CivicLex is a civic education nonprofit that brings daylight to the issues, policies, and procedures that impact Fayette County.

CivicLex envisions a Lexington in which all residents are able to participate meaningfully in the decisions that shape where they live.
Democracy is in crisis - and the solution is local.

In 1964, 74% of Americans reported trusting the government in Washington to do what is right ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’. That figure is now less than 25%. It’s not hard to understand why - since the 60s, widening inequality, political crises, and a more broad understanding of the impacts of systemic racism have sobered our idyllic beliefs of democratic self-governance.

The paradox of democracy tells us that a thriving democracy is one that effectively balances trust and skepticism. However, what we see in American civic life is a disproportionate amount of distrust and cynicism that threatens to undermine the very core of our civic life with apathy and anger.

If we are to rebuild our democracy we must start with trust. We must build new systems for civic engagement, participatory decision-making, and equitable representation. We must reshape our democracy into one that affirms the lived experience of those at the margins as much as it does academic expertise. We must connect with our neighbors to learn, listen, and share power.

There is no better position to start this work than at the level. Relationships are easier to build locally. Policy is easier to develop locally. Results are easier to see locally.

At CivicLex, we work every day to build a more robust and healthy democracy within the boundaries of Fayette County, Kentucky. We’re excited to share with you what we have accomplished in 2020 towards this aim. We hope that CivicLex is laying the foundation for this approach to democratic practice to spread up and across our civic life.

+ Richard Young – Executive Director, CivicLex

“There’s something brilliant in what [CivicLex is doing] because they’re foregrounding the importance of relationships...

Imagine if we could make it a basic principle that as we rebuild local journalism and information resources, we connect that to a project of relationship building on that scale.”

+ Danielle Allen, Director of the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University about CivicLex on WBUR’s “On Point”
2020 at a Glance

$241,966 Raised to support local democracy work in 2020

20,000+ Residents reached by CivicLex programs in 2020

1,400+ Hours spent on Zoom in 2020

400 Hours of city meetings watched, digested, & covered

228 Individual programmatic partnerships in 2020

Milestones in 2020

**JAN.**
CivicLex and Lexington Herald-Leader receive grant from Lenfest Institute for Journalism & Facebook for community-based media.

**FEB.**
Staff attends a convening on the future of democracy by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

**MAR.**
COVID-19 hits, derailing the launch of our On the Table initiative, a $30,000+ project with over a year of planning behind it.

**APR.**
Launch of our Digital Town Hall Series, bringing together hundreds to discuss and process the impacts of COVID-19.
With our partners at Fayette Alliance, we unveil a cross-sector coalition of organizations to collaborate on voter education.

CivicLex receives NEA Our Town Grant for Civic Artist Residency.

CivicLex is featured on two NPR flagship shows: WBUR’s On Point and the Diane Rehm Show.

Relaunch of the CivicLex website, featuring civic education micro-lessons and a focus on local issue explainers.

Launch of Our Voices Project alongside the Herald-Leader, Key NewsJournal, and RadioLex.

CivicLex is featured on PBS NewsHour as an example of how to reimagine American Democracy.

First five articles of Our Voices Project launch, addressing the intersection of race, housing, & gentrification.

CivicLex raises over $25,000 through the GoodGiving Challenge, outraising 2019 by over $10,000.
Reacting to a public health crisis.

Like the rest of the world, COVID-19 completely altered our plans for 2020. Weeks before launching our version of the city-wide conversation series, On the Table, we decided to postpone everything based on recommendations from the Fayette County Health Department. We didn’t know what would happen, how severe the virus would or wouldn’t be, and if we were making the right decision. During that time, though, with misinformation spreading on social media and uncoordinated aid efforts popping up across town, we understood the community’s need for accessible and accurate information.

To help, we did what we do best: provide clear and accurate information about important issues. We built a website that included regularly updated city, state, and national guidelines for safety and aid for individuals and small businesses. We compiled a COVID-19 myth-buster resource. We convened 20+ digital forums with city health and government officials and helped aid workers provide information and support to our community.

13,000+
Residents used our COVID hub to find crisis resources.

750+
Residents gathered digitally with civic leaders to discuss and process the impact of COVID-19 on our community through our workshops.

