

2023 UPDATE

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

BLUE RIBBONS Robust civic engagement · Interest in volunteerism and nonprofit support · Improved voter outreach and education efforts

RED FLAGS Low voter turnout · Difficult to identify active voters · Misinformation affecting participation

Citizen participation grows, but with concern over division

During 2022, Springfield and Greene County saw increased levels of participation as citizens took the lead on top issues to make meaningful change in our community. But concerns about political and social divides — a 2021 Red Flag — remain.

Civic engagement remains robust and **interest in volunteering** is still high. Despite some divisive overtones in public meetings and via news media, area residents contributed in many ways to the community with donations of time and resources. The Council of Churches of the Ozarks, which opened a new 57,000-square-foot headquarters, continued to see donation increases, with 2022 resulting in the highest giving (\$2.8 million) of the past five years for the organization that has more than 70 member churches. Also, 7,219 volunteers contributed 28,716 hours toward Crosslines.

The United Way of the Ozarks contributed \$2.1 million to support 21 programs at 14 local nonprofits during 2021. More than 800 volunteers contributed 3,704 hours during the United Way's 2021 Day of Caring event.

The Community Partnership of the Ozarks, an umbrella organization for numerous programs and collaboratives, continued to make a sizable impact, leveraging more than \$13.3 million to support the region. In 2022, 86,759 people were served or affected by its programs, services, education and community awareness campaigns — up from more than 68,000 in 2020. Though slightly fewer volunteers participated year over year (9,259 compared with 9,596), those participating gave much more time (56,940, compared with 35,895).

The number of certified neighborhood organizations in Springfield hit a record number — 24 — and the implementation steps began for the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality. Prosper Springfield and the Equity and Prosperity Commission also continued steady work toward measured goals. The Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality was a multisector group that developed guiding principles to improve equitable access to opportunities, recognizing the inherent dignity, value and worth of each individual. Prosper

RECENT SUCCESS STORY

Despite national trends of declining rates of volunteerism, Springfield and the Ozarks continue to see signs of a desired rebound of volunteerism following the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

A new program linking volunteer coordinators, Volunteer Leadership of the Ozarks, has sprung up, uniting area nonprofits in need of volunteers and providing best practices for volunteer recruitment and management. Give 5, a civic matchmaking program for retirees continues to grow its ranks as it connects highly skilled seniors 60 and above with meaningful volunteer opportunities. The United Way Day of Caring, the community's original and beloved volunteer mobilization effort, saw record-breaking numbers in 2023. More than 1,300 volunteers participated, tackling 130 projects that helped 44 local nonprofits.

Clean Green Springfield, a relatively new volunteer effort, saw nearly 1,500 individuals registered to volunteer in one or more cleanup or beautification opportunities during April and May. Volunteer opportunities included one-time street and stream cleanups, various beautification projects at sites throughout the city, and two Point of Pride Cleanup events. The group provided volunteer support for many scheduled neighborhood cleanups hosted by Community Partnership of the Ozarks.

Nearly 1,000 followed up on their registration, completing one or more of their volunteer commitments. Assuming an average of 2.5 hours of



volunteer work per participant, it's estimated that Clean Green volunteers logged more than 2,500 volunteer hours through the spring initiative.

Nearly 1,500 bags of trash were collected by Clean Green volunteers throughout the campaign, estimated at more than 18 tons of litter removed from Springfield streets, neighborhoods and waterways.

Volunteers were also welcomed back into Springfield Public Schools in 2023, after the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily closed doors to many people who were not employees. About 1,500 community members provided about 7,000 volunteer hours over the year; volunteers linked to the Math and Reading Buddy Program at SPS accounted for about 1,000 of those hours. In that time, the volunteers helped 237 students work on improving their reading or math skills.

During the 2021–22 school year, 1,500 people began the application process to volunteer with the district, and about 900 were approved. In the 2022–23 school year, about 2,100 began the application process, with about 1,500 being approved — a 66% increase in approved volunteers year over year.

IMAGE COURTESY OF GIVE 5/UNITED WAY OF THE OZARKS

Springfield is a collective-impact model initiative aimed at decreasing poverty and increasing educational attainment, following through on the recommendations by the 2015 Impacting Poverty Commission. The Equity and Prosperity Commission was created to serve as the “boots on the ground” to reach the identified goals.

Citizens in Springfield also took advantage of opportunities to share input for a housing study, visioning for the future of Lake Springfield, redevelopment of the areas surrounding a public/private Grant Avenue Parkway project, the daylighting of Jordan Creek, and other placemaking efforts. Forward SGF, the City of Springfield’s comprehensive plan developed with citizen input, was approved in November 2022.

Overall voter registrations continued to increase in Greene County, with 199,804 residents registered to vote, but **voter turnout** for non-presidential elections remains a Red Flag, with only 17.6% of registered voters — fewer than 1 in 5 — participating in the April 2023 county election. That turnout, however, showed the third successive increase for an April election.

Efforts to address the Red Flag of **polarization** have sprung up. A multi-organizational group convened a diverse group of community leaders with the goal

of improving public discourse, in online forums as well as at face-to-face gatherings and government meetings. The “Civics and Civility” group has begun working on community events and outreach.

The Springfield City Council became more diverse in terms of age and ethnicity, and Springfield Police and Fire academies are starting to better reflect the demographics of the communities they serve, thanks to intentional recruiting and marketing.

A new southwest Missouri chapter for the Urban Land Institute will promote and create advocacy for numerous Red Flag issues: lack of sustained population growth, gaps in economic disparity, transportation and public transit-related red flags, parks, trails, placemaking, arts funding, and housing issues. ULI is one of the oldest and largest networks of land-use industry experts with a focus on urban development. The local/regional chapter will help shape the community through the goals set forth in the Forward SGF comprehensive plan.

The Citizen Participation 2023 Update was produced by Cora Scott of the City of Springfield, with input from Greg Burris, Leslie Carrier, Bridget Dierks, Jessica Hawkins, Stephanie Hein, Lisa Langley, Carrie Richardson, Cora Scott, Marc Truby and Randall Whitman.

KEY METRICS

Voter Participation in Greene County Elections, 2019–22

	REGISTERED VOTERS	TOTAL BALLOTS	ABSENTEE BALLOTS	TURNOUT
April 2019	174,491	30,160	1,442	17.28%
March 2020	164,697	46,372	1,892	28.16%
August 2020	166,222	53,620	3,638	32.26%
November 2020	168,458	142,752	32,409	84.74%
April 2021	180,432	23,914	1,233	13.25%
April 2022	170,391	24,961	1,207	14.65%
August 2022	198,911	47,219	2,443	23.74%
November 2022	198,004	98,868	9,896	49.93%

SOURCE: GREENE COUNTY CLERK

ABOUT THE 2023 UPDATE

This interim update reviews current data for the Blue Ribbons and Red Flags from the 2021 report. The 20th anniversary report, to be released in 2024, will develop an updated list of Blue Ribbons and Red Flags.