Civic Engagement is the process of engaging with your government to advocate for an issue(s) that affects your city or community or region, with the goal of improving quality of life (Generation Citizen & iCivics, 2020). Civic Engagement exists on a spectrum; it can look like direct involvement with your local government, for the purpose of expressing your opinions or concerns, for example by attending town halls or public meetings, writing letters, or emailing/calling your local government representatives. Civic Engagement can also look like indirect involvement to address civic issues by engaging with community organizations, through volunteering, community service, or joining an interest group (Generation Citizen & iCivics, 2020). Whether direct or indirect, Civic Engagement is a two-step process involving empowerment and advocacy (Gerston, 2021). Individual empowerment happens through the development of knowledge, skills, values and motivations, which can take place over a lifetime, through education, or lived experiences. Once an individual values an issue and acquires knowledge and skills, they might become an advocate (Gerston, 2021).

Community Engagement has a very similar definition and purpose to civic engagement, however, is used by academic institutions, or the like, when referring to involvement with the external communities (Bodo & Akhurst, 2019). Community Engagement “is a process for working collaboratively with stakeholders and partner organizations to address the issues that affect our communities” and can take a wide range of forms, differ in aim, and exist at varying levels of involvement (CCEL, 2018). An individual might engage with their community as a volunteer, an employee or employer, a researcher, a teacher or learner. The aim of this involvement might be knowledge exchange, advocacy, activism or simply to develop a deeper relationship with a community (CCEL, 2018). In this sense, you might see community engagement as a less direct form of civic engagement.

The Ethics of Engagement

Depending on your role or context in civic or community engagement, the ethics surrounding your involvement vary. While working with community organizations as an academic institution, it is integral that all voices in the community are heard and valued. The Centre for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL) prioritizes working with community members to establish greater self-determination through the Equitable Engagement Framework.
This approach aims to decrease inequities by prioritizing the engagement of underrepresented groups, promoting diversity and inclusion and recognizing the community as the expert. According to CCEL’s Engagement Framework, the five key values of equitable engagement are: Reciprocity, Innovation, Collaboration, Ethical Engagement, & Adaptability. The Ethical Civic Engagement Cohort learns and applies this framework in its engagement. A detailed engagement framework, called Engaging People with Lived/Living Experiences, was created by the Tamarack Institute (2019) for public reference.

The ethics surrounding civic engagement from a citizen perspective are simply to be mindful of all the needs of these in your community, and ensure your advocacy is respectful of these needs.

**Civic Engagement at UBC**

The University of Victoria identifies community engaged learning as the most important contributor to the development of key sustainability competencies in students and is a key component in meeting UNCESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (Tremblay, 2020). UBC has infinite opportunities for students to work collaboratively with community organizations and partners to gain experience, apply their learning, and meet community needs.

The Ethical Civic Engagement Cohort facilitates competency building through civic-engagement-centred curriculum and experiential learning opportunities through a community project, where students work with local community partners to help address their identified needs, while practicing equitable engagement.
References


Bodo, B & Akhurst, J. (2019). ‘Most importantly, it’s like the partner takes more interest in us’: Using Ubuntu as a Fundamental Ethic of Community Engagement (CE) Partnerships at Rhodes University. Alternation, 1023-1757. DOI: 10.29086/2519-5476/2019/sp27a4


