



AI Civic Action Accelerator October – December 2026

Description

The AI Civic Action Accelerator is a free, 6-session, part-time program that helps individuals and teams refine and advance promising solutions to civic artificial intelligence (AI) challenges. The accelerator will support early-stage projects that aim to strengthen the relationship between government, communities, and AI. We are seeking practical, community-driven ideas that help governments use AI more effectively, improve public participation and civic engagement through AI, or build policy tools and approaches that enable governments and AI to work together in more transparent, equitable, and effective ways. The program is open to individuals and teams developing projects with the potential to create meaningful public impact at the local or state level.

During this short course, participants will workshop their ideas, getting direct feedback from peers and Aspen Policy Academy instructors, while also learning our core framework for achieving policy impact. By the end of the program, candidates will have developed a concrete civic AI policy solution, produced a set of tangible outputs, and begun implementing a policy engagement strategy to present their solution to a decisionmaker, culminating in an opportunity to share their work directly with a key policymaker.

Strong candidates are individuals or teams of up to 4 who have a somewhat developed solution to an AI policy problem but need support in refining it or developing an effective advocacy campaign to get it implemented.

Before applying, please carefully review the AI Civic Action Accelerator details and eligibility below. If you are applying as a team, you only need to submit 1 application.

Deadline

Priority Deadline: Tuesday, August 25 at 11:59pm PT

Final Deadline: Tuesday, September 1 at 11:59pm PT

Timeline

Application Open: July 16 – September 1

Participants Admitted: Late September



Program Dates: 6 Thursday sessions from 9:30 – 11:30am PT/12:30 – 2:30pm ET on October 22, October 29, November 5, November 12, November 19, and December 3

Curriculum

During the AI Civic Action Accelerator, participants will a) learn about the Policy Academy's proven framework for achieving policy impact, b) workshop their own ideas with peers and expert Aspen Policy Academy instructors to refine them using this framework, and c) pitch a polished solution directly to a decisionmaker. The program will include 6, 2-hour workshoping sessions, supported by targeted assignments and readings to keep participants progressing between sessions.

Each 2-hour session will be split between instruction and hands-on workshoping. The instructional portion will cover the Academy's policy impact framework, including lessons on scoping problems, identifying stakeholders, defining alternative solutions, developing relevant outputs, and creating an advocacy plan. The workshoping portion will focus on applying these lessons: Participants will complete assignments to advance their civic AI policy ideas and present them each at each session for feedback from peers and Aspen Policy Academy instructors. By the end of the program, participants will have a concrete civic AI policy solution and deliverables, and will have pitched their solution to a real decisionmaker.

Eligibility

For the AI Civic Action Accelerator, we are looking for individuals or teams of up to 4 who have a promising idea for a civic AI policy solution that still needs refining. For example, you or your team may still need to narrow your idea, assess its feasibility, identify key stakeholders, or develop a policy engagement strategy.

Qualified applicants include subject-matter experts on tech and AI issues (e.g., engineers, tech start-up founders, tech policy communications professionals, and tech lawyers) with specific ideas for broader policy change based on their expertise. They may also include community members pushing for a specific civic AI policy change in their local municipality (e.g., community member applicants might have a new idea for how their city can handle engaging the public using AI).

This course is an introductory program, so it is best suited for those with little or no policy experience. Applicants with significant past policy experience (e.g., past experience working in a policy role or a master's in public policy) are likely to be too advanced for this program. All applicants also need to meet the following eligibility requirements for the program:

- Applicant(s) must be at least 21 years of age by the start of the program.
- Applicant(s) must be fluent in English.
- Applicant(s) live in the United States or are US citizens or permanent residents living abroad.



If you are applying as a team (maximum 4 people), you only need to submit 1 application. You will be asked to share names and contact information for all team members.

Where and When

The course will take place over 6 Thursday sessions from 9:30 – 11:30am PT/12:30 – 2:30pm ET on the following dates: October 22, October 29, November 5, November 12, November 19, and December 3.

