



POINTS OF LIGHT




CIVIC LIFE TODAY

A look at American civic engagement amid a global pandemic

With the generous support from  AT&T

INTRODUCTION



We are living through historic, extraordinary times. The challenges we face have never seemed greater or more complex. This moment of change, spurred by a global pandemic and uprising in response to tragedy born of systemic racism, is poised to bend the arc of history. We are at the dawn of a “Civic Century,” an age when people become the driving force that transforms our world. It will take all of us, united in action, for this new ethos to take root. In this moment, we see our challenge as, “How can we create a society where it is easy for every individual to take action and accelerate impact within their community and around the world?” At Points of Light, we believe that the most powerful force of change in our world is the individual. Together, we are a force that transforms the world.

To best understand current perceptions of civic life and identify a path forward for businesses, nonprofits, and individuals, Points of Light and our partners Hart

Research and Carol Cone ON PURPOSE, with generous support from AT&T, surveyed adults about their behaviors, attitudes, and motivations for civic engagement. This research is a comprehensive look into the current state of civic engagement, a universal desire to do more in the future, and how we can help convert good intentions into positive action.

One thing is clear: traditional thinking about civic life is not sufficient to address the challenges before us. People have a strong desire to do good, and we must make it easier to do so.

Today, people believe civic action is more important than ever before and are holding themselves and each other accountable to get more involved and create a more connected future.

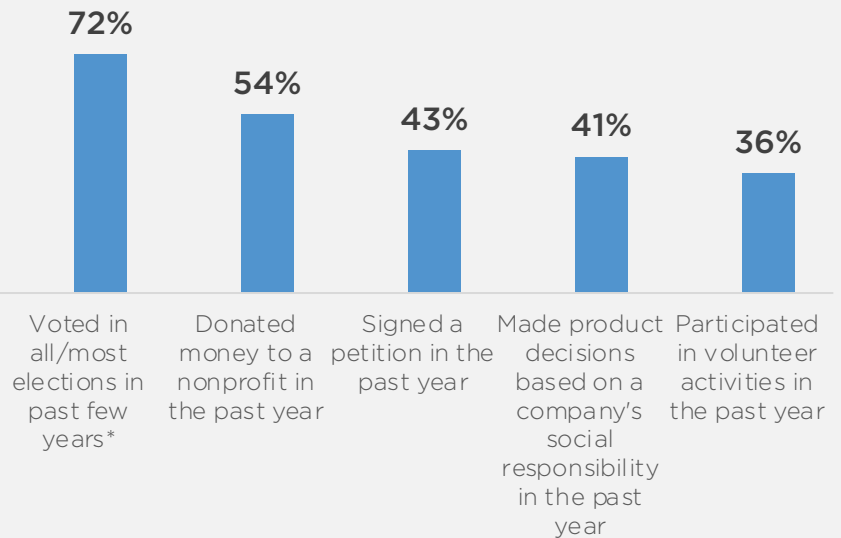
INTRODUCTION

Every aspect of our lives and livelihoods has been called to attention as the COVID-19 pandemic and social inequities continue, forcing us to re-evaluate our norms and discover new paths forward. Civic engagement is not exempt from this kind of thought and evaluation. Prior to the pandemic, voting and donations to nonprofits were the primary ways people participated in civic life. Today, people believe civic action is more important than ever before and, not only do they want to do good as individuals, they expect business to lead the way and they want them to do it through credible nonprofit organizations.

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PRE-PANDEMIC ENGAGEMENT LANDSCAPE

Participation in Civic Life *Top 2 Box*



Voted in all/most elections in past few years*

Donated money to a nonprofit in the past year

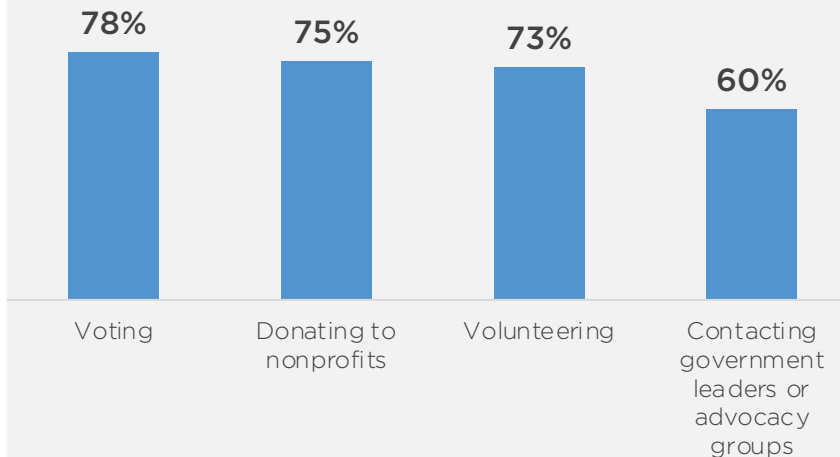
Signed a petition in the past year

Made product decisions based on a company's social responsibility in the past year

