

The objectives for investing in Civic Awareness

Introduction

As national borders come to mean less and less, we discover that various kinds of differences can still create ever increasing chasms. As a global company with a workforce that comes from all corners of the earth, speak dozens of different languages, represent varying faith traditions and every race on the earth, we know that the diversity a global community engenders can be a strength and not just a challenge. Aristotle said that politics is the dialogue among citizens that takes place daily in the public square. At Boeing, we are interested in contributing to the public discussion of issues and ideas but through a deliberative process. It is through deliberation that people with different perspectives convene to learn about each other's interests and work together to address complex community problems. This exploratory discussion and planning and is at the heart of Boeing's civic investments.

Communities Define Issues

Some key issues, such as the environment, seem to span the globe while others vary from community to community. What ties our civic strategy together is this process of deliberation. We invest in projects that bring various members of our community together to develop knowledge, reflect, debate, and plan in tackling important civic issues. Across Europe we witness young people competing by creating short videos expressing their views about a country's method of showing "hospitality" to recent immigrants with the winners meeting in Amsterdam to develop a platform on how to deal with international migration on the continent. In Africa and India, we see men and women coming together to deliberate on how to shepherd the limited but precious resource of water. In Seattle, Washington, we see emerging leaders studying together to understand important social issues in hopes of addressing these issues in their workplace and as community volunteers.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead famously declared that "a small group of people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." We believe that a good citizen not only has the power to influence change in his or her community but feels a responsibility to do so. According to Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, education researchers at the University of Ottawa and Mills College, there are three types of productive citizens: personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice-oriented citizens. The personally responsible citizen acts responsibly as an individual in his or her community (by picking up litter, giving blood, and staying out of debt, for example). The participatory citizen actively participates in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels (by engaging with community based organizations and churches, for example). The justice-oriented citizen critically assesses social, political, and economic structures and considers collective strategies for social change. At Boeing, we want to encourage good citizenship at any level of engagement.

Learn, Debate, Plan

The methods by which NGOs support these kinds of practices vary greatly. In the interest of knowledge acquisition they might produce a series of lectures and discussions or develop a museum exhibition tackling a targeted subject. They might encourage reflection through common readings followed by facilitated discussion. Dialogue may come in the form of small group deliberations or more formal debates. And, finally, planning might include utilizing all three of these tools before sketching out answers and plans for implementation together.

Boeing's civic investments often overlap with our other areas of focus. For example, a civic project we support might lead to a plan for the economic development of a blighted community, a plan that might be aligned to our focus in health and human services. A convening of stakeholders to address youth violence might yield a series of arts projects for young people and caring adults. A group of Parent Teacher Associations might come together in a city to map out a plan for teacher training across all the schools in their city.

As stated above, the issues we support may vary widely – environmental stewardship, globalization, scientific literacy, racial tension, increasing homelessness, to name a few – but the method that we invest in is the convening of community members to learn about and think deeply about issues that are important to our communities to address complex community needs.