

Interstate Civic Governance Organizing Agency 2018 Update

A demonstration of the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative (MACI). MACI organizes a base of civic leaders and a new basis for policy making in the Midwest that places the obligation to govern justly and wisely in the role we all have as citizens. This base of leaders uses a civic organizing approach to implement a civic policy agenda. The civic policy agenda produces the civic capacity and civic infrastructure needed for institutions to achieve their specific goals and foster economic and environmental sustainability, while addressing the complex problems that threaten the common good. Civic Organizing makes a case for civic policymaking to sustain democracy as a just system of governance.

Wisconsin – Interstate Initiative

Civic Governance Demonstration Jurisdiction: The general jurisdiction for the Civic Governance Demonstration (made up of three civic organizing agencies (cohorts)) is the relationship between government and community in developing the capacity to address public problems (including water quality) that impact the common good.

Civic Governance Partners: Lower Chippewa Invasives Partnership (LCIP), St. Croix County Sportsmen’s Alliance (SCSA), St. Croix County Community Development-Resource Management Division, and Tainter-Menomin Lake Improvement Association (TMLIA).

Civic Governance Demonstration Identity Statement: Civic Governance is a new approach to policymaking that produces a civic infrastructure needed to govern for the common good and sustain democracy as a just system of governance.

Civic Governance Model: Specific practices developed to test and measure the value of Civic Governance in addressing water quality problems in a particular jurisdiction.

Integrating Active Citizenship and Civic Leadership Development into Watershed Management

Why do we need a new approach to policy making within the context of watershed management?

Water touches our lives in innumerable ways every day, and it is one of the most important “raw materials” for manufacturing and development across many sectors of our economy. When our waters become polluted, threatened, or scarce, it necessitates the involvement of many stakeholders, each who has a key role to play in determining the common good around this critical resource.

There is no doubt that water pollution presents a complex problem to solve. Our current approach to water governance has produced: 1) numerous federal, state, and local rules, 2) multiple jurisdictions each having specific responsibilities for protecting water, 3) a diverse set of stakeholders, 4) scattered funding sources, and 5) an often-unengaged citizenry. When these factors combine, they challenge even the best efforts to manage water quality well.

The good news is that we often have the science, expertise and knowledge needed to improve or protect water. Yet, it is often the case that our communities (government staff and residents alike) lack the civic mindset and skills needed to work cooperatively or to leverage the complex resources needed to solve our most serious pollution problems. These same circumstances also impact our ability to *protect* the good quality waters we still have.

The current model of water governance places the greatest responsibility for policymaking and governance in the hands of government agencies. Experience tells us that this governance model is not enough to address complex water issues. In recent years, there has been a growing sense that we have reached a point of diminishing returns when it comes to traditional ways of governing watershed decisions and managing water quality. Existing education and outreach programs, incentive programs, regulatory programs, and even civic engagement activities, all have their limits when it comes to achieving real impact.

A New Approach

Given the scope and complexity of the problems we face, it has become clear that we need a new way to think about water governance that starts with putting ourselves inside the obligation of caring about and seeing the value in the common good, and to understand that as citizens, our daily choices make a difference. In these ways, we all become “policy makers”. We all have a vital role to play in producing the common good and that role gives honor and meaning to the term, “citizen”.

There is a growing number of local leaders with economy, efficiency and quality of service in mind, who have been looking for new ways to approach watershed management. Civic Governance is one such approach, providing an opportunity to test new ways of getting better environmental outcomes using existing resources. Civic Governance seeks to develop leaders willing to invest time in dealing with the complexity of a problem, and who can invest in developing their own civic imagination and political skills to organize the stakeholders who impact or who are impacted by the problem. In so doing, they create the kind of civic processes that encourage collaboration and develop the ability to organize sustainable solutions to complex problems.

Civic Governance is grounded in 5 principles. We believe in:

- 1) **Human capacity**, to govern for the common good, if that capacity is developed in our societal institutions.
- 2) **Democracy**, “government of the people, by the people and for the people”, **as the best system of governance**, where active citizens contribute to governing for the common good in the tension between individual interests.
- 3) **Active citizenship**, where individuals are obligated to govern for the common good in institutions of family, community, faith, education, work and government.
- 4) **Political skills**, requiring an investment in the political mindset and abilities necessary to carry out the obligation of the role.
- 5) **Democracy is essential in all institutions**, each are responsible for sustaining the democratic values of our society and ensuring the capacity to govern for the common good. Civic leaders and active citizen know they are obligated to produce this outcome.

Civic leadership development is done in what is called a “**civic organizing agency**” made up of leaders who commit to testing the Civic Governance model in their role. All of this is done with the intent of listening, reasoning, and acting upon common agreements.