CivicLex’s COVID-19 Hub Provided information on:

- Basic Needs
- Government Response
- Small Biz Resources
- Staying Entertained
- Staying Healthy
We held the following digital COVID Impact Town Halls in 2020:

Our Town Halls featured facilitated community conversations with:
Lexington–Fayette County Health Department (Kevin Hall & Kacy Bryant), University of Kentucky College of Public Health (Dr. Kathleen Winter), Atomic Ramen (Dan Wu), A Cup of Common Wealth (Alexandra Canada), FoodChain (Rebecca Self), Blue Grass Community Foundation (Lisa Adkins), Kentucky Nonprofit Network (Danielle Clore), Lexington Herald-Leader (Peter Baniak & Daniel Desrochers), Lexington Philharmonic (Allison Kaiser), Athens West Theater (Bo List), Kentucky Arts Council (Emily Moses), Community Action Council (Sharon Price), God’s Pantry Foodbank (Michael Hailligan), Traditional Bank (Dan Mason), Fausto Sarmiento, Hope Center (Brooke Raby), Lexington Rescue Mission (Laura Carr), Nest Center for Women, Children, & Families (Jeffrey White), Kentucky Refugee Ministries (Mary Cobb), Community Response Coalition of Kentucky (Dominique Olbert), LFUCG Urban County Council (CMs Jennifer Reynolds & Amanda Bledsoe), Voices for Hope (Alex Elswick), Greenhouse 17 (Darlene Thomas), Mental Health America (Marcie Timmerman), Lexington Fair Housing Council (Art Crosby), Salvation Army (Jennifer Andrews), LFUCG Office of Homelessness Prevention & Intervention (Jeffery Herron), Kentucky American Water (Susan Lanch & Meriah Rose), Community Action Council (Melissa Tibbs), Minerva Financial Arts (Elaine Luttrull), Pam Miller Downtown Arts Center (Celeste Lewis), Pride Community Services Organization (Carmen Wampler-Collins), and AVOL (Jon Parker)

In 2020, CivicLex continued to provide accurate, nonpartisan information about essential city issues throughout the year in the form of our CivicLex Weekly newsletters, our budget guide and workshops, and Local Government educational resources featured on our website.

Additionally, we launched two new Civic Education initiatives:

**Local Government Curriculum**
We launched a local government curriculum found under the “Take Action” hub on the new CivicLex website. The curriculum features bite-sized “action civics” lessons, helping residents understand how to participate in civic life – from best practices when giving public comment before the council to a broad overview of Imagine Lexington, our city’s Comprehensive Plan.

**One thing this week**
A new section of our newsletter and website called “One thing this week” explains an essential item discussed before council each week. These deep dives help residents understand complex issues like the city’s approach to tackling systemic racism and LFUCG’s financial outlook – but it also touches on more mundane matters like updates to the city’s snow removal plans.

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* Moments of civic education are defined as instances in which direct civic education occurred via in-email issue coverage or opening of external links to educational material. Civic action includes contacting council members or city staff directly from emails, adding of city meetings to external calendars, opening of city meeting agendas or summaries, and more.
One thing this week information fragments, “Police body-Worn Camera Presentation, August 17; Personal Property Tax Changes, August 31; ""Changes to Public Comment in City Meetings”, September 13; “Coldstream Land Swap MOU”, November 8

“CivicLex helps me to understand what happens at our local government. They provide transparency to the important inner workings of local civics. It makes it easy to be a more informed Lexingtonian.”

Tevin Monroe, Assistant Director of Campus & Community Engagement, Transylvania University

780
Readers of “One thing this week”, a new civic issue explainer series we started in August 2020.
Reimagining local government.

This type of Civic Artist in Residence program is a first for the state of Kentucky. This ambitious project seeks to embed three Fayette County-based artists of any discipline within three departments of Lexington's city government for just over a year to reimagine how the departments work with each other and the greater community. The CAIR program is funded in part by a prestigious National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant and made possible by the city’s generous participation.

We are currently finalizing the artist application, which will be open to artists based in Lexington, KY, in preparation for a release date in early 2021. While the core of this project is to create new approaches for how the city engages with the public, we will encourage projects that bring marginalized community voices into city decision making and find creative solutions to problems or “stuck” aspects of how the city works. We want this program to benefit the city government by celebrating city employees' labor and helping departments communicate more effectively.

