

# Civic Chat – by Ken Granderson

Understanding Democracy Made Easier, With the Power of AI



Civic Chat helps citizens learn about local to national government and make more informed civic decisions, in their native language, simply by talking to their phone.

Civic Chat is founded on two hypotheses of mine:

1. If more people better understood how government worked, they would be more likely to participate in the process of government.
2. If the civic education process was made as easy as possible for them, and if they had easy access to a range of information about those looking for their vote, they would make decisions more closely aligned with their interests.

Based on these hypotheses and motivated by my 30 years of building advanced software applications for the public good (see <https://kengranderson.com> for details), Civic Chat leverages the power of Generative Artificial Intelligence, the availability of instant voice recognition and translation, and the ubiquitous penetration of mobile devices to drive greater civic literacy than ever before possible in human history.

Simply stated - Civic Chat will enable anyone to learn what they need to know about local to national government, requiring nothing more than the smart phone that most people already have, and the voices that most people are able to use.

## Application Features

**Ease of Use:** Simply by sharing their address, Civic Chat looks up local, regional and national elected officials for the user and provides information about their roles and responsibilities in a conversation held in their native language.

**Election Season Education:** During election season, Civic Chat will be able to inform users about relevant local ballot questions, local to national political issues, and incumbent and candidate public statements regarding various issues. External services like Media Bias Fact Check will be used to ensure maximum transparency about the sources and potential biases of provided information.

**Political Dialogue at Any Level:** While guard rails built into Civic Chat would not allow it to make specific recommendations, its AI engine will enable conducting conversations with users about various issues based on their provided demographics, concerns and level of political ‘wonkiness.’

## Long-Term Vision

**Open Source:** In the interest of small ‘D’ democracy, I believe that Civic Chat has unique potential to serve as a practical and powerful example of a software application that has the potential to move societies across the globe forward in a positive way. Philosophically, I believe that software that helps teach people, potentially in any free country, about how their country operates and how to make choices that better align with their interests is a technology that we cannot afford to have controlled by any single entity who may promote or deprecate features based on their personal interests. Therefore, I believe that after development, the entire code base of Civic Chat should be placed into the public trust as open-source software.

## Funding and Sustainability

As Civic Chat is envisioned as an open-source initiative, a realistic, robust and sustainable funding model is essential to ensure ongoing development, accessibility, and support. With the need for open contributions and community involvement, the platform's sustainability plan will include:

### 1. Short-Term and Long-Term Funding Sources:

- In the short term, Civic Chat will seek foundational support from civic-minded organizations and grants that align with its mission, as well as partnerships with civic institutions that can provide initial resources. Crowdsourced funding efforts may also be launched to generate community interest and support.
- For long-term sustainability, Civic Chat will establish relationships with tech organizations whose values align with its mission, particularly those committed to civic engagement and public education. These collaborations can provide ongoing financial support, access to technology resources, and potential contributors to the development team.

### 2. Building Strategic Collaborations:

- Civic Chat will actively seek out partnerships with tech companies, academic institutions, and public organizations dedicated to advancing civic literacy. Through these collaborations, the platform can benefit from both technical expertise and organizational support, furthering Civic Chat's reach and impact.

### 3. Leadership Succession for Long-Term Continuity:

- Recognizing the importance of sustainable leadership, Civic Chat will recruit and train a small team of individuals who can take over project management and development responsibilities. This succession planning ensures that Civic Chat can continue to evolve and serve the public without depending on any single individual's involvement. Key roles will include open-source contributors, project maintainers, and community engagement specialists committed to supporting and advancing Civic Chat's mission.

## Current Status / Demo

The Civic Chat Proof of Concept (POC) is live at <https://civicchat.nyc> and provides a glimpse into the platform's potential by enabling users to access information on New York City's elected offices in multiple languages.

Designed to showcase one of Civic Chat's core capabilities - allowing users to read or hear about the responsibilities of local officials in a variety of languages - the POC demonstrates how Civic Chat will simplify access to civic information.

*Due to technical constraints, the POC is best experienced using Microsoft Edge on Windows 10 or 11, where the most languages are automatically built in.* The full version of Civic Chat will support the same languages regardless of the device used, offering all users an accessible and reliable tool for civic education.

If you are not able to view Civic Chat on Edge in Windows, a video demonstrating the full breadth of language support can be viewed at <https://links.blackfacts.com/civic-chat>

**THANK YOU, and PLEASE SHARE with anyone you think can provide guidance or help!**

– Ken Granderson ([ken@blackfacts.com](mailto:ken@blackfacts.com))