Participated in volunteer activities in the past year

POST-PANDEMIC ENGAGEMENT LANDSCAPE

Actions that will be More Important than Ever After the Coronavirus *Top 2 Box*



Voting

Donating to nonprofits

Volunteering

Contacting government leaders or advocacy groups

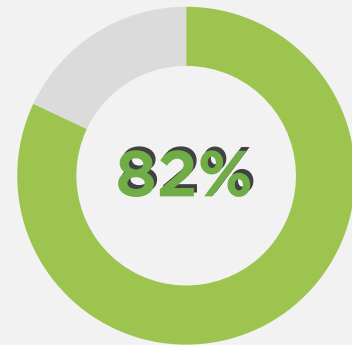
*Among registered voters

COVID-19 and CIVIC LIFE

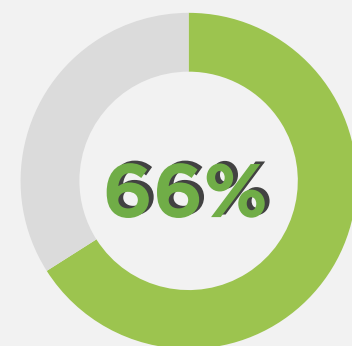


Nonprofits were strained for resources before the pandemic. However, these extraordinary times have led us to a critical moment. Post-pandemic, individuals want to be more active in their communities and are optimistic this health crisis will have a positive impact on consideration for others and the willingness to get involved.

Many of the causes people are most interested in supporting through civic engagement are those that will experience long-term consequences due to COVID-19: healthcare, food insecurity, impacts on children/youth, and poverty, to name a few. There will be no shortage of need for resources and support and, thankfully, there will be increased interest from community members to be a part of the solution. Businesses, organizations, and governments must prepare for the influx of civic engagement once the pandemic passes.



Agree “we all must get involved to rebuild our communities and country” post-COVID-19



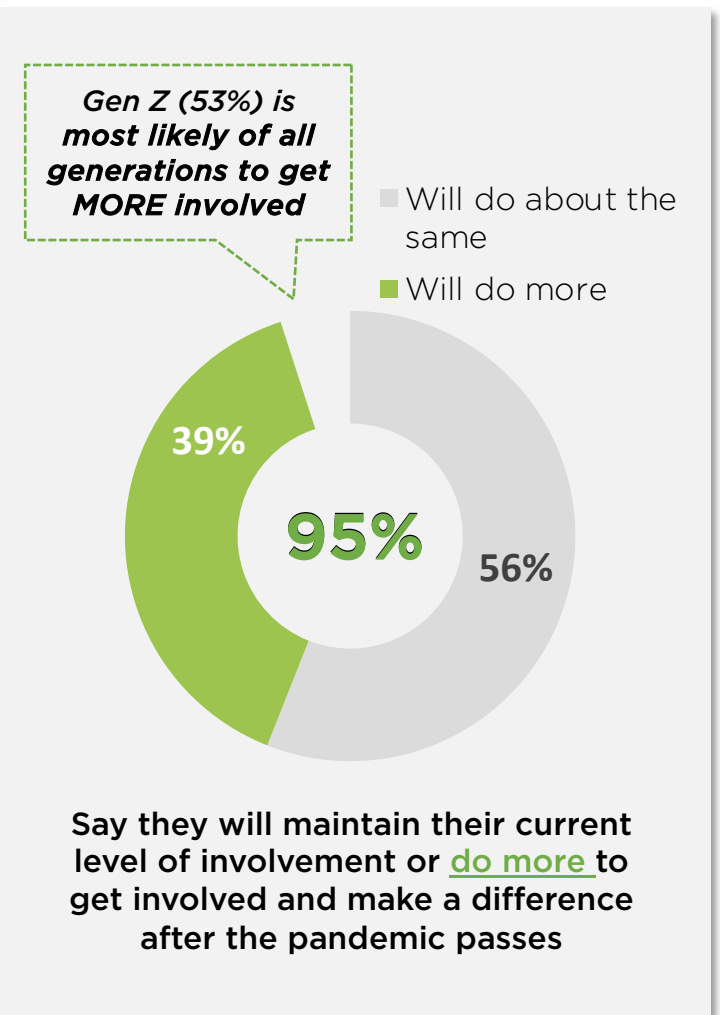
Agree “the coronavirus will have a long-lasting, positive impact on consideration for others and willingness to get involved in making a difference”