Successful applicants are expected to attend all sessions and complete all assignments to graduate from the program and receive a completion badge; our attendance policy allows participants to miss no more than 2 hours of programming. See the FAQ section below for details on our attendance policy.

Application Schedule

Admitted applicants will be notified by late September 2026. A subset of applicants may be asked to complete interviews in mid-September.



Application

Please review all the materials on this page before filling out this form. Your answers will be automatically saved, but may not remain if you navigate away from this page. We thus recommend preparing the answers to the essay questions in a separate program, and pasting them in before submission.

** = required question*

By checking the below box, you affirm that you and any other team members applying with you are aged 21 or older.

☐ All members of my team are 21 years of age or older.*

By checking the below box, you affirm that you and any other team members applying with you live in the United States or are US citizens or permanent residents living abroad.

☐ All members of my team either live in the United States or are US citizens or permanent residents living abroad.*

By checking the below box, you affirm that you and any other team members applying with you speak and write fluent English.

☐ All members of my team speak English fluently.*

Please answer the following short essay questions below.

Why did you and your team decide to apply to the AI Civic Action Accelerator? How do you and your team intend to use the learnings from this program to impact policymaking in the United States? Enter up to **300 words.***

Tell us about the civic AI problem that you want to help solve. What is the problem and why is it important? Enter up to **250 words.***

Please write a short memo outlining your proposed solution to the problem you described above. Your memo should: a) address a specific government official, company executive, or other decisionmaker who could influence the outcome, and b) clearly describe your solution to that audience. Strong memos will include evidence for your solution. Enter up to **500 words.***

In 1-2 sentences, please briefly describe you or your team's expertise on the solution you have identified. Enter up to **100 words.***



Please describe any progress you (and your team, if applicable) have already made on your solution. For example, how long have you been working on it, and have you created any materials (such as memos, websites, or other deliverables) that showcase it? Have you already pitched your solution to decisionmakers and, if so, what feedback did you receive? Enter up to **100 words.***

Optional: You may share links (e.g., Google Drive links or websites) to materials that demonstrate progress on your solution. This is not required – only include links if you have them. These will help us understand how much work has been done on your solution so far.

We hope to select a class with a variety of life experiences. We especially welcome applicants who bring perspectives that are less commonly represented in policy, or those who have experience engaging with or working directly with communities that face systemic challenges. What unique perspectives do you bring to this work? Enter up to **100 words.***

We recognize that emerging technologies are changing the norms of how people work. We'd thus like to better understand how applicants are using generative AI tools. Please tell us how, if at all, you used AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, or other tools) in completing this application. This information will not be used in selection decisions. Select all that apply.*

- ☐ I used generative AI to write the first draft of my responses.
- ☐ I used generative AI to edit my responses.
- ☐ I used generative AI to write the final draft of my responses.
- ☐ I did not use generative AI.
- ☐ Other

Are you applying as an individual or a team?*

- Individual
- Team

How big is your team?*

- Two (2) members
- Three (3) members
- Four (4) members

[Only for applicants who are applying as a team] How do your team members know each other, and have you worked together before? How will you ensure effective collaboration throughout the program? **100 words.***

How did you and your team hear about the Aspen Policy Academy and/or our programs?*



Please answer the following background questions for **yourself**, even if you have additional team members.

Mailing Address:* _____

Phone Number:* _____

You may choose to submit a resume or a LinkedIn (or similar) profile. Please select which you'd like to submit.*

- ☐ I'd like to upload a resume
- ☐ I'd like to link to my LinkedIn (or similar) profile

Have you **applied** to a past Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program?* Yes/No
If yes, please list the past programs you've applied to.

Have you **participated** in an Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program before?* Yes/No

If yes, please indicate which cohorts you've participated in.

Optional: You are welcome to answer the following optional demographic questions for statistical purposes. We do not consider demographic information in evaluating your application.

