PACE Civic Language Perceptions Project

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE FIELD

We hope PACE's Language Project sparks conversation—both about what we heard, and also what the considerations and implications may be for the work of practitioners. Below is a series of discussion questions that could make fruitful conversations for group discussion. The first set of questions is intended as context setting for a group that is coming together to discuss the report; the second set of questions delves into themes that arose in the research, and related questions for our field's collective consideration. We invite you to host a community discussion, conference session, or discuss the findings with your colleagues in the context of your own work. We also invite you to share with us what you hear, so we can all benefit from the wisdom and insights that arise. Given the exploratory nature of this project, we welcome feedback, for its own sake as well as in service of shaping the next point of exploration on this journey. You can use this form to share your reflections with us directly.

- What surprised you about respondents' sentiments and perceptions? What didn't surprise you?
- In what ways might you incorporate some of the learnings from this research into your work?
- What did this leave you wondering? Given the findings and patterns that surfaced in the data, if you or your organization were to recommend a subsequent arc of research, what would you suggest as a next step?

Field-Building Questions

1. We heard that many Americans don't relate to the language our field most often uses to refer to civic engagement and democracy. In fact, they seemed to feel those words felt "like someone else's language." How might this dynamic be impacting our field's efforts to bring people together? How might it be impacting the perceptions people have of our field? What role might civic education play in this dynamic?
2. Given the language that respondents used to describe civic engagement and democracy, do you see possibilities for evolving the way our field refers to the work we do? What might that process look like? How might it incorporate everyday Americans and the words they already use to describe civic life?
3. A central challenge our democracy faces today is a pervasive lack of trust in our democratic institutions. How might these findings—in particular, around perceptions of power and individual notions of engagement—influence this reality? How might we shift this dynamic?
4. Despite lack of resonance around traditional vocabulary related to civic engagement and democracy, the concept of democracy itself was one of the most highly-rated terms. Why do you think this is? How can this positive sentiment inform communication about democracy and democratic ideals?
5. If we accept the premise that language both reflects reality, and also shapes it, what do the findings suggest about the lived experiences of everyday Americans? In what ways might our prevailing narrative of democracy be mis-aligned with the lived experiences of everyday Americans? And how might we use this information to shape future communication about civic engagement and democracy work?

To access the full report and accompanying materials, visit: PACEfunders.org/language