

Media Relations

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N.H. Ranks High in Civic Health, UNH Carsey Institute Finds

DURHAM, N.H. – The state of New Hampshire is in good civic health, ranking higher than the national average on several key indicators such as voter turnout, engaging in political discussions, contacting public officials, volunteering, and charitable giving, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The new research is presented in the Carsey Institute report “2012 New Hampshire Civic Health Index” in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Campus Compact for New Hampshire, the University System of New Hampshire, and the New Hampshire College & University Council. The research was conducted by Bruce Mallory, interim director of the Carsey Institute and professor of education at UNH, and Quixada Moore-Vissing, a doctoral student in education at UNH and a graduate research assistant at the Carsey Institute.

Civic health refers to the ways in which residents of a community or state participate in civic activities that strengthen social capital, enhance interconnections, build trust, help each other, talk about public issues and challenges, volunteer in government and nonprofit organizations, stay informed about their communities, and participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges.

“Our communities and individual residents continue to believe that government works best at the local level, that volunteers play a central role in governance and civic life, and that practical solutions are perceived as more important and useful than ideological positions. The state motto, ‘Live Free or Die,’ while perhaps no longer as salient as it was when General John Stark first proclaimed it in 1809, still captures the basic sense of independence and autonomy that is found in our 234 municipalities,” the report’s authors said.

The researchers found:

- New Hampshire charitable giving increased from 53.7 percent in 2009 to 57.5 percent in 2011. Though the state ranks last in the nation when it comes to the portion of income donated to charitable organizations, it ranks 12th in the nation in terms of the proportion of citizens who give more than \$25.
- New Hampshire ranks 19th in the nation for volunteerism, with 29.4 percent of residents volunteering, compared with a national volunteerism rate of 26.8 percent.
- Voter turnout for local politics in New Hampshire is above average when compared with the rest of the nation, with 63.6 percent of N.H. residents reporting they always or sometimes vote in local elections compared with 57.8 percent nationally. In presidential election years, New Hampshire ranks among the top three or four states in voter turnout in the general election.
- New Hampshire residents like to talk about politics with family and friends much more than people in other states: 36.8 percent of New Hampshire residents say they discuss politics on a daily or weekly basis compared with 29.3 percent nationally.
- New Hampshire ranks 13th in the nation for residents who contact public officials to express an opinion, with 16.9 percent of Granite Staters reporting they do so compared with 12.3 percent nationally. Those with higher incomes and higher education levels are much more likely to do so.

The most powerful factor that influences civic health is education level, according to the researchers. The high levels of educational attainment of New Hampshire residents are associated with increased likelihood of

volunteering, charitable giving, voting, engaging in political discussions, serving in civic leadership roles, attending public meetings, and contacting public officials to express an opinion or seek help.

The second significant factor associated with strong civic health is the economic condition of the state, according to the researchers. "Education and economic well-being are closely correlated, so there is a sort of 'trifecta' in New Hampshire, in which relatively high levels of education, economic productivity, and civic activity are all evident," the researchers said.

The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publication/735>.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. The institute gives policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

GRAPHICS

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http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/civichealth_volunteering.jpg

Voter turnout varies considerably across years, with high rates in presidential elections years and lower rates in mid-term elections. In presidential election years, New Hampshire ranks among the top three or four states in voter turnout in the general election.

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/civichealth_voterturnout.jpg

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