedule their shifts so that they can attend school. For almost all the students, it was the first time in their lives they had attended school.

However, the students did not stop their campaign against child labor once the school for Iqbal opened. Many of them continued to speak out on the issue of child labor. They contacted and met with their elected representatives, on both the state and national levels, to fight for an international treaty to protect children from child labor. Some of the students also traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify before a congressional hearing on child labor. Another student gave a speech at the United Nations on the issue.

Every year, new Broad Meadows Middle School students become active in the cause. They continue working with other schools to establish a new school each year in a different developing country. The annual campaign is called Operation Day's Work. The American schools that sponsor the campaign are located nationwide, and the students communicate by e-mail. The story of Iqbal's impact and inspiration on students continues, and the School for Iqbal in Pakistan is thriving.

The Ryan White CARE Act

Ryan White was born on December 6, 1971, in Kokomo, Indiana. At birth, he was diagnosed with hemophilia. Hemophilia is a dangerous genetic disease that causes blood not to clot—even a small cut can lead to a life-threatening amount of blood loss. Fortunately for Ryan and his parents, a new treatment called Factor VIII had recently become available. It was a treatment made from blood and contained the clotting agent that allowed healthy people to recover quickly from cuts. As a child, Ryan went to the hospital at least twice a month to receive blood transfusions of Factor VIII. These transfusions allowed him to play sports and act like a normal child without having to worry about dying from a small cut or injury.

When Ryan was 12 years old, he began to feel more and more sick. Ryan's pediatrician said that Ryan just had a bad case of flu. A few months later, an annual checkup showed that Ryan had a disease called hepatitis. He and his family were relieved. They thought the hepatitis had caused his diarrhea, stomach cramps, and night sweats.

When he was 13, he ended up in the hospital. There Ryan learned he had AIDS, a recently discovered and deadly disease. AIDS attacks the body's ability to fight off other diseases. Ryan had gotten it through the very same blood product that had allowed him to be like other kids: Factor VIII.

Ryan's doctors told him he had only six months to live, and Ryan insisted on living a normal life. He wanted to return to school, but the administrators, teachers, students, and parents at Ryan's school were afraid that his disease would spread. In the early 1980s, little was known about how AIDS is transmitted. People were afraid that even casual contact could pass the disease from person to person.

The Indiana State Board of Health issued guidelines saying that it would be safe for Ryan to attend school, but the school still refused to allow it. His mother, Jeanne White-Ginder, took their case to court. Locally, people called his mother "unfit" because she had "allowed" her son to get AIDS. At church, people would not shake Ryan's hand.

Someone even shot a bullet through the front window of the Whites' home.

Ryan White's story was soon nationally publicized. He traveled all over the country speaking about AIDS and his fight to attend school. Many celebrities—actors, musicians, athletes, and politicians—praised Ryan for his work to educate people about AIDS. Some even became friends of the family.

Eventually the court ordered the school to admit Ryan, but he only faced more harassment. The Whites decided to move to Cicero, Indiana, using the proceeds they received from the ABC movie *The Ryan White Story*. Students at Ryan's new school, Hamilton High, went through an AIDS education program. They learned that people cannot get AIDS by touching others or sharing a bathroom. Ryan made many friends who would help and support him through his illness over the next several years.

Ryan continued to draw public attention. He felt it was important to educate people about the facts of his disease. He spoke before a presidential commission on AIDS about his experience in Kokomo. He gave interviews and spoke at public events about his disease and about AIDS education.

Just before his 18th birthday, Ryan began to feel sicker. He died on April 8, 1990. His funeral was attended by thousands of family members, friends, celebrities, and strangers, all of whom had been touched by his life.

Since Ryan's death, there has been much more education about AIDS. Shortly after his death, his mother established the Ryan White Foundation, a national organization dedicated to AIDS education for young people. She has spoken before many audiences. She worked to lobby Congress for the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act, even testifying before the Senate about the bill. The bill provides funding for AIDS patients and their families to receive medical care.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

May 3, 1980, was a beautiful day in Fair Oaks, California. Thirteen-year-old Cari Lightner was dressed in her orange-and-white softball uniform, walking along the side of a residential street on her way to a church carnival with a friend. She was struck by a car that came out of nowhere and thrown 125 feet. The driver who killed her was a 47-year-old man who had been on a three-day drinking binge and had three prior DUIs, or citations for driving under the influence of alcohol.

After losing her daughter to such a senseless crime, Cari's mother Candy Lightner decided to do something about the problem of drunk driving. At the time, drunk driving was not a major public concern. Though alcohol was a factor in nearly 60% of fatal crashes, driving while drunk was not, in and of itself, a crime. Candy was determined to focus public attention on the issue and get laws enacted to protect people from drunk drivers.

Candy created a victims advocacy group, or interest group, called Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or MADD. Donations started pouring in, and MADD worked diligently to get then-governor of California Jerry Brown to create a task force to address the issue of drunk driving. For years, bills to help curb drunk driving had failed to become law, and MADD wanted the state of California to address the problem in a visible way.

In September 1980, a woman named Cindy Lamb started a Maryland chapter of MADD. Cindy's daughter Laura had become the nation's youngest paraplegic when she and her mother were hit head-on by a drunk driver who had five prior DUIs. In October, Candy and Cindy drew national attention to their issue when they held a press conference about drunk driving on Capitol Hill. By telling their heart-wrenching story and sharing family photographs, they brought a hidden issue to the forefront of American politics. Suddenly victims and concerned citizens were banding together to change the laws. Chapters of MADD began to spring up around the country, and stories about the organization were in newspapers and on television stations in nearly every community in the country.

As MADD continued to put a personal face on the tragedy of drunk driving, their legislative successes and fundraising ability grew. By 1982, MADD had 100 chapters nationwide and President Ronald Reagan had invited MADD to testify at a presidential commission on drunk driving. By 1983, MADD had successfully met with elected leaders to encourage the passage of 129 new anti-drunk-driving laws around the country.

Armed with loads of statistics showing that alcohol-related crashes involving teenagers occurred at higher rates in states with drinking ages below 21, MADD then pushed for a federal law raising the legal drinking age to 21 across the nation. MADD was up against the wealthy and influential alcohol industry, but in 1984 President Reagan signed the Uniform Drinking Age Act into law. MADD also held rallies to gain public support for their cause and even planned and held a 4,000-mile March Across America to publicize the problem of drunk driving.

In 1991, MADD staged press conferences and generated press releases to publicize its first "Rating the States" report, in which it evaluated each state's record at preventing drunk driving. By 1992, a poll revealed that most Americans felt that drunk driving was the number one issue on highways. By 1993, alcohol-related traffic fatalities dropped to a 30-year low.

But MADD did not rest on all it had accomplished. Instead, it used the 1990s to launch more visual appeals to discourage drunk driving and encourage tougher legislation to fight the problem. In Florida, where MADD was having a hard time getting anti-drunk-driving legislation passed, they placed a pair of shoes worn by every one of the 1,100 victims killed by a drunk driver in Florida the previous year in the rotunda of Florida's state capitol. In 2000, MADD successfully achieved another milestone, when the national legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level was lowered to .08. By 2004, all states and Washington, D.C., had lowered the legal BAC level to .08. MADD continues to be active in fighting to reduce drunk-driving tragedies.