NASS IDEAS AWARD APPLICATION



Project Title: Civically Engaged Organizations (CEOs)

Submitted by: Connecticut Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas

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General Subject Areas: Business Services and Elections

Project Description: As the keeper of the state's business registry and as the administrator of Connecticut elections, the office of the Connecticut Secretary of the State has married two segments of its agency: Business Services and Elections. Many Connecticut businesses are civic-minded and working with their communities in various ways, whether funding a community sports team or art project, or volunteering with a local non-profit organization. However, businesses tend to underestimate and downplay the amount of influence they can and do have in their communities. The Secretary of the State's CEO program highlights this influence that businesses have, and further empowers them by providing a toolkit of trusted educational resources they can easily download and post, email, or print as needed to inform clients, staff, colleagues, and community members.



Executive Summary

History

Two main functions of the Connecticut Office of the Secretary of the State are holding the business registry and overseeing the administration of elections. Secretary Thomas sought to marry these two divisions of the agency in an effort to highlight the good community work Connecticut businesses were already doing, empower them to play an even greater role in their communities, and leverage businesses as trusted voices to disseminate important voter education and civics messages from the Secretary's office.

When Secretary Thomas took office, the state budget had already been finalized, leaving zero dollars allocated for public outreach and education. Given the traditionally low voter turnout in municipal election years and the impending adoption of early voting in 2024, this presented a significant challenge. And it was evident that money would not be appropriated to promote early voting or educate voters on how it would work and that it's a safe, secure way to vote. Secretary Thomas had already been meeting with non-profits, colleges and universities, community groups, and leaders, and realized she had another large group at her fingertips by holding Connecticut's business registry.

The office developed the **Civically Engaged Organizations** (CEO) program which is geared toward any business, nonprofit, educational institution, or religious entity that is willing to take a pledge to promote civic engagement. CEOs commit to emailing and/or posting the Secretary of the State's nonpartisan materials to staff, clients, colleagues, and/or other communities. After joining the CEO program, organizations receive monthly email newsletters highlighting important election-related dates, deadlines, and key civic holidays for the upcoming month. Participants also gain access to a comprehensive, regularly updated toolkit containing social media graphics, sample posts, documents, and videos. These resources are designed to be easily downloadable, allowing organizations to share them with their communities through printing, email, or social media. The Secretary's office tailors these materials each month to align with and amplify core civic messages. Each month, the CEO email newsletter boasts an open rate between 65% and 79%!

The office designed a logo for the program as a "badge" that CEOs could upload onto their website and paste into their email signature to be branded as a CEO. The office also created a CEO certificate that CEOs could download, print out, and display in offices. Further, the office created several announcement social media graphics CEOs could download and post stating that they had joined the CEO program and were committed to promoting civic engagement in Connecticut.

The Secretary's office created printed and online sign-up forms which list various reasons organizations should consider joining the CEO program. By highlighting these perks, organizations understood that the Secretary's office was offering a true win-win opportunity. These reasons include:

- assisting in the recruitment of young employees who are shown to care about companies' civic health
- boosting employee morale by showing employees the organization cares about their lives outside the workplace
- building partnerships in the community
- providing marketing opportunities and positive media attention for the organization
- bringing people together regardless of political party affiliations
- improving the community around them

Significance

The CEO program is a great example of how state government can work smarter, not harder. By combining replicability, no-cost implementation, and public/private collaboration, it is a practical and impactful solution that could be adopted by communities everywhere. The program has the added benefit of empowering everyday people to take charge of improving their own lives and neighborhoods. With free, open-source tools available on the CEO resource page, any community can tap into these resources to create meaningful change.

The Civically Engaged Organization program is:

1. Easy to Replicate:

- One of the program's best features is how easily it can be copied and adapted by all communities from small towns to big cities, regardless of demographic factors.
- The program is customizable for any audience and CEOs can use the program and its resources in a manner that works best for their community.
- All materials are ready to use, making it easy for CEOs to hit the ground running for immediate impact in their communities.

