

# The LEADE Initiative

*The **Leveraging Equity and Access in Democratic Education (LEADE)** initiative provides educational decision makers with research-based tools for assessing equity and access in civic education in order to improve civic learning opportunities in and out of schools for all students.*

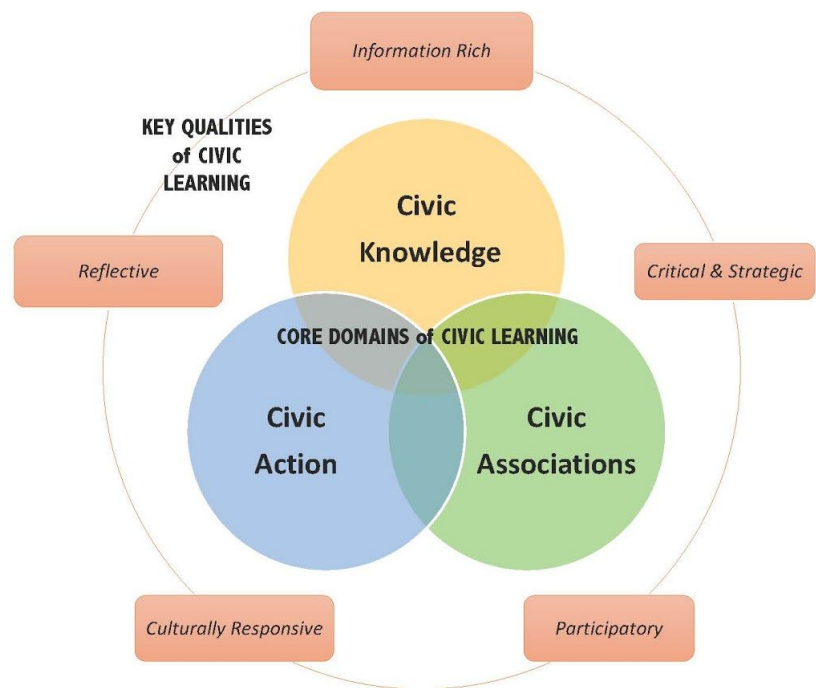
Most school districts and organizations lack critical data on how fully and equitably civic learning opportunities are distributed. Without such information, communities are not able to assess their overall civic learning needs or determine how to target necessary supports to enhance civic learning and make it more equitable. The LEADE indicator system and technical support will enable districts and communities to promote high quality civic learning opportunities equitably and at scale by providing needed evidence, enabling public deliberation, informing educational leaders' decision making, and highlighting strategies and organizations that can help schools and districts promote more and more equitable civic learning opportunities.

## LEADE Framework

The LEADE framework attends to practices that research has shown to promote desired outcomes in three core domains--**civic knowledge, civic associations, and civic action**. The LEADE framework also reflects findings that high-quality civic learning opportunities are **information rich, critical and strategic, participatory, culturally responsive, and reflective**.

The LEADE indicator system attends to civic development in three domains:

- **Civic Knowledge:** principles of American democracy, substantive information about important policy issues, procedural information about how to effect social and political change, and the operation and distribution of influence. Development of civic knowledge can foster the understanding necessary for informed participation in public deliberation, community problem solving, voting, participation on juries, etc.
- **Civic Associations:** membership in voluntary groups in which people share information, deepen relationships, and take action to address common concerns. In a pluralistic society, civic associations are formed through mutual interests or shared identities but at times also foster connections with diverse community members. Civic Associations can promote the ability to work jointly with others to identify, investigate, and represent shared interests and concerns.
- **Civic Action:** work to improve and/or transform public policies, prevailing institutions, and social practices. Such engagement can expand commitments to and understandings of how to participate strategically in changing social and political conditions. In addition, civic action can also help develop one's efficacy and sense of civic agency.



The LEADE indicator system also attends to five essential qualities of high-quality civic learning opportunities.

1. **Information Rich.** Powerful civic learning presents youth with knowledge to deepen their understanding of the structure and function of American political institutions, social and political issues, and civil rights and responsibilities. To be informed civic actors, young people need to develop the skills and capacities to access information from a range of sources, assess the credibility and reliability of claims and evidence, examine data regarding societal problems, acquire historical understanding, and seek out and consider multiple perspectives.
2. **Critical & Strategic.** Robust civic learning also enables youth to critically analyze the information and evidence they gather as well as determine strategic ways to go about responding to the issues at hand. These include opportunities to analyze root causes of problems, ask questions about morality and fairness, explore issues of inequality and injustice, assess sources of power and influence, and weigh the strategies and tactics a group or collective can enact.
3. **Participatory.** High-quality civic learning opportunities are participatory in that they encourage youth to: identify issues that matter to them, take ownership over their learning, be part of a group or collective endeavor, shape the course of action, take on leadership roles, and engage in meaningful decision making in partnership with others.
4. **Culturally Responsive.** Civic learning that is “culturally responsive” attends to the ways in which history, social context, culture, religion, and identity shape the experience of civic life. Civic learning opportunities should draw on young people’s lived experiences, funds of knowledge, and interests in order to incorporate a wide-range of civic experiences and to motivate a diverse cross-section of youth.
5. **Reflective.** High-quality civic learning experiences also include ongoing opportunities for young people to reevaluate their thinking and beliefs, consider civic and political issues in new and different ways, contemplate their role in a group or collective, and explore their own identity and agency as civic actors.

## Key Civic Outcomes

In the LEADE indicator system, we highlight commitments to civic and political life and the practices that signal relevant forms of engagement. For example, we consider young people’s commitment to address community needs through service and collective activity as well as their commitment to vote and follow the news regarding important societal issues.

## LEADE Indicator System

The LEADE indicator system establishes a set of evidence-based tools for assessing equity and access in civic education so that educators and members of civic organizations can work together to improve civic learning opportunities for all students.