To which gender do you most identify? (check all that apply):

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary/third gender
- ☐ Other

To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify? (check all that apply)

- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native
- ☐ Arab or Middle Eastern
- ☐ Asian including South Asian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latina/o/x
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Other

Are you a veteran, transitioning service member, or military spouse? (Check one)

- ☐ Veteran



- ☐ Transitioning Service Member
- ☐ Military Spouse

How do you identify politically?

- ☐ Socialist
- ☐ Progressive or Liberal
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ Other

- ☐ Do you identify as having a disability or chronic health condition (sensory, learning, mental, or physical)? If so, check this box.

- ☐ Do you identify as LGBTQ+? If so, check here.

Do you live in a rural, suburban, or urban area? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban

Is there any additional information about your background or experiences that you would like us to know? Enter up to **100 words**.

Do you have a second team member on your team?

- Yes
 - *If yes, answer the following questions.*
- No
 - *If no, go to the end.*

Please answer the following background questions for your second team member.

Second Team Member Name*: _____

Second Team Member Email Address*: _____

Second Team Member Mailing Address*: _____

Second Team Member Phone Number*: _____

You may choose to submit a resume or a LinkedIn (or similar) profile for your second team member. Please select which you'd like to submit for your second team member.*

- I'd like to upload a resume
- I'd like to link to my LinkedIn (or similar) profile



Has your second team member **applied** to a past Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program? Yes/No *

If yes, please list the past programs they have applied to.

Has your second team member **participated** in an Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program before? Yes/No *

If yes, please indicate which cohorts they have participated in.

Optional: You are welcome to answer the following optional demographic questions for your **second team member** for statistical purposes. We do not consider demographic information in evaluating your application.

To which gender does your second team member most identify? (check box, check all that apply):

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary/third gender
- ☐ Other

To which racial or ethnic group(s) does your second team member identify? (checkbox, check all that apply)

- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native
- ☐ Arab or Middle Eastern
- ☐ Asian including South Asian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latina/o/x
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Other

Is your second team member a veteran, transitioning service member, or military spouse? (Check one)

- ☐ Veteran
- ☐ Transitioning Service Member
- ☐ Military Spouse

How does your second team member identify politically?

- ☐ Socialist
- ☐ Progressive or Liberal
- ☐ Independent



- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ Other

- ☐ Does your second team member identify as having a disability or chronic health condition (sensory, learning, mental, or physical)? If so, check this box.
- ☐ Does your second team member identify as LGBTQ+? If so, check here.

Does your second team member live in a rural, suburban, or urban area? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban

Is there any additional information about your second team member's background or experiences that you would like us to know? Enter up to **100 words**.

Do you have a third team member on your team?*

- Yes
 - *If yes, repeat the same set of team member questions above.*
- No
 - *If no, go to the end.*

Please answer the following background questions for your third team member.

Third Team Member Name*: _____
Third Team Member Email Address*: _____
Third Team Member Mailing Address*: _____
Third Team Member Phone Number*: _____

You may choose to submit a resume or a LinkedIn (or similar) profile for your third team member. Please select which you'd like to submit for your second team member.*

- I'd like to upload a resume
- I'd like to link to my LinkedIn (or similar) profile

Has your third team member **applied** to a past Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program? Yes/No *

If yes, please list the past programs they have applied to.

Has your third team member **participated** in an Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program before? Yes/No *



If yes, please indicate which cohorts they have participated in.

Optional: You are welcome to answer the following optional demographic questions for your **third team member** for statistical purposes. We do not consider demographic information in evaluating your application.

To which gender does your third team member most identify? (check box, check all that apply):

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary/third gender
- ☐ Other

To which racial or ethnic group(s) does your third team member identify? (checkbox, check all that apply)

- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native
- ☐ Arab or Middle Eastern
- ☐ Asian including South Asian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latina/o/x
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Other

Is your third team member a veteran, transitioning service member, or military spouse? (Check one)

- ☐ Veteran
- ☐ Transitioning Service Member
- ☐ Military Spouse

How does your third team member identify politically?

