

Civic Fest

The Festival with a Purpose: From music & ideas to civic action and community transformation.

Alternative names: **CivicFest, CiviFest, Civic Awakening, GiveFest, VolunteerFest, Make-a-Difference Fest, Civic Transformation Festival, Build a Better World Festival** (**Have a preference for a festival name? Let us know!**)

Imagine a weekend or weeklong festival like Britain's How the Light Gets In Philosophy and Music Festival (<https://howthelightgetsin.iai.tv>) that combines music, provocative speakers and conversation, camping, community, and nature – all aimed at giving us the inspiration to work together to build stronger communities and more fulfilling lives for ourselves. The first will take place at the Frederick County 4-H Camp & Activity Center, a wonderful 85 acres of woods and fields, an easy 1-hour drive from Washington and Baltimore on the weekend of July 29-31st.

The Vision: We need a "civic awakening" to transform the future of our communities and our country.

The great movements of the past several centuries were anchored by big events that mobilized large numbers of people. We need to do the same if we are to succeed in getting a tutor and mentor for every student who needs one – our immediate goal – and in creating the civic leadership movement we need to navigate the challenges we face with growing inequality, persistent poverty, climate change, and polarized government. If we want thriving communities and a healthy democracy, we need to step up our game.

This festival can be the linchpin for this effort and will serve several purposes:

- Catalyze volunteering. Each participant is required to either commit to long-term volunteering for the next year or make a substantial contribution to the tutoring & mentoring fund.
- Provide participants with the concrete and inspiring experience of working together intensely as a community for a shared purpose.
- Give participants the experience of living a well-balanced life. Each day begins with exercise in nature, the food will be healthy, the "TED talk-like" speakers with spur conversations that we hope are rich, deep and energizing.
- Serve as a springboard to help people support one another in their efforts to have meaningful community-focused lives. People will have the option of continuing to conversations in biweekly or monthly small groups if they'd like.
- Raise funds to support local organizations. 30-50% of proceeds go to local nonprofit organizations including local tutoring and mentoring organizations and other partner nonprofit partners. (Each partner is expected to sell at least 50(?) tickets.)

The Festival combines: the arts, music, and thought-provoking talks with volunteering and service; a wonderful short-term experience with a focus on helping people achieve concrete long-term outcomes that benefit all of us; highlighting of local businesses and farms alongside recharging the local nonprofit and civic community.

The “Price of Admission”

- ***Do good in the world.*** Commit to being or becoming Long-term Volunteer (a 1-year or 1-academic-year commitment to serve as a tutor, mentor or weekly volunteer) or give a significant amount (\$100?) to help support us and our partner organizations). We ask for the name of the organization where you volunteer or a letter showing that you are in the process of signing up.

Alternatively, you can make an extra \$100 contribution and it will be used to support local volunteer work at the Tutoring & Mentoring Initiative and its partner organizations.

- **Participate** fully in the arts, exercise, dialogue, study and reflection that will be integrated into each day. Everyone is expected to get up around sunrise to walk, exercise, meditate, do yoga, or pray, either alone or in a group. (You can choose your own activity but we encourage you to try a mix.)
- **Pay the modest participation fee.** The basic price will be determined later but we anticipate a sliding scale to accommodate people of limited means.

Logistics

- This first year, we expect to have one or two weekend events, possibly with one targeted for Millennials and the other for families and people of all ages. In the future, we hope to expand to a full week event and be able to provide people with the option to stay for a day, a weekend or the whole week.
- Our goal is to provide options for everyone: Camping, shared lodge, rent a room nearby, or build your own teepee or yurt! (See <https://howthelightgetsin.iai.tv/accommodation/riverside-boutique-yurts/> for examples of luxury yurts or <http://www.instructables.com/id/Yurt/> for a simple temporary yurt made from discarded materials.)

What We Believe: The Path Forward

We all want to live in a better world where every child grows up feeling loved and supported and has a decent shot at a good life; where we can achieve a fulfilling balance or rhythm of life and work, reflection and action, fun and service; where communities work together; where nations are at peace with one another. But little of this is likely – at least on a large scale – unless many more of us start taking more responsibility for our communities. We hope that you will find this event provides a taste of what a better world can be. And if we remember this experience, and take it with us in our actions over the next year, we will begin to change the world for the better.

The odds are that this sort of event won't be possible in the future if we can't work together as a community, if we aren't good stewards of the environment and of all our people, and if we don't take care of the wider world beyond our metro area, too.

Imagine: Change starts with a dream for a better life and a better world. “Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” — Harriet Tubman

Collaborate: “Go fast, go alone. Go far, go together.” (African proverb) Build or be part of a team working together. It will take all kinds of people working together and we need to start with an appreciation for the strengths each of us brings to creating a better world and more patience for the weaknesses, which we all have as well. To be successful in creating strong communities, we need...

- The imagination and creativity of the artists.
- The determination and systems thinking of the engineers.
- The laser-like focus on reaching a goal of the businessperson.
- The analytic logical mind of the engineer or scientist or scholar.
- The love and patience of a parent.
- The ability to push through pain to achieve a goal of the athlete.

Build **wisdom, compassion and creativity**: **Make time each morning for reflection, prayer, meditation, and study.** Connect to the deeper threads of your own experience and history. Where do we find meaning in our lives? How can we bring our values to our day-to-day lives and work?

Develop the **focus, courage, and tenacity** to put that wisdom, compassion and creativity into our lives each day in both the big decisions we make in life and work and in the small habits and interactions we have with others.

