



## Civic Information Needs Census (CINC) Core Survey Instrument

Version: February 2026

### ABOUT THIS INSTRUMENT

The core standard CINC survey instrument consists of 15 questions across 4 blocks:

1. Demographics: 8 questions
2. Information needs and satisfaction: 4 questions
3. Information sources: 1 question
4. Civic engagement: 2 questions

This instrument is a free resource for the information needs research community. Researchers conducting an information needs survey are encouraged to use this instrument. Please inform us of your use to facilitate shared learning. We also encourage the public sharing of aggregate data from your surveys for community benefit.

The original instrument was developed in 2024 and first deployed in three surveys: national, Chicago, and New York City. It was created through a synthesis of previous information needs surveys and refined based on feedback from academics, journalism research leaders, local civic information providers, survey methodologists, and cognitive testing. This instrument has since been revised multiple times based on additional feedback. It is designed as an evolving document that balances the adaptation of new learnings with the benefits of comparability derived from using existing, standardized questions.

We are grateful for all collaborators who have provided feedback and data to this initiative. A list of collaborators and additional resources, including data and survey instruments from previous CINC, can be found at <http://infocensus.org>. The website also includes links to additional, non-core questions asked in previous individual CINC that you are welcome to use as well (for example, the first 3 CINC asked detailed questions to parents and K-12 education professionals on education information needs).

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

*\*Questions with an asterisk are part of our core/standardized questions and are used for weighting. Minimal changes can be made.*

\*1. Are you:

- A man
- A woman
- Another identity

\*2. In what year were you born? [TEXT BOX]

\*3. In what ZIP code do you currently live? [TEXT BOX]

\*4a. What is your race? [MULTI-SELECT]

- White / Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Black or African American
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Other (please specify): [TEXT BOX]

\*4b. [IF HISPANIC/LATINO NOT SELECTED] Are you from a Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish-speaking background?

- Yes
- No

\*5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school diploma or less
- Some college, but no degree
- Associate's degree, or two-year college degree
- Bachelor's degree, or four-year college degree
- Graduate degree

\*6. Are you registered to vote?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

\*7. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a: [RANDOMIZE]

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent/Other

**[IF INDEPENDENT/ NO PARTY AFFILIATION]**

\*7a. Do you consider yourself closer to:

- The Democrats
- The Republicans
- Neither

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**[IF DEMOCRAT/ REPUBLICAN]**

\*7b. Do you consider yourself a:

- Strong [Democrat/Republican]
- Not so strong [Democrat/Republican]

\*8. How did you vote in the 2024 election for President, or for some reason were you unable to vote?

- Kamala Harris, the Democrat
- Donald Trump, the Republican
- A third party candidate
- Not registered/Too young/Ineligible
- Did not vote

#### **INFORMATION NEEDS AND SATISFACTION QUESTIONS**

9. How **difficult** is it for you to get information about each of the following in your day-to-day life? [Very difficult | Somewhat difficult | Not that difficult | Not difficult at all] [RANDOMIZE]

- What's happening in my neighborhood

- What's happening in my city/town
- What's happening in my county
- What's happening in my state
- What's happening nationally
- What's happening around the world

**\*\*Q9 NOTE\*\*** *This is a new question that was asked in the most recent iteration of the civic information needs census that proved extremely fruitful. We encourage asking this question regionally.*

10. How important is it for you to get information about each of the following topics in your everyday life?

[RANDOMIZE] [Very important | Somewhat important | Not that important | Not important at all]

- Local weather
- Local sports
- Local education (including school programs, curriculum, and quality)
- Local transportation (including transit schedules, costs, and traffic)
- Local health and well-being (including access to quality care and community needs and trends)
- Local economic opportunities (including jobs, personal finance, and business environment)
- Local political information (including voting, elected officials, and public policy initiatives)
- Local environment (including air/water quality, sanitation, and access to recreation)
- Local risks and emergencies (including crime/public safety and climate)
- Local community organizations and events (including churches, libraries, clubs, and cultural events)
- Local housing (including property listings and housing assistance services)