WHILE THE PANDEMIC HAS INTENSIFIED THE STRAIN ON NONPROFITS, IT HAS INSPIRED INDIVIDUALS TO GET INVOLVED

Nonprofit organizations have been greatly impacted by the challenges posed by the pandemic. As fundraising events were cancelled and donations from organizations and individuals fell as much as 75 percent, nonprofits have struggled, some even choosing to operate at a loss knowing their communities depended on their services. Despite their financial difficulty, three-quarters of nonprofits report an increase in demand for their services. As communities and businesses begin to look to the post-pandemic future, individuals are eager to be more civically engaged. The sweeping disruption and devastation felt by the pandemic has inspired individuals to volunteer—85 percent of nonprofits report volunteer requests increasing by at least double that of requests prior to the pandemic. *A convincing 95 percent of individuals believe they will be at least as involved or do more to support their community once the pandemic passes.* Further, more than half of Gen Z, and nearly half of Millennials and Gen X, say they will do more to get involved in their community after the pandemic. Points of Light estimates that, for every volunteer mobilized, an average of four lives are positively impacted. Individuals, pent up inside and eager to be civically engaged and

participate in volunteer activities, will look to nonprofits and businesses to offer those opportunities. Now is the time to prepare for the influx of activity after the pandemic and convert this well-intentioned desire to do good into realized action.

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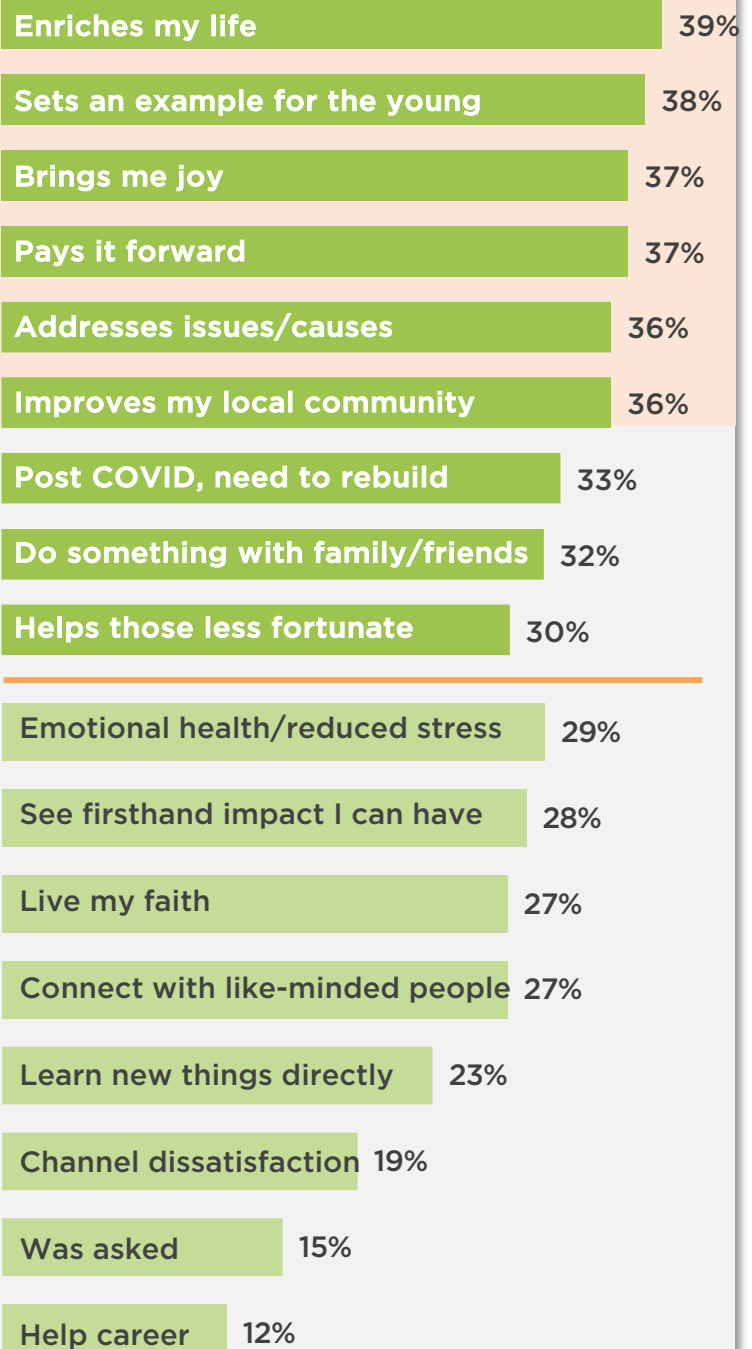


PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED TO GET INVOLVED BECAUSE IT ENRICHES THEIR LIVES AND THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND THEM.

The physical and mental health impacts of the novel coronavirus have devastated communities and awakened a new motivation among Americans to help people. People are embracing the value doing good can bring to their communities...and the value that doing good brings to their own life. More than half of respondents agree the pandemic will lead to improvements in how we live, work, and treat each other. This hope is encouraging action, with more than 80 percent of respondents agreeing we must all get involved to rebuild our communities—locally and nationally. Our research shows that individuals want to help people and create positive change with their civic engagement, citing “enriches my life,” and “brings me joy” as some of the top personal motivators for engaging in civic life. Other personal motivations for getting involved include setting an example for young people, “paying it forward,” and addressing important issues and causes. When considering how to engage individuals in civic life, businesses and nonprofits must consider opportunities that appeal to these motivators and make opportunities “worthwhile” in the eyes of individuals. From the volunteer perspective, a worthwhile experience is discoverable, local, credible, social, authentic, personal, impactful, and

repeatable. When those elements are present, most people say they will make time to volunteer.

Personal Motivations for Getting Involved and Taking Action to Make a Difference *% Selected Response*



DO GOOD, FEEL GOOD

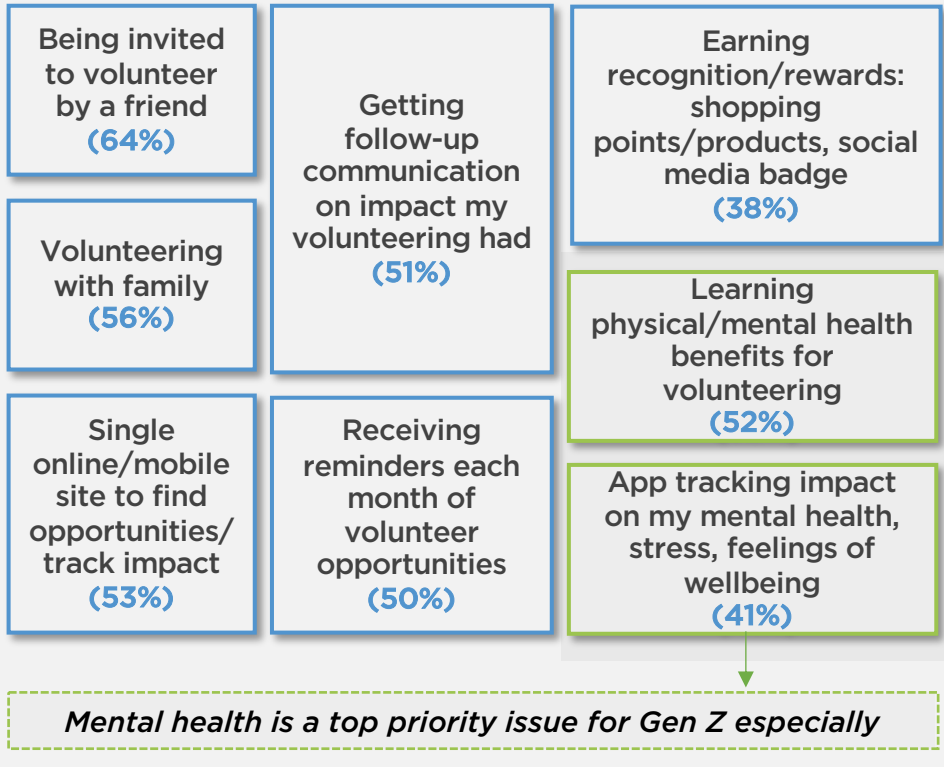
The COVID-19 pandemic has led to feelings of isolation and helplessness. It has left people desperate to find new ways to connect with others and uplift their mood. We have long known the positive impact volunteerism and civic engagement have on an individual's mental health and well-being and our research confirms health benefits are leading motivators for being civically engaged. While an invitation to volunteer by a friend is most likely to get an individual involved, learning

the health benefits and reading outputs from health tracking apps are powerful incentives, too. Tapping into the happiness engagement brings people, we are reminded that getting involved in civic life will add meaning, connection, and joy to their lives in a time when we need it most.