2. Low-Cost, High-Impact

Budgets can be tight, but this program proves that making a difference doesn't have to break the bank. Its low-cost approach ensures that even communities with limited funds can take part.

- The program is Internet based so no software or licenses are needed. However, all materials are created to be shareable so CEOs may choose to print materials to share with their audiences.
- The program largely utilizes materials and resources already in use by the Office of the Secretary of the State such as social media posts and its CRM system. This limits the cost of the program for the office.

3. Combines the Best Aspects of a Public/Private Partnership

- CEO members bring fresh ideas that are unique to sub-segments of the population, while the office of the Secretary of the State provides the expertise and the structure to make things happen.
- By working together, the office is more effective than if it would be if working alone.
- CEOs are invited to share feedback, helping to refine and improve the program for everyone's benefit.
- Virtual convenings were added in 2024 to allow CEOs an opportunity to build community, share their stories and successes, and tackle enduring issues around civic education.

4. Fosters Greater Civic Engagement

- A representative democracy works best when all voices make themselves heard 365 days a year. The CEO program encourages organizations to use their voice to strengthen the social fabric of the community.
- In turn, civic engagement helps residents feel more connected and empowered.
- The program makes a point of including all voices, helping to ensure that everyone has a say in shaping their community's future.

Impact / Results

The office of the Connecticut Secretary of the State has historically interacted with businesses in a transactional way, assisting entrepreneurs as they started their businesses and helping business owners file annual reports. The CEO program deepened the relationship the agency has with the business community by supporting them in a completely new and different way. It introduced businesses to the "other" side of the agency (elections) and enlightened them to the idea that they have power and influence in their communities.

The CEO program now boasts 255 members across the state. Organizations range from a small barbershop to the United Way to The Connecticut Sun WNBA team. This program has been a game-changer in helping state government work better, especially when it comes to communication, collaboration, and making the most of limited resources. Financially, it stretches the budget of the Office of the Secretary of the State by helping deliver important messages to the community that we couldn't otherwise afford. By partnering with other organizations and using cost-effective tools like digital outreach, we've been able to expand our reach without breaking the bank.

After finding success in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, government agencies and municipalities learned about the program and requested to join. There are now 10 towns and/or government departments signed up as CEOs, committed to promoting civic messages.

Administratively, it's a big help for our small team and strengthens teamwork across different government agencies. With limited staff, the program creates easy, "plug-and-play" resources that CEOs can use right away. This saves time, reduces duplication of effort, and ensures everyone is sharing consistent and clear information. From the resident's perspective, the program makes an even bigger impact. Instead of only hearing from the government, people get key messages from trusted sources they already rely on, like community organizations and local leaders. This builds trust and makes it easier for important messages—like election updates or public service announcements—to cut through the noise.

In short, this program helps stretch resources, strengthen partnerships, and deliver messages in ways that truly connect with residents—all while making government work smarter.

CEOpledge.ct.gov

Toolkit Link

CEO Sign-up form (online sign-up also available):



If you already practice civic education and engagement, or want to, you can become a **Civically Engaged Organization (CEO)** by agreeing to our business pledge!

What is a CEO?

It is a business or non-profit organization that wants to commit to being civically engaged, either through active participation in the local community or by helping to broaden public and employee civic awareness.

Why your business will benefit from committing to our civic engagement pledge:

- It will assist in recruiting younger employees who have been shown to care about the civic health of their companies.
- You will boost employee morale by showing your employees that you care about their lives and involvement in the community outside of the workplace.
- . You will build lasting partnerships by showing local stakeholders that your business is an active member in its community.
- . It will provide marketing opportunities and positive media attention for your business.
- · You will help improve the community around you!

Business Pledge

Email our non-partisan "Civics 101" document to staff and/or customers; Note dates of elections in the office and/or in newsletters; Give employees time off to vote on Election Days, if their schedules don't allow for before- or after-hours voting; Announce your commitment to civic engagement via email and social media; Give employees time to volunteer in the community each year; Email or post a polling place look-up tool for employees.

