

## **Civic Agency developed by the (Sabo) Center for Democracy and Citizenship**

Civic Studies emphasizes agency as a fourth key theme. It is defined “as effective and intentional action that is conducted in diverse and open settings in order to shape the world around us.” Civic Studies is fed by three broad strands of empirically grounded theory, democratic governance of common resources; deliberation; and public work. All emphasize agency and co-creation.

These are other elements of Civic Studies, described on the website of the Tisch College of Civic Life (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/civic-studies/> )

1. Civic Studies is the intellectual component of civic renewal, which is the movement to improve societies by engaging their citizens.
2. The goal of civic studies is to develop ideas and ways of thinking helpful to citizens, understood as co-creators of their worlds. We do not define “citizens” as official members of nation-states or other political jurisdictions. One can be a co-creator in many settings, ranging from loose social networks and religious congregations to the globe.
3. Civic studies asks “What should we do?” It is thus inevitably about ethics (what is right and good?), about facts (what is actually going on?), about strategies (what would work?), and about the institutions that we co-create. Good strategies may take many forms and use many instruments, but if a strategy addresses the question “What should we do?”, then it must guide our own actions— it cannot simply be about how other people ought to act.

### What are the characteristics of citizens in a civic agency framework?

- civic agency – People see themselves as having agency/power on issues. People feel like effective problem solvers and change agents
- civic identity – people see themselves as citizens – problem-solvers, leaders, organizers, co-creators.
- stewards of communities – people take pride in the community, learn about it, understand it and take care of it
- pro-active agents – people initiate change, take risks, assert their own interests and connect these to the community
- employee (or workplace) citizenship – citizens/employees/members of an employer/organization help make their work place better, make constructive change, strengthen its connections with and responsibility to the community

### What do citizens do?

- Identify and engage others in work on an issue
- Learn skills of working on a public stage
- Solve public problems and co-create things of common value through collective, collaborative work (public work)
- Change the cultures of institutions (and the work people do within them) and communities to make work more public in purpose and more collaborative and interactive
- Shift professional identities and roles to emphasize their civic and public dimensions as well as their technical aspects

### Who do they work with?

- People develop broader and deeper public relationships. They learn to tap and catalyze new energies and talents.
- People develop skills of working across differences in interests, views, and cultures of groups concerned about an issue or problem.

*What do agents of change learn?*

1) Conceptual skills as well as action skills:

People come to understand and develop the ability to use concepts like citizens, power, politics, democracy, interests, free space, public work, and citizenship.

2) Democratic skills

People learn skills like collaborative work; public narrative; power mapping; public speaking and other ways of communicating publicly; collective evaluation, negotiation, setting agendas, strategic thinking, dealing constructively with conflict, running meetings, relationship building and researching public issues.

3) Civic knowledge

People learn about local government. They learn about the politics, histories, cultures, stories, conflicts, achievements and struggles of their communities.