Volunteering [can](#) reduce risk of mortality and physical functioning limitation, lead to more physical activity, and create better psychosocial outcomes, like higher optimism and lower depressive symptoms or loneliness. "Now might be a particular moment in history when society needs your service the most. If you are able to do so, while abiding by

Top Incentives For Volunteering

Top 2 Box (Somewhat/Much More Likely) Among All Respondents



health guidelines, you not only can help to heal and repair the world, but you can help yourself as well," according to Eric Kim, co-author of "Volunteering and Subsequent Health and Well-Being in Older Adults: An Outcome-Wide Longitudinal Approach. A report from United Health Group and VolunteerMatch backs this up, "Volunteers have consistently higher scores (by about 15 percent) than non-volunteers on nine well-established measures of emotional well-being including personal independence, capacity for rich interpersonal relationships, and overall satisfaction with their life."

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED IS A PRIMARY BARRIER TO VOLUNTEERISM

Despite a strong desire to do good, we identified some key barriers to participation. *Sixty percent of adults are interested in volunteering, but almost half of those interested did not volunteer in the past year.* Respondents struggle to find meaningful opportunities and prefer to directly impact their community while interacting with the people they are helping. Businesses and organizations will need to make it easier to find and join local, meaningful opportunities if we aspire to engage more individuals in civic life.

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Top Barriers To Volunteering
Top 2 Box (Major/Moderate Barrier)
Among Those Interested in Volunteering Who Have Not Done So

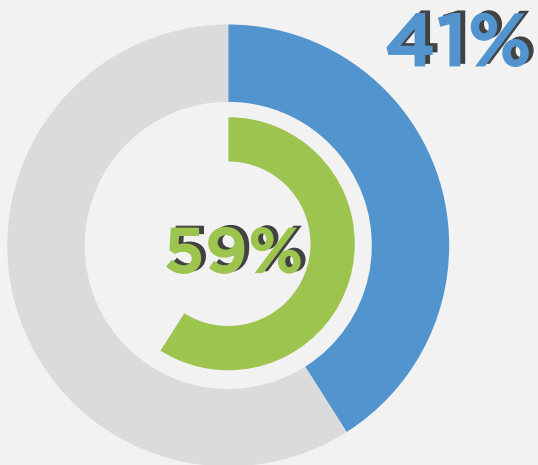
<p>Unsure how to get involved or where to find opportunities 44%</p>	<p>Cannot find opportunities near me 44%</p>	<p>Not sure what I can do that would be helpful 43%</p>
<p>Busy, don't have time to volunteer 42%</p>	<p>Haven't found a group of volunteers with whom I fit 41%</p>	<p>Haven't found opportunities matching my skills, abilities 41%</p>
<p>Rather do other things when I have free time 34%</p>	<p>Uncomfortable volunteering with people I don't know 33%</p>	<p>Don't believe my efforts will make a difference 26%</p>

PREFERENCES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS VARY BY GENERATION.

With Boomers as the exception, each generation—Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z—show moderate to high levels of civic engagement. They also show variation in their top motivations for being civically engaged and their priority issues. Gen Z has emerged as a new leader in civic life and embraces it as multi-faceted. They are setting the new standard for civic engagement, leading the way through newer actions like advocacy through social media, using their purchasing power, and making employment choices.



IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL ACTIONS ON PURCHASING

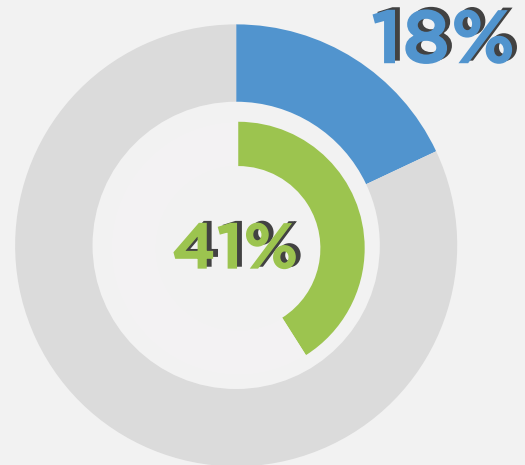


41% OF ALL ADULTS and 59% of GEN Z have made decisions on products based on a company's social responsibility

Who They Are:

- 49% male, 51% female
- 36% under age 35
- Reflect the general population on race/ethnicity
- 39% have a college degree or higher
- 32% are parents of children under 18

IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL ACTIONS ON HIRING



18% OF ALL ADULTS and 41% of GEN Z have considered applying for or taking a job with a company specifically because they believe it is committed to being socially responsible

Who They Are:

- 53% male, 47% female
- 54% under age 35
- More likely to be Hispanic or Latino (25%)
- 39% have a college degree or higher
- More likely to live in urban areas (38%)
- 39% are parents of children under 18

PREFERENCES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS VARY BY GENERATION.

Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z are interested in issues impacting their local communities rather than global issues, further underscoring how essential it is for opportunities to be easy to find in every community. These opportunities should also prioritize “helping people,” as every age group reported being most interested in doing so. Gen Z and Millennials are also especially interested in “creating positive change,” perhaps because, as younger generations, they feel more responsibility to contribute to creating a better future for themselves.



Types of Activities Participated In Past Year % Selected

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers+
Purchase decisions based on company’s social responsibility	59%	40%	44%	42%
Signed a petition	54%	40%	44%	42%
Participated in volunteer activities	53%	40%	35%	29%
Donated money to a nonprofit	46%	53%	51%	59%
Voted in almost/every election in the past few years	42%	67%	76%	80%
Posted or started group/campaign for issue on social media	41%	32%	37%	22%
Considered applying/taking job because of company’s social responsibility	41%	25%	18%	6%
Attended demonstration/rally for issue	28%	17%	14%	8%
Contacted elected official about issue	24%	18%	22%	26%
Engaged in public service thru military, elected office, nonprofit board	14%	10%	9%	7%

GEN Z DEMANDS CHANGE

Gen Z, adults born after 1996, is just now coming of voting age, but has already proven itself as the most civically engaged generation alive today. They are distinguished by the breadth of their civic engagement and participation in more activities per year than older adults. Most interested in helping people and creating positive change, this generation has made it clear they will not accept the problems left un-addressed by the generations before them.

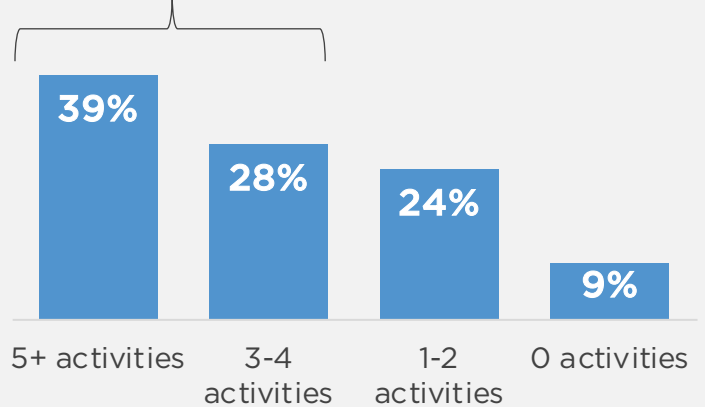
Gen Z shows strong preferences for social media as their primary way to learn about and discuss issues they care about, like mental health, poverty, environmental and racial issues. They are especially likely to act in [response to a request](#) from their followers on social media and expect to see the results of those actions with their own eyes. All these points considered, there is a strong case for the positive influence social media and social networking can have on inspiring young people to act. While social media and networking has become a primary way for engaging in civic life, Gen Z uses many different channels to make their voices heard, like protesting and making socially-informed choices about where they work and products they buy.

Business, organizations, and governments must prepare to meet this generation's high expectations for social responsibility. Not only is Gen Z the most likely to have decided about purchasing a product based on a company's social responsibility, but they are also most likely to consider a company's social responsibility when applying for or accepting jobs. Businesses stand to lose both customers and talent without robust civic engagement and social responsibility.

Number of Activities Engaged In Past Year

% Selected Among Gen Z Respondents

67% GEN Z VS. 52% OF ALL ADULTS have done 3+ activities



72% GEN Z vs. 57% OF ALL ADULTS agree that "social media is an important way to learn about and discuss issues that I care about."