When you become a CEO, you will receive access to our CEO Toolkit which includes:

- · Our "Civics 101" document and other educational videos and handouts;
- · Sample social media posts for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter;
- · A CEO badge for your email signature and/or website;
- · A printable certificate from the Office of the Secretary of the State certifying your commitment to civic engagement.

Agree to our pledge! Become a CEO today by emailing the following details to: Civics101@ct.gov

Name:	Company:
Address:	City, State, Zip:
Email:	Phone:
Industry:	Why is this important to you?



Connecticut Secretary of the State

Scan to sign up at CEOPledge.ct.gov:



CIVICALLY ENGAGED ORGANIZATIONS

2 Ann's Professional Cleaning and Organizing 3PRIME 4-H Education Center at Averfarm ABP COMMUNICATIONS, LLC Academic Edge Services, LLC Access Community Action Agency ACME Lightning Rod, LLC Advocacy to Legacy, Inc. Afro-Caribbean Cultural Center AIGA Connecticut ALLEN LEVY, PHD, LCSW, PC Alzheimer's Association American Mural Project Anonymous Society Arts Council of Greater New Haven Atheava Avurveda Autoimmune Registry, Inc. Balancing Act Financials Barcelona Wine Bar Beauty for Ashes Christian Counseling Services BG2G BHistorical Bilingual Special Education Services of Connecticut Black Lion, LLC Bloomfield Registrar of Voters Brass City Rescue Alliance, Inc. Bridgeport Prospers Bridgeport Public Education Fund, Inc. Burroughs Community Center C12 Metro North Capitol Squash, Inc Carignan Tax Service Cavanaugh & Company, LLC Chabaso Bakery City of Derby Clavette & Company, LLC-CPA's and Advisors Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church Colt Park Foundation Community Action Agency of New Haven Community Mindfulness Project Community Renewal Team, Inc. Community Vocational Services, Inc. Connecticut Chapter, American College of Physicians Horizons National Connecticut Community Foundation Connecticut Democracy Center Connecticut Foundation for Deptal Outreach Connecticut Foundation For Open Government Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants Connecticut League of Conservation Voters Connecticut Sun Connecticut Youth Political Advocacy Center Covenant Shelter of New London, Inc. Coventry Winter Farmers Market CSS Con NRZ Board Member **CT** Humanities Cynthia Howard Consulting, LLC DACS Foundation, Inc. **Danbury Collective** Darien Board of REALTORS, Inc. DeepLook Medical Delight HomeCare, LLC Digital Business Platform™ Domus Kids, Inc. Earth Animal Ventures, Inc. East Glastonbury Public Library EBC MultiServices, LLC Efficiency For All

ElderHouse, Inc. Ellington Volunteer Ambulance Corps Empere LLC English Learner Support Services ERB Consulting Espalier, LLC Executive Leadership, LLC Fairfield County's Community Foundation Fairfield Museum and History Center Families Network of Western Connecticut, Inc. Family Enrichment Center, Hospital of Central Connecticut Ferguson Library Fidelity Finance Solutions, LLC Finishing Touch Men's Grooming Lounge First-Gen Place, Inc. Flawless Paintless Dent Repair FORCE Freckled Jane INK. Friends of the New Fairfield Free Public Library Fundacion Perros sin Nombre Coro. Future 5 Gears in Heaven, Inc. Global Girls Worldwide Women **Gmp Services, LLC** Goldson Investment Group Greater Bridgeport Symphony Grounded World, LLC Hamden Youth Services Bureau Hampford Research, Inc. Happy Children Daycare, LLC Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Hartford District Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society New Milford Affordable Housing, Inc. Hartford Federation of Teachers Hartford NEXT, Inc. Hartford Yard Goats Foundation Heartbeats + Bare Feet: Womban Wellness, LLC **Heavens Nails** HELP, Inc. Higher Edge Hi-Ho Energy Services HMTX Industries Hopson Consultancy, LLC Housatonic Youth Service Bureau HRA of New Britain Impact Growth Partners Incision Network International Attestations, LLC Iwo Jima Memorial Historical Foundation. Inc. J. Capital Investment Partners, LLC J. Molina Immigration Law, LLC J.L.Fabbri Designs **J.N.L.Excursions, LLC** Jackson Services, LLC JavField, LLC Jewish Historical Society of Greater New Haven, Inc. JUMA Accounting Solutions JW Healthy Homes, LLC Kadiwaku Family Foundation Kazanas Development Strategies, LLC Kent News, Inc. Kent Registrar of Voters Key Realty of Connecticut, LLC Kidambi & Associates, PC Kids In Crisis Klein Memorial Auditorium Foundation, Inc. Latino Advocacy Foundation of Fairfield county