The development of a new imagination for politics and policy making which puts everyone inside the civic obligation to govern for the common good in their role as an active citizen, requires leaders to organize a tangible experience of this obligation in the places where they have the authority to act. The governing experience needs to be consciously associated with the functions of policy making as it relates to the individual’s obligation to: 1) participate in defining water quality problems, 2) contribute ideas for solving those problems, and 3) discover the challenges of governing day- to-day processes given competing political interests.

Without a place in which to develop a new civic imagination and capacity, individuals often remain cynical about policy making, and government in general. If they engage in politics and try to impact policy making, their choice is to participate within increasingly partisan and polarizing structures in which defining the common good is often not a goal. More often, individuals withdraw from their obligation to govern for the common good for lack of a way and place to do so.

In addition, the civic space (institution) created for development of a new civic imagination and obligation, needs to have the capacity to expand to a scale of impact where the challenge of producing good water quality exists.

Civic Governance:

1. **Links water quality restoration and protection work to active citizenship and a higher purpose** (i.e., all citizens in communities and institutions have a central role and obligation in a democracy to solve the challenge of water pollution and to work toward the common goal of clean water). This means owning one's role and the decisions one makes that could impact the greater good.
2. **Develops a cross-sector base of civic leaders in watershed communities through the structure of an expanding "civic organizing agency"**. Effort is focused on organizing those interested in and willing to engage in all aspects of the civic policy making process (including problem definition, strategic planning, leveraging the complex resources needed to advance solutions, working with all stakeholders who need to ensure water quality, and insisting upon and contributing to transparent, accountable decision-making). This requires individuals within institutions who take on the identity of civic leader (organizer-educator-policy maker) to create the structure, process, and provide the support necessary for people to take on this new governing role in the name of active citizenship. Participants integrate Civic Governance into what they are already doing to improve water quality in their existing organizational role.
3. **Establishes internal policies in all institutions** that support the obligation of governing for the common good that comes with the identity of being a citizen. Develops the civic capacity of key leaders and creates governing processes that sustain a meaningful governing role for interested citizens in watersheds. *This requires a dedication of staff resources to civic development across time, sectors, and generations.*

What Is the Timeline for the Demonstration?

The Civic Governance Model (Demonstration) has 4, 5-year long stages. Each stage moves its membership closer to a sustainable civic organization within an ever-expanding base of institutional partnerships. The Civic Governance model creates impact over an increasing geographical and institutional scale.

Stage 1 of the Civic Governance Demonstration is dedicated to establishing a "civic organizing agency", the members of which have produced a daily practice that demonstrates their capacity to model the civic principles and standards that define the model. This model creates a new kind of civic imagination and organizes the civic infrastructure needed to support a new approach to policymaking. This often means addressing systemic barriers resulting from the institutional policies created between government agencies and their communities. These policies may be getting in the way of constructive collaborations for better soil and water quality.

However, the most important outcomes we are seeking in Stage 1, is evidence that an investment in civic leadership development improves the ability of civic leaders to meet organizational and watershed management goals in a sustainable way. We believe that when people organize to achieve tangible goals that are grounded in the higher aspirations and expectations summarized by our civic principles and have a direct role in governing the process, they will ensure that their efforts become sustainable and are not reliant on charismatic leaders that inevitably come and go.

Why Did the Partners Choose to Participate in this Initiative?

Like many natural resource professionals, the partners that make up the demonstration had become frustrated with the way existing approaches were working and were looking for new approaches that might show greater promise in addressing complex soil and water resource problems. When introduced to the Civic Governance framework, each decided, through trial and error to determine whether the Civic Governance model had promise within their own jurisdiction. Each is learning that a civic leader organizes partnerships to a civic obligation to govern for the common good, learns how to integrate Civic Governance into their role, and teaches from practice.

Each partner has taken a slow, measured, strategic approach as they tested this collaborative model of watershed governance. This has not required any of them to give up existing programs or authorities. Rather, it has meant they use their time

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differently to produce better results. Civic Governance requires them to track the value of taking the time to develop themselves more fully as civic leaders, to bring their staff or associates along with them, and to slowly introduce others to the Civic Governance model.

What have been the challenges?

The challenge of changing existing systems has been well-documented. Oftentimes, people would rather cope with changes happening to them, rather than lead out with a change strategy. It is one thing for leaders to know there is a need for change if they want greater accountability (both within and outside their institution), but it is quite another to try an unfamiliar approach for improving internal operations if that leader is uncertain about the outcomes. It is also challenging if there are already overwhelming demands on their time.

Those who agree to pilot Civic Governance need to own that they are the *object* of change as well as the *agents* for change, and that it will require a 2-3year commitment of their time to feel a level of comfort and confidence (grounded in evidence) of the value Civic Governance brings to their institution.