RACISM HAS BEEN A KEY ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND PEOPLE OF COLOR, BUT LESS SO FOR OLDER INDIVIDUALS AND WHITE INDIVIDUALS, AND RECENT EVENTS UNDERSCORE ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE FUTURE

While this survey was conducted about three weeks prior to the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among other Black Americans, results confirm racism was already a priority issue for young people and people of color. From the killing of Black Americans across the United States to protests for racial equality and a powerful reckoning with institutional racism and its impact, these results only underscore how critical this moment and these issues are when thinking about civic life and participating in creating a better society. Almost [80 percent](#) of Gen Z has taken at least one action to address racial discrimination and inequality since May. Some top actions taken include signing a petition via an organization's website or

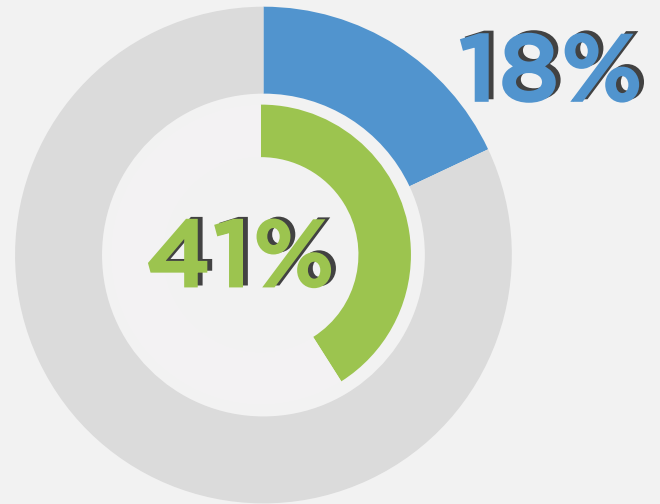
through social media, participating in marches or rallies, and sharing content on social media. However, of young people civically engaged on race and racism, [more than twice](#) as many white or Caucasian individuals reported doing nothing to address the issue compared to their Black peers. When considering best practices to create diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces and communities, civic engagement is critical for businesses. According to the research, white individuals are inspired to act [when a cause or organization asks them to](#). Organizations with a civic engagement strategy are attractive to Black and Hispanic/Latino customers, as they are the employees who are most likely to make socially-informed decisions.



ON RACE AND RACISM

The fight against racial inequality and injustice has called many to act in service of a more just, fair society. Black individuals have taken more actions to address racial inequality, discrimination, and social injustice than white or non-Black people of color. They believe their actions will lead to results and that companies have a great deal of influence over the issue. They are also the group [most likely to buy or boycott](#) a brand based on its response to current protests, and most likely to believe brands owe it to employees to take a stand against racism. Hispanic or Latino adults are also making socially informed decisions. Within the general population of adults who have considered a company's social responsibility when applying to or accepting jobs (18%), 25% identify as Hispanic or Latino. Further, Hispanic adults are 9 percentage points more likely than the general population to believe they can have a big impact on their community.

Our research shows recognition is important to Black and Hispanic/Latino individuals, too. Black and Hispanic/Latino individuals reported it is important they receive recognition after taking an action to make a difference or help someone in need. For groups who often struggle to feel seen and valued in corporate settings, this is a critical element for businesses to get right when thinking about civic engagement.



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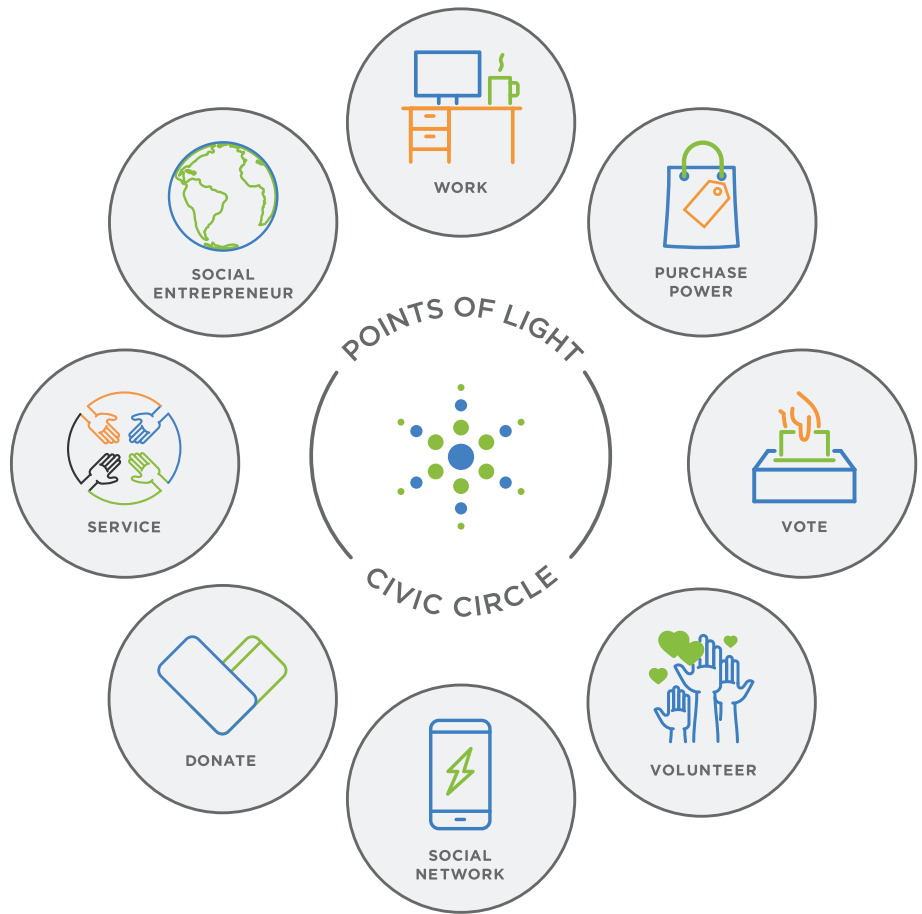
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THE PATH FORWARD: THE CIVIC CIRCLE