- ☐ Socialist
- ☐ Progressive or Liberal
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ Other

- ☐ Does your third team member identify as having a disability or chronic health condition (sensory, learning, mental, or physical)? If so, check this box.



☐ Does your third team member identify as LGBTQ+? If so, check here.

Does your third team member live in a rural, suburban, or urban area? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban

Is there any additional information about your third team member's background or experiences that you would like us to know? Enter up to **100 words**.

Do you have a fourth team member on your team?*

- Yes
 - *If yes, repeat the same set of team member questions above.*
- No
 - *If no, go to the end.*

Please answer the following background questions for your fourth team member.

Fourth Team Member Name*: _____
Fourth Team Member Email Address*: _____
Fourth Team Member Mailing Address*: _____
Fourth Team Member Phone Number*: _____

You may choose to submit a resume or a LinkedIn (or similar) profile for your fourth team member. Please select which you'd like to submit for your second team member.*

- I'd like to upload a resume
- I'd like to link to my LinkedIn (or similar) profile

Has your fourth team member **applied** to a past Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program? Yes/No *

If yes, please list the past programs they have applied to.

Has your fourth team member **participated** in an Aspen Tech Policy Hub/Aspen Policy Academy program before? Yes/No *

If yes, please indicate which cohorts they have participated in.

Optional: You are welcome to answer the following optional demographic questions for your **fourth team member** for statistical purposes. We do not consider demographic information in evaluating your application.

To which gender does your fourth team member most identify? (check box, check all that apply):



- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary/third gender
- ☐ Other

To which racial or ethnic group(s) does your fourth team member identify? (checkbox, check all that apply)

- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ American Indian, Native American, or Alaska Native
- ☐ Arab or Middle Eastern
- ☐ Asian including South Asian
- ☐ Hispanic or Latina/o/x
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White or Caucasian
- ☐ Other

Is your fourth team member a veteran, transitioning service member, or military spouse? (Check one)

- ☐ Veteran
- ☐ Transitioning Service Member
- ☐ Military Spouse

How does your fourth team member identify politically?

- ☐ Socialist
- ☐ Progressive or Liberal
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Libertarian
- ☐ Other

☐ Does your fourth team member identify as having a disability or chronic health condition (sensory, learning, mental, or physical)? If so, check this box.

☐ Does your fourth team member identify as LGBTQ+? If so, check here.

Does your fourth team member live in a rural, suburban, or urban area? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban



Is there any additional information about your fourth team member's background or experiences that you would like us to know? Enter up to **100 words**.

Thank you for your application. Click below to submit it.



FAQ

We will update the following FAQs as we receive additional questions about our accelerator. If your question is not answered here or in the materials above, please contact aspenpolicyacademy@aspeninstitute.org.

What is policy?

Great question, and one we will be exploring through much of the accelerator. In general, policy is defined as a “course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual.” It is a set of rules that an organization or individual agrees to follow. Both governments and companies (and many other actors) set policies, and those policies have the potential to affect all of our lives. The goal of this accelerator is to expose you to the value of policymaking, and to teach you how to impact policy yourself.

Why are you running this accelerator?

We’re running this accelerator because we see many individuals and teams who have a promising but still somewhat vague idea for a policy solution to a civic AI policy problem. These individuals or teams need support to refine their ideas, understand how to engage key stakeholders, and develop effective advocacy plans. Our goal is to provide that guidance and help turn good ideas into actionable, impactful policy efforts.

What are the benefits of participating in this program?

This program offers you and your team free coaching from policy experts to advance a policy idea, while learning and applying our framework for policy impact. By the end of the program, participants will have a concrete solution and a set of deliverables to pitch to a stakeholder. You’ll also gain insights from other cohort members and have ongoing access to opportunities and resources offered to Academy alumni.

How do I submit an application as a team?

Teams (maximum 4 people) should submit 1 application. In your application, you will be asked to share names and contact information for all team members.