Civic leaders start with the understanding that the way leaders currently spend their time (their practice) can be the root cause for why they cannot produce the outcomes they had hoped for. They need to own their own role in “setting policy” and begin to incrementally change: 1) the way they use their time, while still producing outcomes that are currently expected, 2) the messages they convey in all situations to reflect the meaning of the civic principles and standards, and 3) the way they practice their role.

It is important for civic leaders to consider the potential ramifications and rewards for their changes in behavior. This will help them to make a case that current approaches that have not proven effective are often sustained by institutional policies that reward these actions, and that these policies often sanction new approaches that could be more effective.

The ultimate goal of the Civic Governance Demonstration is to make a case for incorporating this approach within personnel, program, and leadership policies in order to build and sustain partnerships between government, community organizations and individuals. By so doing, we can improve our ability to solve complex public policy issues within communities and across regions.

Related challenges in applying the Civic Governance model include:

- Current approaches to water governance require that we produce a large scale of impact before we have laid the foundation for supporting and sustaining that impact;
- We have limited capacity at this point to teach and practice Civic Governance at scale;
- The three civic leaders will need to maintain enough support from their boards, and enough time to sustain their civic organizing agency. In time, the organizations’ boards will need to become fully engaged in the organizing process which will require them to try new practices in their roles; and
- The three partners will need to continue to expand their base of interested citizens and other civic leaders who can work with them to accomplish important water quality goals.

What Activities Have the Partners Been Focused On?

At the heart of the Civic Governance framework is the idea that democracy can best thrive when it is actively modeled within all institutions. When these institutions provide the space where individuals who see themselves as *citizens* of their institution and own the obligation-to govern for the common good, to practice democracy every day, discover the challenges and value of it in their own lives, and to be a part of a larger group of active citizens working together on the ground to address the very challenging issues we face in these times. The individuals who launched and sustained Civic Governance resonate with the challenge to sustain democracy as a just system of governance in each generation in the face of changing environmental, economic, social, political circumstances.

Consequently, partners in this pilot are working inside their organizations to change existing processes and policies so that individuals who identify with the obligation of active citizenship can participate in solving complex water pollution problems, learning and practicing key civic skills and disciplines in the process.

Civic Governance Initiative Partners (Interstate): Lower Chippewa Invasives Partnership (LCIP), St. Croix Sportsmen's Alliance (SCSA), St. Croix County Community Development-Resource Management Division (SCC); and Tainter-Menomin Lake Improvement Association (TMLIA)

The primary focus for Interstate is demonstrating how community-based non-profits organized as civic institutions and working in partnership with local units of government can increase many times over the capacity to achieve sustainable water quality or conservation goals.

Over the past 4 years, members have been involved in learning the purpose for and then establishing a "civic organizing agency" as a primary place for learning how civic leadership could be integrated into their current community based and government roles. There, they can challenge one another to take new steps to build civic infrastructure (new civic processes and procedures) and bring active citizens from the community into their governing decisions and some day-to-day operations.

"Earning a traditional university education, then working for a private company, and now a local unit of government, never prepared me for working with an entire community of stakeholders who are needed to help to define soil and water problems and contribute their diverse skills, resources, and relationships to solving them. Civic Governance brings those key stakeholders to the table, so they can define their role and get engaged in the process. This model allows them to continually gain traction and authentically sustain organizations that might otherwise simply dissolve using traditional approaches.

"There is a key benefit when local units of government invest in civic leadership development. This restructures the existing relationship between local non-profits and local units of government which have traditionally only been based on specific projects or efforts that focus on short-term solutions to complex problems. Civic Governance has opened-up the door, allowing two influential organizations to have conversations, develop common work plans, and accomplish goals that could have not been achieved before implementing this approach. These opportunities have opened the eyes of many citizens who now see that they do, in fact, have a role to play, if they choose to take it. For it is up to each of us to decide whether we authentically want positive change or if we would rather wonder why our natural resources and community relationships continue to degrade at a rapid pace." --Chris Gaetzke, LCIP

How Has the Interstate Initiative Been Working?

In 2013, a group of natural resources organizations located in the St. Croix, Chippewa & Red Cedar River Basins in Wisconsin and the St. Croix River Basin in Minnesota formed a cohort that learned the Civic Governance framework from Peg Michels. Over the years, the group has consolidated into the current structure that includes three community organizations. As they have learned together, the three partners have developed into a stronger team, developing a new kind of civic imagination around their work across Wisconsin. By using the same civic principles, standards and disciplines, the three leaders have been able to set a consistent tone in their lake/river and invasive advocacy work, improving their ability to get organizational goals accomplished and to more broadly spark the civic imaginations of their constituents. During Stage 2, these organizations will seek to expand membership in this cohort, helping to develop new leaders that also govern in a new way.