Law Offices of John Q. Gale, LLC Latinos for Educational Advocacy and Diversity Leadership, Inc. League of Women Voters of Greater Hartford Lennie Rose Estate Appraisals, Inc. LEO Clinic Liquid Diamonds Studio Lishon Historical Society, Inc. LISS VICTORIA BEAUTY LiveGirl Livity, LLC Madison Democratic Town Committee Madre Latina Organization, Inc. Magic Cleaning Company 1 Maika, Inc. Main Street Community Foundation Majestic Aura Manchester Youth Service Bureau MARC Community Resources LTD Marrsing Communications McBride Holding Company, LLC Mercy Learning Center Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce Morris Armstrong EA, LLC Ms President US Nave International Ministries NEST New Beginnings Realty of Plymouth, LLC New Britain Roots New England Yankee Construction New Leaf Family Dental Newtown Savings Bank Noble Happy Family Home, Inc. Northwest CT Arts Council Norwalk ACTS Number 1 Business Broker Old-New Gibson-Valley Specialty Company Open Doors PAIDEIA Partnership for Strong Communities Person to Person Podorowsky Thompson & Baron Princen Sammy Eduful and Herty Foundation Publish Your Purpose **OUFALYBOXTRUCK R Kids Family Center** RACE AGAINST TIME INC Regional Youth Adult Social Action Partnership Registrar of Voters, Guilford Restoratively Speaking, LLC Ross Tartell, Ph.D Consulting, LLC Safari Stan's Pet Center School and State Finance Project Science Park Development Corporation Scott Accounting and Tax Firm, LLC. Sexual Assault Crisis Center of E CT Sherman Senior Center Shultz & Co. Simmons Cruise Planners Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities **SNI** Companies SociaLite Lighting Systems, Inc. Sound Steppers Square Dance Club, Inc. Southern New England Conference, UCC Special Needs Family and Community Advocate St. Paul's On The Green

Stamford Cradle to Career Stamford Public Education Foundation Starfish Connection Strong Sauce Brands, LLC Structural Sport & Rehabilitation Therapy, LLC Suburban Sports Symmetry Physical Therapy Team Curcin of William Raveis Real Estate Telegraph Thames Valley Council for Community Action The Cake Queen The Carver The Center for Empowerment and Education The Get In Touch Foundation, Inc. The Greater Bridgeport, OIC, INC. The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc. The Jimmy McDaniels Foundation The Newtown Bee Thought Partner Solutions Town of Guilford Connecticut Town of Kent Town of Middlebury, Elderly and Social Services Dept. Town of Simsbury Town of Stratford Town of Voluntown Two Coyotes Wilderness School TYLERCLUB29 United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut United Way of West Central Connecticut USA Softball of Connecticut Vanity Studio Varick Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Veterans Strong Community Center Vintage Flver Media, LLC Walters Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church Walton altEnergy Waterford Public Library Waterford RISE WATT CT Weslevan University Allbritton Center West Hartford United Methodist Church Western CT Coalition, Inc. Weston Today Wethersfield Community Television WildBloom Skincare Wilton League of Women Voters Women's Business Development Council World War II Legacy Foundation, Inc. World Wide Youth Networks WPAA-TV and Community Media Center Yakairas Notary Service, LLC Yale Home Care Physicians DBA 828 Urgent Care Young and Destined Inc. YWCA New Britain



as of December 2024

Sample graphics from the CEO Toolkit:

2023 Election Day, municipal elections



2024 Early Voting Campaigns



2024 Learn How to Spot A.I. Videos and Photos series



2024 Disability Pride Month

Did You Know? You have the right to an accessible polling place!	Did You Know? An accessible ballot marking device is available at every polling place in CT	Did You Know? If you have a disability and can't stand in line at your polling place, talk to the moderator!	Did You Know? If you need help filling out your ballot due to a disability, you can ask for assistance!
Find out more at MyVote.ct.gov and click on:	Find out more at MyVote.ct.gov and click on:	Find out more at MyVote.ct.gov and click on:	Find out more at MyVote.ct.gov and click on:
Guidance for All Abilities	Guidance for All Abilities	Guidance for All Abilities	Guidance for All Abilities

Sample resources from the CEO Toolkit:

Flyer detailing special accommodations available at the polls (Spanish and English versions posted)

NEED A LITTLE EXTRA HELP AT THE POLL?

DO YOU KNOW ABOUT:

1 BALLOT MARKING Device

If you can't read the ballot or can't fill it out, request an accessible voting machine to make your choices audibly or by touchscreen.

3 CURBSIDE VOTING

If you arrive at the polling place and cannot enter due to a temporary incapacity: you can ask to vote outside at the curb.

> Office of the CT Secretary of the State

2 SOMEONE TO ASSIST

If you need someone to help read or mark the ballot: you can bring someone with you (except an agent of your employer or union, or a candidate on the ballot).

4 LINE PLACEHOLDER

If you can't stand in line for a long time: ask the Moderator that your place be held while you take a seat.

Find out more information: www.MyVote.ct.gov 860.509.6200

NEXT STEPS: 1. Wait for the ballot to come in the mail 2. Complete the ballot following the instructions

 Mail the ballot in the provided envelope to your Town Clerk, or use the Secure Absentee Ballot Dropbox in front of your town hall (contact your Town Clerk for more dropbox locations)

Office of the CT Secretary of the State

GENERAL ELECTION: NOVEMBER 5, 2024

Video promoting the 2023 municipal elections with "vote local" in multiple languages



YOU CAN VOTE ABSENTEE

IF YOU'RE PREVENTED FROM VOTING IN-PERSON BECAUSE OF A **DISABILITY** OR **SICKNESS** OR BECAUSE YOU'LL BE **OUT OF TOWN** ON ELECTION DAY See a full list of reasons at **myvote.ct.gov/absentee**

APPLY 1 OF 2 WAYS:

IN-PERSON with your Town Clerk or ONLINE with your CT Drivers License

SCAN TO APPLY ONLINE myvote.ct.gov/getmyab







Dear CEO,

Connecticut holds its primary elections this month! And we're asking your help to ensure voters are aware of important election related dates and information.

For the month of August, we've added many social media graphics and sample text regarding early voting and Primary Day itself. And don't worry, we've kept all the accessible voting posts from last month in case you want to include a few of those helpful messages as well.

Please help spread the word that if you have registered with a party holding a primary, you can vote in the August 13 primary. Key messages around early voting include:

- 1. Early voting is August 5 11 and is completely in person
- 2. Each town has at least one early voting location (not your normal polling place), and you can find out where it is at <u>MyVote.CT.gov</u>
- 3. Early voting hours are 10am to 6pm. Except the Tuesday and Thursday before Election Day when they are extended, 8am to 8pm

Early voting is a big benefit to voters who want to vote in person but can't vote or are unsure whether they can vote on Election Day. It offers seven days to vote before the primary, including a full weekend and evenings. Let's be sure all voters know about this great convenience!

Explore and Download Posts Here

Thank you for being a CEO.

ANUM

Stephanie Thomas Connecticut Secretary of the State

Screenshot of the virtual meeting Secretary Thomas held with CEOs in December 2024 to review the year, discuss the upcoming legislative session, and hear feedback, suggestions, and concerns from CEOs.



