

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Vermont Civic Health Index offers a look at the state's civic life, revealing considerable strengths as well as areas for growth across six key domains. The Index also spotlights some of the organizations that offer unique support for civic health across the state and presents original data from the Vermont Youth Civic Health Survey.

Vermonters rank high in crucial areas of civic health such as helping neighbors, attending public meetings, participating in groups, and staying well informed. Meanwhile, findings regarding Vermont's youth, people of color, and other groups offer insights about how we can broaden participation opportunities and deepen healthy engagement. A snapshot of some of our findings:

Volunteerism & Donating

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 5th in the country for informal helping and 13th for formal volunteerism.
- » Volunteerism increases as age, income, and educational attainment increase, except for youth (student) volunteering. Rates are highest for middle and high school students.
- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the country for donations to political organizations .

Next Steps: Vermont has a strong culture of volunteerism and mutual aid that needs to be supported. We need to continue to invest in and expand initiatives that work, and better understand barriers to volunteerism so that opportunities for engagement are equitably available across different groups.

Political Engagement

Key Findings

- » Vermonters rank 2nd in the country for attending public meetings.
- » Vermonters also rank 2nd in the U.S. for engaging with neighbors in frequent discussions about political, social, or local issues.
- » Vermont's voter registration rate has been steadily increasing, while voter turnout remains consistent over time. Vermont ranks 4th in the country for voting in the last local election.
- » Only 59.1% of Vermont youth report that they intend to register to vote when they become eligible

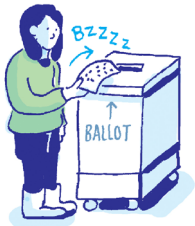
Next Steps: While Vermont ranks quite high in several indicators, there is still room for improvement. Investing in civic education will ensure that young people and adults alike feel prepared to participate in democratic processes, from voting and engaging with public officials to running for office. We can learn from communities with high levels of participation and successful programs to ensure that Vermont's rich history of engagement continues and accessibility expands.

Community & Social Context

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the country for working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community and for discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors.
- » Between 2013 and 2020, the percentage of Vermonters reporting never feeling uncomfortable or out of place in their community because of ethnicity, culture, race, skin color, language, accent, gender sexual orientation, or religion increased from 62% to 78%. While the increase is positive, 22% of Vermonters do report feeling uncomfortable and that is far too high.

Next Steps: We must prioritize creating inclusive and welcoming civic spaces. To do that effectively, we need to continue to learn about the experiences of historically marginalized populations and how to welcome their civic participation. We also need to invest in data equity across the state to ensure that future reports give a full picture of our challenges and strengths across different groups and geographic regions.



Cultural Access & Engagement

Key Findings:

- » In 2021, nearly twice as many Vermonters reported belonging to any type of group than the U.S. population overall (VT-33%, U.S.-17%).
- » The 2023 Vermont Youth Civic Health Survey found that 70% of Vermont youth reported an affiliation with a group or organization in their community or school.
- » Vermonters saw a decrease in satisfaction with access to artistic, cultural, recreational, and learning opportunities in their communities between 2017 and 2020. This is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » 93% of respondents to the 2024 Vermonter Poll agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities to view and participate in arts and culture are an important part of thriving and healthy communities. (CreateVT Action Plan)



Next Steps: Vermonters must continue supporting Vermont’s creative and cultural sector as it recovers from the Covid-19 Pandemic. Libraries should be centered in community planning efforts, understanding their critical role in providing reliable information, serving as community gathering places, and in broadening access to social services and Vermont’s public schools should prioritize access to a full range of arts education as a critical component of building a well-rounded citizenry capable of participating in and shaping a healthy democratic practice.

Media Trust & Access

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the nation in the number of people who report they frequently read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal or local issues. 78.9% of Vermonters report they do this frequently compared to 67.6% of the national average.
- » Vermonters seek out national and local news sources at about the same rates for issues important to them.



Next Steps: Encouraging media literacy and supporting access to reliable news sources can help strengthen trust and build civic knowledge. Programming that addresses polarization and bias can help Vermonters navigate the increasingly complex media landscape.

Government Trust & Access

Key Findings

- » Vermonter’s confidence in local government is much greater than in national government.
- » Confidence in local government was increasing before the COVID pandemic and increased substantially during the height of COVID in 2020.

Next Steps

Supporting efforts to ensure civic spaces are accessible and welcoming is crucial. This can include physical accessibility, technology training for remote participation, and training to create spaces where everyone feels safe to share their voice. Developing a civic engagement coalition that can share resources, best practices, and troubleshoot together would also be beneficial.

This report presents a baseline and a snapshot in time, but we acknowledge that it could never fully capture every experience or factor in the dynamic systems that comprise our civic health. We hope Vermont’s Civic Health Index will serve to jump-start fresh conversations about our state’s civic health priorities as we engage with Vermonters across the state.