Models

Think of this as a cross between a music festival, TED Talks, and a county fair, but there are a range of models that we can learn from in designing the event:

- How the Light Gets In Philosophy and Music Festival (England) - <https://howthelightgetsin.iai.tv/> - Combination of music and ideas.
- Chautauqua - <http://ciweb.org/about-us/about-chautauqua/our-history> - A century-old approach to combining education, activities, a religious/spiritual dimension, and entertainment in an outdoor setting that started in upstate NY and became popular around the country..
- TED and local TEDx events - <https://www.ted.com/about/programs-initiatives/tedx-program>
- Burning Man - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning_Man, <http://burningman.org> - - Fluidity of event, volunteer-driven, organic growth of week-long arts and community event.
- FooCamp - https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foo_Camp - The "un-conference": Even the tech leaders have to camp in tents! Participants vote on session.
- Aspen Ideas Festival - <http://www.aspenideas.org> - Thoughtful, even big-name, speakers.
- Running and walking events for charities - Big events can raise funds and awareness for causes.
- County fairs - A focus on the local and activities for all and found all across the country..
- Religious revival meetings, the Great Awakenings - The spiritual and religious dimension that inspires personal action.
- "Elite" festivals: Aspen Ideas Festival, Davos
- Shakori Hills Grassroots Festival of Music & Dance (NC) - <http://shakorihillsgrassroots.org>
- River Rally -<https://www.rivernetwork.org/events-learning/river-rally/about/> - "hosted annually by River Network, is a national conference that focuses on education, inspiration and celebration within the river and watershed community. Unique in its focus on connecting peers, providing practical education, inspiring courage, and celebrating achievements, River Rally draws hundreds of people together every year from across the United States and the world. Join NGO staff, academics, agency and foundation representatives, industry innovators, and concerned citizens for the biggest (and most fun) event of the year!"

Possible Schedule: Outdoors at Sunrise

The approach would be to alternate between a range of activities over the course of a day. The goal is to provide a mix of activities for introverts and extroverts, athletes and casual walkers, people passionate about the arts and those whose passions are in leadership and service.

Stretch yourself: Talk to people you wouldn't normally talk to, try an activity that you wouldn't normally try. (If you are a tutor or mentor, it's a great opportunity to "walk the talk" of trying new and uncomfortable habits. It will make for good conversation with your student.

Possible Organization Partners

- Tutoring & Mentoring Initiative partners in DC and Baltimore
- Local religious congregations
- OrchKids (A project of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra)
- TED Talks
- United Way, community foundations
- Local corporations
- Civically minded local small businesses
- Local universities
- Aspen Institute

Location Ideas

Some ideas from Matt Mullenix:

- Arrange the service program around providing free labor to a local small farmer to improve his land (fences, drainage, plantings, clearing, harvest, building repairs, etc) in exchange for use of pasture space and woods for camping/hiking, etc.
- Or: look at "team building" areas (ropes courses, etc) and summer camps out of season for providing the basic infrastructure and setting. Jacobs Camp in MS is a good example; there's also a Catholic orphanage in central LA we toured once that owns a lot of property and turned it into rural conference and team building space to rent out to corporate clients; that might be a common model you could find locally.
- Or: state parks or city park commissions. In Florida and here in LA I know the state parks have extensive infrastructure and do rent space commercially for camping and outdoors events.

Principles and Ideas for Programming

Every activity on the daily schedule reflects the values and principles that we would like to have in our home communities (from Matt Mullenix):

- **Tent placement:** How do we arrange camping so that the benefit is to more than the individual participant? How do we assure that tools are shared and that a board provides info on available toiletries or group chores? Where are fires placed, if we have them? How is electricity provided, if it is?
- **Food and eating:** Where does the food come from? How do we prepare it communally? How do we distribute it equitably?
- **Nature:** What does it need? What does it provide? How does a walk in the morning connect you with the natural environment, and how does that connection impact your community?
- **Education:** How is it delivered and by whom? Does everyone have something to teach, or should teaching be reserved for professionals? How do we apply what we learn and how do we teach it to others?

Workshops

Participants can create their own workshops and sessions. (The FooCamp "unconference" is a model for this approach.) Post an idea on the board and the most popular ones will get to choose their own space

or smaller groups can sit on the lawn or in the pavilion. We will also have a number of workshops planned in advance. These may include:

- Community Leadership 101
- Models of leadership: Servant leadership, resonant leadership, transformational leadership... What's a framework that can work for you?
- How to think about your community as a system
- How to recruit volunteer tutors and mentors
- Organization capacity-building: What you need to know to run a successful volunteer organization
- Mentoring and Tutoring Models: What does the evidence show about what works?
- Conversations with organization leaders: How did your organization get started? What lessons have you learned from your experience?
- Tutoring Tips Workshop
- Mentoring Workshop
- Family Engagement Workshop

Decisions Still to Make

Who is **target audience**? Millennials, who are most likely to volunteer? Middle-aged professionals, who are more likely to make substantial donations? Both? Both, with separate workshop/small group tracks (explicit or implicit)? Separate festivals (perhaps next year)?

Should we set a high or low bar to participation? Set a high extra contribution requirement (\$100?) if a person is not a current volunteer or signed up to become one?

Tied to the target audience questions is the question of how best to market. Should we focus on partnering with existing tutoring and mentoring organizations, which means that the event becomes more of an opportunity for strengthening the skills and commitment of existing volunteers or focus on outreach to businesses, religious congregations, colleges and other locations where we might attract more people who don't currently volunteer but who would be interested in doing so?

If we aim for a broad cross-section of the population, what **music** would work best? 1970s folk rock favorites (James Taylor, etc.)? A mix of genres?

WE WELCOME YOUR THOUGHTS!