Examples of CEO's work

Kent News created a voter guide for the town of Kent and published it along with their town's sample ballot

2024 ELECTION Town of Kent, CT

ON THE BALLOT

- Electors for President and Vice President of the United States
- Senator for Connecticut
- Representative for Connecticut's 5th District
- State Senator for the 30th District
- State Representative for the 64th District
- Democratic and Republican Registrar of Voters for the Town of Kent
- Constitutional question regarding No Excuse Absentee Ballots

CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

"Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to permit the General Assembly to allow each voter to vote by absentee ballot?"

A YES vote on this amendment will give the General Assembly the ability to change the state constitution to allow all voters to vote by absentee ballot without providing an excuse, or reason. A NO vote means current regulations remain.

A NOTE ON ELECTORS

IMPORTANT DATES

Election Day

Tuesday, Nov. 5

6 a.m. to 8 p.m. First floor meeting room of town hall

Early Voting

Oct. 21 to Nov. 3

10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Oct. 29 & 31, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Registrar of Voters Office Second floor of town hall

All voting takes place in person at town hall at 41 Kent Green Blvd. unless by absentee ballot. Only US citizens at least 18 years of age can vote in US elections.

Voter Registration Deadline

Friday, Oct. 18

Mail: postmarked by this date DMV: by end of business day Online: by 11:59 p.m. In person: by 8 p.m.

Absentee Ballots

Available beginning Friday, Oct. 4

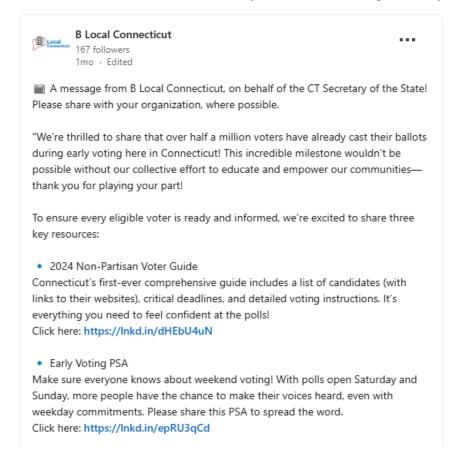
Can complete application ahead of time

- Online application portal
 - Download application to send in by mail
- Apply in person at town hall

The Hartford Yard Goats Foundation invited Secretary Thomas to hold a civics session for their Youth Ambassadors



B Local Connecticut shared the Secretary of the State's voter guide, early voting PSAs and more online





The Connecticut Sun coach and players recorded PSAs related to voting and civics

Connoisseur Media recorded and aired radio PSAs for free







Fairfield County Community Foundation encouraged others to join the CEO program



Fairfield County's Community Foundation 3,636 followers 1mo

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Shoutout to the amazing organizations that have joined us and signed the CEO (Civically Engaged Organizations) Pledge!

By taking this step, they've shown their commitment to fostering civic engagement, building stronger community connections, boosting employee morale, and making a positive impact both inside and outside the workplace. Their leadership unites people across political lines and helps improve the community for everyone!

To all who've signed: we encourage you to repost this and show your commitment. Let's keep building together! Feel free to comment if you want to be tagged!

There's still time to show that your organization stands for a stronger, more civically active workforce and community. Sign the CEO Pledge today! https://lnkd.in/eifYniKV

#ceopledge #leadershipforchange #civicengagement #communityimpact #fairfieldcounty #connecticutbusiness #communityleaders #fairfieldcountyct #bethechange

CEO PLEDGE!!

Swipe to see which local Civically Engaged Organizations recently signed the pledge! *

English Learner Support Services Hopson Consultancy LLC Inspirica LiveGirl ElderHouse, Inc. Bridgeport Public Education Fund Inc Ferguson Library Stamford Public Education Foundation

CT Institute for Refugees and Immigrants Community Mindfulness Project Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities The Greater Bridgeport OIC, Inc. Greater Bridgeport Symphony Burroughs Community Center Two Coyotes Wilderness School

To see the full list of organizations that signed the CEO pledge, see the link below: https://bit.ly/ceo-pledge-orgs Ms. President organized an event painting lawn signs with civic messages