What Have Been the Benefits of Civic Governance?

The barriers to change in the Initiative have been the same as those defined above. In the process of addressing those challenges, the Interstate partners have demonstrated how to restructure community-based non-profits to support civic partnerships to the benefit of the organizations, government and the region.

Lower Chippewa Invasives Partnership, Inc. (LCIP) lcinvasives.org

- LCIP has moved from a marginally effective community organization with few members to one that is robust, and with many more active citizens involved in governing the organization and accomplishing its goals.

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- The Chair for LCIP, Chris Gaetzke, has developed and implemented a Civic Governance Governing Document (approved and understood by the Partnership), which frames the organization’s civic philosophy, policies, and approach to meeting its specific goals.
- LCIP has developed a civic work plan for the year and is in the process of implementing it. This work plan sets out to accomplish the organization’s existing goal, but does so using this new civic, collaborative lens.
- LCIP has leveraged the skills of eight key board members, each that have their own jurisdiction to reach out to, thereby multiplying LCIP’s ability to gather resources and implement its work plan in ways they never thought possible.
- LCIP leaders are using targeted 1-1 meetings to help them accomplish goals in less than half of the time that traditional methods would have required.
- LCIP, has supported Chris Gaetzke in his leadership role in testing the model over a three-year period, which has developed the organization into one that many other Wisconsin Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) want to model in their own organizations.
- LCIP, through its work plan, has engaged partners from 3M, Andersen Windows, Leinenkugel Beer, five special interest and community non-profit organizations, Beaver Creek Reserve-Citizen Science Center, three local private businesses, State Representative Rob Stafsholt, five local school districts, UW-Stout-River Falls and Eau Claire universities, local units of government including five counties and twelve townships, state agencies of WI DNR and DOT and federal agencies of USFS, USFWS, NRCS. All are active in supporting the LCIP work plan to further expand invasive species management, outreach and education, making LCIP the winner of a state award for best CISMAs in 2016.
- By modeling a new, more transparent and inclusive process, LCIP was able to secure multiple, substantial donations and state/federal grants that support work plan goal objectives.
- LCIP now sees their five-county jurisdiction as a community of leaders that with time, can become like-minded civic leaders that will work together toward the common good by using this model.

“The St. Croix County Alliance of Sportsman’s Clubs has been meeting and operating for 2 years with the understanding that Civic Governance and its associated standards and disciplines are the mechanism to better governance, not only for our club, but more importantly, for society as a whole. “Civic Leadership development within the Alliance has enabled our club to become more accountable with respect to implementing and acting upon our Policy Document. Looking into our Club’s future, we believe stakeholder engagement is critical in expanding our club’s base, for the specific purpose of building capacity between ourselves, other conservation organizations, and Federal, State, and local units of government.” –Kyle Kulow, St. Croix County Alliance of Sportsman’s Clubs

St. Croix County Sportsmen’s Alliance (SCCSA)

- Before adopting Civic Governance as its new governing model, the St. Croix County Sportsmen’s Alliance leadership was considering “sunsetting” the organization due to lack of interest. However, with adoption of Civic Governance principles, the Club has been reinvigorated to the point where its membership has increased from 4 individuals to 8 active members that have all made a conscious decision to govern the organization for the common good of its members.
- In the process of reorganizing the Club, the leaders emphasized the importance of defining individual roles for each active member. This ensured that everyone had a sense of responsibility for the success of the organization and that each was accountable for producing specific results for the Club.
- The Club’s President, Kyle Kulow, worked with other members to create a governing document which keeps SCCSA accountable for producing a new approach to policy making, and to be more accountable and transparent as it works to achieve its goals.
- The Club has integrated civic principles into its day-to-day governing decisions, allowing it to run more efficient meetings, and develop policies related to both natural resource management and the creation of outdoor recreational opportunities in the county. The Club has done this while taking on the obligations of advancing civic leadership development and civic organizing within the civic institutions that make up the Alliance’s base of influence.
- Overall, the Alliance believes that the Civic Governance framework has allowed the Club to have a much greater capacity to build their base of influence. Prior to using a Civic Governance approach, the Alliance saw its base of influence deteriorate to the point where the Club was not very effective.

- Using a Civic Governance approach has resulted in an improvement in the ownership of individual governing roles, more effective and efficient meetings, and the re-establishment of fundraising activities for the club that reflects its over-all purpose to be a base of institutional partners committed to working together for the common good.
- Seeing the positive changes in the SCSA and in Kyle's leadership style, Saint Croix County is now exploring Civic Governance as a potential pilot project.

Members of Interstate Civic Organizing Agency are planning on expanding their base of institutional partnerships based upon outcomes from Stage 1.

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