

2009 CIVIC HEALTH INDEX REPORT FINDS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT UNDER STRESS IN THE RECESSION

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCO) has released its annual Civic Health Index report for 2009, entitled "Civic Health in Hard Times." As in past years, CIRCLE contributed to the design and analysis of the national survey that was the basis of the study and helped with the writing of the report. In addition to the 40 measures of civic participation that compose the Civic Health Index, the survey included timely questions about civic issues. To learn more or to download the report, visit: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=353>.

The survey's results reflect the hard choices Americans have made during the downturn, with 72 percent of respondents saying they have cut back on time engaged in civic participation, which includes time spent volunteering, participating in groups or performing other civic activities in their communities. Public perception supports this finding, as 66 percent of Americans say they feel other people are responding to the current economic downturn by looking out for themselves, with only 19 percent saying people around them are responding to the recession by helping each other more. "The economic crisis has triggered civic foreclosure," said Michael Weiser, NCoC Chairman, "The good heart of Americans is still very evident, though, as they refocus on basic needs."

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PROVIDING FOOD AND SHELTER IN TIMES OF NEED

Even though they are disproportionately affected by the economic downturn, low-income Americans are still finding ways to give back to their communities. Thirty-nine percent of respondents with an income less than \$50,000 reported helping others by providing food or shelter, compared to only 27 percent of Americans with a higher income. Overall, 50 percent of Americans gave food or money to someone who was not a relative, while 17 percent allowed a relative to live in their home and more than one-in-ten took in non-relatives.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND RELIGION MAY OFFER PATHWAYS TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The Civic Health Index also explored the relationship between online forms of engagement and community-based civic activities. The results show that Millennials who use social networking sites for civic purposes are far more likely to actively engage in civic participation in their communities.

Religion plays a major role in civic engagement, as 40 percent of respondents who reported they are frequent participants in religious services noted they had increased their level of civic engagement. In addition, individuals who reported they had a high level of social activity – visiting often with friends, eating together as a family or belonging to a local club – also reported an increase in civic engagement. The results indicate that social engagement through church, friends, or even via social networking sites can have a significant impact in countering the negative effect of the current economic downturn on civic engagement.

"God, friends, and Facebook provide a civic safety net," said David B. Smith, NCoC Executive Director, "Spending time with others enhances social connections that provide resiliency in tough economic times."

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES: MILLENNIALS MOST LIKELY GENERATION TO VOLUNTEER

The Civic Health Index also found generational differences. Of those surveyed, Baby Boomers had the lowest volunteering rate at 35 percent, while Millennials had the highest rate at 43 percent. However, in terms of material contributions including providing food, money, or shelter, Baby Boomers were far more likely to provide support (38 percent) compared to Millennials (28 percent).



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"We had hoped the economic hardship might trigger more compassion as people saw real suffering and needs," said John Bridgeland, Chairman of NCoC's Advisory Board and CEO of Civic Enterprises. "While this is not true for volunteering, it is true for providing food and shelter. And people with the least means are giving the most."

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- 31 percent of survey respondents noted they had a "great deal of confidence" in small businesses, making them the most trusted institution. Major companies ranked last on the Index in terms of public confidence (five percent), with banks, Congress and the executive branch garnering six percent.
- 40 percent of African Americans expressed some level of trust in federal government, compared to only 22 percent of Whites.
- 68 percent of respondents said that they would be willing to provide food to those in need.
- 69 percent of respondents said that they would buy U.S.-made products to help foster improved local economic activity.

America's Civic Health Index is released annually in conjunction with NCoC's conference. The 2009 conference was held on Wednesday, September 9, in Washington, D.C. In addition to the national report, NCoC has released a series of state reports measuring civic health compiled with the assistance of CIRCLE. For more information on these reports please see, www.ncoc.net. ★