When we look at the data, there is a clear need and expectation for a holistic framework to help businesses, nonprofits, and individuals understand, identify, and engage in the full scope of civic life. Points of Light saw the need for this framework and developed the Civic Circle, comprised of eight ways we can engage in the full spectrum of civic life and be a force for positive change. The Civic Circle—vote, volunteer, donate, social network, purchase power, work, social entrepreneur, service—encompasses the many ways to be civically engaged and address the challenges and opportunities addressed by this research.



The Civic Circle will help:



- Individuals connect to opportunities and understand doing good comes in many forms;



- Nonprofits prepare for the next wave of engagement by better focusing and communicating their impact;



- Businesses understand and address the expectations of consumers and employees to be socially responsible and civically engaged.

THE PATH FORWARD: THE CIVIC CIRCLE



Donate: We know that, for many people, donating money or goods are the most effective ways for them to support causes they care about.



Volunteer: Volunteering remains one of the most popular ways for people to give back to their community and support causes they care about. It is someone who gives their time, talent, and energy to act in recognition of a need. This includes informal activities like neighboring and small acts of kindness to support the community around you.



Purchase Power: Consumers today often make decisions on spending or personal consumption expenditures that reflect their values or advance a social cause or issue.



Social Network: Individuals are more inclined than ever before to use their voice to raise awareness, promote, or advance a social cause or issue. Whether it's through social media, through their networks, or with family and friends, being an advocate for something you care about brings purpose to your life.



Vote: Voting is an important component of civic engagement. People express their views on the type of society they want to live in by participating in national and local elections or supporting efforts that increase engagement in electoral processes.



Social Entrepreneurship: Many people take their passion for a cause and turn it into a social enterprise by starting organizations and businesses with the goal of developing and implementing solutions to social, cultural, and environmental challenges.



Work: In addition to using their purchase power to support brands with a purpose, many people make choices about where they work based on the values and purpose of the business. Today, companies that know doing good is good business have corporate values that reflect a commitment and responsibility to society. They use their financial and human capital, along with their business practices, to advance social causes or issues.



Service: Military, public, and national service are personal commitments of time, energy, and talent that contribute to the public good by protecting the nation and its citizens, serving in public office, delivering critical services, and strengthening communities.

CONCLUSION



At Points of Light, we are working to help everyone re-think civic life today. We know people who do good or want to create change do not necessarily assign themselves traditional labels like “volunteer.” Today’s engaged person may express their desire to do good through the purchases they make, in what they share on social media, where and how they choose to work, and what nonprofit organization to support as a volunteer or donor. We know nonprofits and social impact organizations play a vital role in building strong communities. We have witnessed the unique ability of business to drive transformative social change in their communities and around the world.

The research reveals the potential of the tragedy of the pandemic to serve as a catalyst for a new era of civic engagement. Together we can build on the millions of individuals who act on their power to do good every day, using their hearts, hands, and minds to strengthen communities and solve persistent problems. Points of Light is committed to empowering, connecting and engaging people and organizations with opportunities to make a difference that are personal and meaningful. Doing good comes in many forms and— together—businesses, nonprofits, and individuals are a force that transforms the world.

At Points of Light, we invite you to join the revolution in which empathy will defeat apathy.