Can I apply more than once?

No. For fairness, applicants should only apply once. You are therefore not allowed to apply as a part of 2 different teams.

Do I need to apply as a team?

No, you do not need to apply as a team for this accelerator. You may apply as an individual. Both team and individual applications will be given equal weight.

Will the accelerator be run in person or remotely?



The accelerator will be run remotely.

What is the expected time commitment for this program?

In addition to the 6, 2-hour sessions, we also expect participants to spend 8-10 additional hours a week completing required readings and assignments. All participants will be expected to develop a suite of policy outputs by the end of this program and pitch a concrete solution to an actual decisionmaker.

What is the attendance policy?

Since this program is run free-of-charge, we require that participants abide by our attendance policy. Each person is welcome to miss a total of up to 2 hours of programming, no questions asked. For those who are on teams, at least 1 team representative must be present during all sessions. No other absences will be permitted except in the case of a verified funeral, illness, or religious obligation.

Participants who miss more than 2 hours unexcused OR teams who do not have 1 representative present during all sessions may be asked to leave the program. Participants who are asked to leave the program because of failing to adhere to attendance will incur a \$500 charge per person in order to cover program-related expenses.

How much does the accelerator cost?

The accelerator is free-of-charge for all participants. However, if you or any team member enrolls in the program and misses more than the required time or fails to complete required assignments, you or your team members will be required to pay a \$500 fee per person to cover staff time for running the program.

Can we continue to work while participating in the accelerator?

The accelerator is part-time (6, 2-hour sessions from 9:30 – 11:30am PT/12:30 – 2:30pm ET on the following dates: October 22, October 29, November 5, November 12, November 19, and December 3). We expect full attention and attendance during the weekly sessions, and participants will be required to complete readings and assignments outside of class that we expect will take an additional 8-10 hours a week. As long as participants are able to fulfill these obligations, we welcome your participation while continuing to work.

I am on a visa. Am I eligible to apply to the accelerator?

Yes. Because this program is for people who want to impact US policymaking, you must either live in the United States now or be a US citizen or permanent resident living abroad. If you are a US citizen or permanent resident and will be abroad during the course, you are eligible to apply if you are available to attend the course 6 Thursday sessions from 9:30 – 11:30am PT/12:30 – 2:30pm ET on October 22, October 29, November 5, November 12, November 19, and December 3.

I am a student/recently graduated. Am I eligible to apply to this program?



You are able to apply to our programs as long as you are 21 and meet all the other program-specific criteria listed in the eligibility section.

I would like to join your accelerator to learn more about policy, but I don't have experience working on civic AI issues. Can I still apply?

All applicants must have a somewhat developed policy solution to a civic AI challenge. Strong candidates will either have subject-matter expertise on tech and AI or be community members pushing for a specific civic AI policy change in their local municipality.

I already have significant policy experience. Am I eligible to apply to this accelerator?

This accelerator provides an introduction to policy work, and is likely not a fit for those with significant previous policy experience (e.g., past experience working in a government policy role). If you (or members of your team) already have a significant policy background, we encourage you to explain in your application how you will benefit from this program. Please note that we may prioritize applicants with less policy experience if the course is oversubscribed.

If you feel you have too much experience to enroll in this accelerator, we may have opportunities to engage you as a policy mentor or on future in-house projects. [Please email us.](#)

How do I write a policy memo?

There is no one way to write a policy memo, and there are many resources online that provide tips on writing policy memos. The appropriate structure depends on the problem you are trying to solve. In general, a few tips:

Your memo needs to define the problem, using evidence as appropriate to support your position, lay out your proposed solution, and identify major obstacles to the implementation of your solution.

To be effective, your memo also needs to be written extremely clearly. For some advice on clear writing, see this blog post from [Y Combinator](#). We also recommend [this post by Paul Graham](#).

While not required, many strong applications will tie the applicant's experience in civic AI issues to the problem they identified or to the solution they are attempting to apply.