Artistic & Community Advisors:
Jason Akhtarekhavari, Jessica Breen, Devine Carama, Raaziq El-Amin, Kurt Gohde, Chester Grundy, Brandy Shumake, Lakshmi Sriraman, DeBraun Thomas, & Kremena Todorova

City of Lexington Advisors:
Nancy Albright, Rob Allen, Chris Ford, Amber Luallen, Heather Lyons, Theresa Maynard, Elizabeth McGee, Angela Poe, Ashley Simpson, & Deborah Slone

Project Team:
Ashley Hanson, Mark Kidd, & CivicLex Staff

$67,000
Allocated for training, compensating, and supporting Lexington-based civic artists

27
Community leaders have signed on to guide this project over the next two years.
Our Voices Project

Lifting up lived experience.

Our Voices Project is the culmination of years worth of discussion and planning for a project meant to center Black and Brown voices on Lexington's major intersectional issues.

In partnership with the Lexington Herald-Leader, Key NewsJournal, and RadioLex, we are recruiting, coaching, and compensating writers of color to write about their perspectives and experiences with the main topics of The Mayor’s Commission on Racial Justice & Equality. Pieces produced through Our Voices run as a complete takeover in the Lexington Herald-Leader’s Sunday Editorial Page - centering the voices of those with lived experience.

This year, we published one round of five writers and are in the process of selecting the second round. In total, the project will produce no fewer than 25 written pieces. We are also working on radio documentary additions to the project with RadioLex.

“The work you and your team have done is life changing for some and the push others needed... I write everyday and have so many pieces ranging in subject and views, I would love to share if you all ever find the need for new, fresh articles or voices again.”

+ Marie Emedi, Our Voices Project Round 1 Writer

$250
Paid per piece to writers, in addition to receiving direct coaching with editors of the Herald-Leader

15,986
Number of times the first round of Our Voices pieces were read
Responding to an unprecedented election.

This election cycle, we built a non-partisan coalition with local nonprofits and community organizations focused on addressing the most pressing issues Lexington faces in the coming years. Our coalition, LexVote, wrote and distributed a rigorous candidate survey to every council member and council candidate during the primary and general elections and published the answers on our Lex.Vote website. We also posted accurate, up-to-date information about voting safely in a socially distanced election, which required numerous follow-ups with city and state election officials throughout the November lead-up.

Along with the website, we hosted forums with the general election council candidates and even several unchallenged incumbents, which are available on our YouTube page. We were excited to include community-submitted questions in these forums, as COVID-19 precautions have made it more difficult for residents to communicate directly with candidates and local officials overall.

8,500
Residents watched the LexVote coalition digital council forums.

3,400
Fayette County voters used the LexVote platform to plan & create their ballots for the 2020 General Election.

18
Hours of question-writing and relationship building with our LexVote coalition facilitated by the CivicLex team.

“With LexVote, voters were able to see candidates' actual positions and priorities for neighborhoods as opposed to relying on advertising. It was particularly important under COVID 19 because campaigns in 2020 involved very little physical contact.”

+ Walt Gaffield, President, Fayette County Neighborhood Council
This year, CivicLex also worked to expand our electoral work by creating a local democracy fellowship program.

We created the Electoral Fellowship position to coordinate our electoral work and generate a report about Lexington's electoral participation. The Fellow and CivicLex worked together to monitor and correct misinformation about the November election, distribute informational flyers to areas with low average voter turnout, and recruit, train, and deploy Election Helpers at two voting centers in Lexington on Election Day.

In 2021, we're continuing our investment into our local democracy with our Redistricting Fellow, who will research Lexington's redistricting process and recommend best practices for future efforts.

The Electoral and Redistricting Fellow's work will bookend each other as a more extensive report on Lexington's electoral participation and representation.

2,200
Voters in low-turnout precincts personally contacted with at-home voting information.

48
Appearances in external media to highlight election misinformation.
What’s in the future for CivicLex?

Civic Action Education
We’re launching a new three-year initiative to design and implement a county-wide local lived, action civics curriculum in Fayette County Public Schools in alignment with Kentucky Academic Standards.

Civic Artist Residency
2021 will bring the full rollout of our Civic Artist Residency program. Applications will launch in January, artists will be selected by May, and they’ll begin working in the city in June.