11. When you seek out news and information about each of the following topics, how **satisfied or unsatisfied** are you with the information you are able to get? [RANDOMIZE]

[Very satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied | Somewhat unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied]

- Local weather
- Local sports
- Local education
- Local transportation
- Local health and well-being
- Local economic opportunities
- Local political information
- Local environment
- Local risks and emergencies
- Local community organizations and events
- Local housing

**\*Q11 NOTE\*** *Starting in Chicago, Civic News and Embold Research added “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” as an answer choice. Based on the quality and consistency of the data, Embold recommends adding this additional answer choice going forward.*

**\*Q11 NOTE\*** *In Chicago and NYC, the satisfaction question was only asked to respondents who considered certain information topics very/somewhat important. The respondent would only be shown the items they marked as important. This was done in NYC and Chicago to reduce potential survey fatigue. This was not done in the 2025/6 national survey to better understand the tradeoffs between differences in results and survey fatigue. There were not major differences in responses from*

*the very/somewhat important category relative to all respondents. Thus, Embold recommends continuing the methodology used in Chicago and NYC going forward.*

12. How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with your ability to get the information you need in the following situations? [RANDOMIZE] [Very satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied | Somewhat unsatisfied | Very unsatisfied | Not applicable]

- During an emergency weather situation
- When making decisions about choosing where to live
- When making decisions about choosing where to work
- When there are changes in local and state policies or laws
- When a crime occurs near you
- For local social or community events
- When making decisions about your health or accessing medical care
- Reporting local infrastructure issues such as potholes, broken streetlights, or sidewalk damage
- Navigating road closures, road construction projects, or traffic incidents
- When looking for resources in languages other than English

*\*Q12 NOTE\* This is the baseline we used in the National, Chicago, and NYC polls. This question can be adapted to local needs.*

### INFORMATION SOURCES QUESTIONS

13. Which of the following sources are the **most useful** when it comes to getting high quality, local information? Select up to THREE. [RANDOMIZE]

- Friends, family, colleagues and/or neighbors
- Government agencies (through their websites, phone services, offices, or social media)
- Local libraries or community centers
- Your religious leaders or congregation
- Local print newspapers
- Local digital news (online-only news source, or associated with a newspaper or radio or TV broadcaster)
- Local TV stations
- Local radio stations
- Local podcasts
- Email newsletters
- Local online groups or communities (e.g. Facebook Groups, Reddit, Nextdoor neighborhood)
- Content creators on social media (e.g. YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, etc.)
- Online search (Google, Bing, etc)
- Local schools, parent-teacher associations, or parenting groups
- Other (please specify):

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

14a. Here is a list of some ways people get involved with and try to improve the community or state they live in. Which of the following, if any, have you done in the last 12 months? Select all that apply. [RANDOMIZE]

- Volunteered with an association or organization (including a child's school or youth organization)
- Attended a town hall or community forum
- Contacted an elected official (via email, phone call, letter, etc)
- Attended a demonstration for or against a candidate, person, or issue

- Participated in a community organizing meeting or effort (separate from a town hall)
- Participated in a mutual aid network or community support group
- Advocated for or worked on positive changes in your city, county, or state, such as improving public services, local programs, or government policies.
- I have not done any of these [EXCLUSIVE, ANCHOR]

*\*Q14a NOTE\* This is the most updated version of this question. There are changes here to both the introductory text and the survey options that provide a richer understanding of community involvement than in the previous iteration of the survey.*

14b. [ASKED ONLY OF PEOPLE WHO SELECT “Advocated for or worked on....” ] Thinking about the ways you get involved in your city, county, or state, which of the following best describes you?

- Trying to improve local or state services, programs, or policies is a part of my job or career
- I often get involved in efforts to improve local or state services, programs, or policies, but it is not part of my job or career
- I sometimes get involved in efforts to improve local or state services, programs, or policies.
- I rarely get involved in efforts to improve local or state services, programs, or policies.

*\*Q14b NOTE\* This is the most updated version of this question. There are changes here to both the introductory text and the survey options that create more clarity for the respondent and the final findings.*