



Reimagining Civics Education for a New Generation

Executive Champion:

Jim Richardson, Director, Office of Foreign Assistance at Department of State

Challenge:

Modernize civics training in secondary schools by developing digital products that draw on foreign assistance open data to equip students with an understanding of how American institutions work.

Background:

In recent years, classrooms across America have prioritized the study of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—often, at the expense of civics training. In 2014, less than a quarter of eighth graders [scored](#) proficient or better on the national civics exam. In 2015, 60 percent of the country's 100 largest school districts [did not mention](#) "civics," "citizenship," or "democracy" in their mission statements. And by 2018, only nine states [required](#) secondary students to complete a year-long course in civics or U.S. government before graduating. Economic globalization accounts for some of this trend. But so too does the pace at which schools are adapting civics education for a new generation. Traditional delivery methods, like classroom lectures and off-site trips, fall short of meeting students where they are: online. And the growth of [online platforms](#), though welcome, is still inadequate in familiarizing students with open data and digital tools to navigate a world of disinformation. These inadequacies will only deepen as COVID-19 motivates more of the nation's learning to move online.

Why this problem is important:

Basic education is an exercise in nation-building—and civics education, a capstone in citizenship. Investments in civics training equip Americans, young and old, with an appreciation for democratic institutions: why they exist, how they work, what they produce. But as civics has gone out of vogue, so has Americans' support for institutions, at home and abroad. Three out of four Americans [believe](#) the public's trust in the federal government has been shrinking, and two out of three believe the same of one another. Consequently, a growing share of Americans [view](#) democracy as a bad way to run government. And beyond the country's shores, Americans on average [believe](#) foreign aid constitutes about 26 percent of the federal budget, when the actual figure is less than 1 percent. Such misinformation obscures the public's understanding of America's role in the world. Given these worrying trends, civics training is in need of a refresh—one that puts digital tools in the hands of

educators to simplify the workings of government, and puts open data on the screens of students to ground their learning in evidence-based examples. Data on U.S. foreign assistance is an especially useful source because it spans nearly two dozen federal agencies, touches the entire federal budget and spending process, and offers a corrective to popular myths about the U.S. government.

Target audience/end user:

Secondary school educators and students enrolled in civics, social studies, or economics courses.

Vision for sprint outcomes:

User-friendly digital tools that educators and students can use to supplement existing secondary school civics curricula, particularly modules on the executive branch and federal budget

Initial datasets and Resources:

- ForeignAssistance.gov budgetary, financial, and performance [data](#)
- ForeignAssistance.gov reporting [agencies](#)
- Department of State [congressional budget justifications](#)
- Department of State [Foreign Assistance Resource Library](#)
- Foreign Aid Explorer [data](#)
- U.S. Government financial [data](#)
- U.S Government budget process [infographic](#)
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities budget process [introduction](#)
- Congressional Research Service. foreign assistance [fact sheet](#) and [report](#)
- U.S. Global Leadership Coalition foreign assistance [fact sheet](#) and [report](#)
- International Aid Transparency Initiative [website](#), [d-portal](#), and [tool guide](#)

Points of contact:

- Sarath Ganji, ForeignAssistance.gov, Office of Foreign Assistance, Department of State
- Samantha Spilka, ForeignAssistance.gov, Office of Foreign Assistance, Department of State