



# Civic Engagement Inventory

January 2017

---

# Executive Summary

From club sports organizing youth clinics at the YMCA to sharing financial resources with the Northfield community, there are many civic engagement initiatives that are being organized by various groups at St. Olaf College. Civic Engagement is important because members of St. Olaf can join with others to strengthen community bonds, further vocational goals, as well as provide valuable return in collaboration and partnership with local people and organizations. Civic engagement takes many forms and can extend student's learning into visible applicability where students can learn more about how they can give their skills and time. Some civic engagement initiatives at St. Olaf are typically recurrent, funded, and can be organized into curriculum such as ACE course, where students can cooperate and engage with community members in a reciprocal and mutually-beneficial project. Some initiatives are created by students as a way to work towards addressing a community-focused mission or social issue that is at the core of their student group in the Volunteer Network. Other initiatives are carried out by groups whose primary function is completely different from civic engagement. These groups such as club sports and the campus catering service carry out their primary functions while simultaneously creating initiatives that are ideologically aligned the principles of civic engagement.

It is important to compile a Civic Engagement Inventory in order to assess areas that lack civic engagement where the College might consider investment in the future. A Civic Engagement Inventory allows for an institutional snapshot of engagement across many levels. Participants and creators of initiatives who continue to do hard work to facilitate and form connections in the community can be applauded in a way by having their work spotlighted, and the individuals who have not received as much formal recognition or publication of their initiative can be lifted into a collective log of civic work as an important element in the summative body of the community work of St. Olaf College. This inventory will work as a marker in time of current initiatives and it will also provide summaries of these recent initiatives.

**Current Focus.** St. Olaf promotes and funds service-based organizations in a group called the Volunteer Network. A main finding of this report is that there are many student organizations with a wide variety of purposes that function outside of the Volunteer Network and still participate in civic engagement initiatives.

- Much information is available about Volunteer Network activities since service is at their core.
- This report details other lesser-known or publicized community initiatives by student groups.

**Future Opportunities.** The second major finding is that while St. Olaf College encourages students, faculty, and staff to participate in many civic dialogue activities, many of these activities are not open to the larger community. Most initiatives allow students to intertwine their studies and civic engagement through an academic or career interest in an activity such as community-based work study, joining a student organization, taking an ACE course, or working as an intern. Most civic engagement initiatives do not involve community members coming to campus, but rather students leaving campus to collaborate in places such as Northfield, Faribault, or the Twin Cities.

- There are many civic dialogue initiatives that are not open to the public, but could be.
- Opening these civic dialogue activities to the public and promoting cooperative dialogues with members outside St. Olaf would be an effective way to turn community thinking into civic engagement. This would require a communication system for event promotion off-campus, but St. Olaf and off-campus community members could benefit from the expanded participation.
- If civic dialogue initiatives are extended to include external organizations or invitees, then students could participate in dialogues with people who have very different perspectives and lives from somebody doing work every day at St. Olaf. Students would be able to consider the voices of a larger community, vice versa for off-campus participants.