Our Voices Project
Four more rounds of Our Voices Project writers will be commissioned in 2021. We’re also looking forward to building a new podcast and radio component with RadioLex.

Redistricting Lexington
In January 2021, we’ll hire a new Redistricting Fellow to work with us on building more equitable strategies for local redistricting in Fayette County, which will take place throughout 2021.

Public Comment
We’ll conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the current council meeting public comment system and generate suggestions for making public engagement more effective and efficient.

Public Health & Democracy
In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, we’re undertaking a new partnership with the University of Kentucky to research the intersection of trust in democratic processes and public health outcomes.
Financial Overview

$241,966
Total revenue raised in 2020 for CivicLex projects

$95,782
Total 2020 operating expenses

$79,000
Invested in the Civic Artist Residency Program for expenses in 2020 – 2022

$70,844
Staff Expenses & Benefit cost in 2020

$27,000
Invested in Electoral Work in 2020

$24,938
Operational costs in 2020

$25,000
Invested in Our Voices Project for expenses in 2020 & 2021

$19,500
Net 2020 Revenue (Unencumbered)

$191,034
Total assets

$30,761
Cash on Hand

$61,522
Operational Reserve for 2021

$98,750
Encumbered Program Expense Reserve for 2021
Program & Admin Expenses

70% of CivicLex’s budget is spent on Program Expenses. Detail right.

26% of CivicLex’s budget is spent on Administrative Expenses. Detail right.
Revenue & Support

$241,966
Total revenue raised in 2020 for CivicLex projects

930
Unique donations to our work in 2020

$5.00
Median donation in 2020

2020 Grantors

National Endowment for the Arts
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Kentucky Civic Engagement Table
Facebook Journalism Project
Blue Grass Community Foundation

Alpenglow Foundation
Jedra Charitable Foundation
Mitchell Family Foundation
Fayette Alliance Foundation
EE Murry Foundation
Donors (> $250)
Adkins Family Foundation, Alex Brooks, Andrea James, Anne Chestnut, Arthur Shechet, Ben Self, Blake Hall, Carol Hustedde, Christine Huskisson, Dan Rowland, Debra Hensley, Devon Pohl, Eileen Burk, Graham Pohl, Hannah LeGris, Herman and Elizabeth Playforth, Holly Hughes, Jane Jensen, Jennifer Lai-Peterson, Jordan Parker, Joshua Douglas, Julia Young, Kathy Plomin, Leah Gayle Bourne, Liz Sheehan, Matthew Ruberg, Matthew W. Wilson, Melody Flowers, Mendel Mehr, Michelle Young, Network for Good, Richard Young, Ronald Vissing, Scott Shapiro, Theodore Schatzki

Members (< $250)
Our Team

Richard Young, Executive Director

Megan Gulla, Director of Programs

Kit Anderson, Evaluation Assoc. (VISTA)

Hayley Alfaro, Communication Assoc. (VISTA)

Melody Flowers
President, Governance Board

Alex Brooks
President, Programmatic Board

Dan Rowland
President Emeritus

Art Shechet
VP, Governance Board

Jordan Parker
Treasurer, Governance Board

Scott Shapiro
Secretary, Governance Board

Jessica Breen
Programmatic Board Member

Natalie Cunningham
Programmatic Board Member

Joshua Douglas
Governance Board Member

Blake Hall
Programmatic Board Member

Wendi Keene
Programmatic Board Member

Jennifer Lai-Peterson
Governance Board Member

Hannah LeGris
Governance Board Member

Tevin Monroe
Programmatic Board Member

Bevin Morgan
Programmatic Board Member

Carly Muetterties
Programmatic Board Member

Sharon Murphy
Programmatic Board Member

Victor Palomino
Programmatic Board Member

Meredith Price
Programmatic Board Member

Hoda Shalash
Programmatic Board Member

Liz Sheehan
Governance Board Member

Andy Shooner
Programmatic Board Member

Christine Stanley
Programmatic Board Member

Mizari Suarez
Programmatic Board Member

Matthew Wilson
Programmatic Board Member

Dan Wu
Programmatic Board Member

Matthew Young, Electoral Fellow
Casey Lyons, UK MSW Practicum Student
Sara Trapp, UK MSW Practicum Student
Hoda Shalash, UK BSW Practicum Student