



RAPID.  
LOCAL.  
CO-CREATED.  
IMPACTFUL.

**CIVIC**  
**INNOVATION**  
CHALLENGE

# CIVIC Brand Book

# CIVIC Brand Book: A Program Style and Language Guide

December 2025

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Note: Make sure NSF is prominent and clear.

# Introduction

Developed as part of the NSF Civic Innovation Challenge program, this Brand Book establishes guidance for describing NSF CIVIC to both internal and external audiences. The goal of the Brand Book is to help forward the missions of both the National Science Foundation and the CIVIC program itself. The Brand Book is meant to be supplemental, and does not supersede the [NSF Policy on Brand Standards](#) or the [NSF Brand Standards Manual](#).

The Brand Book includes ways to describe the NSF Civic Innovation Challenge, CIVIC's Brand and Attributes, a CIVIC Style Guide, and a CIVIC Roadshow Roadmap.

*What is a brand?*

“A brand is the personality of a [program]. It’s the first thing consumers think of, or feel, when they see a company’s logo or product to hear their name. In fact, you can use the word “personality” as a direct substitute for “brand”...

[-SuccessWise](#)

## Describing CIVIC

### **Program Description:**

The Civic Innovation Challenge is a federal government research and action competition that aims to fund ready-to-implement, research-based pilot projects that have the potential for scalable, sustainable, and transferable impact on community-identified priorities. It aims to flip the community-university dynamic, inviting communities to identify civic priorities ripe for innovation and to then partner with researchers to address those priorities.

### **Elevator Pitch:**

The NSF Civic Innovation Challenge funds a network of pathfinders using boots-on-the-ground research tactics to quickly and collaboratively launch ambitious pilot projects focused on issues prioritized by their communities.

### **Slogan:**

- A National Research and Action Competition Driven By Community Priorities
- Ideas for the Taking

### CIVIC in one word (in order of relevance):

- Pilot
- Impact
- Communities
- Collaborative
- Localized
- Fast-paced
- Visionary
- Competitive
- Solution-based

## CIVIC's Brand and Attributes

CIVIC Project Pillars			
Rapid	Local	Co-Created	Impactful
NSF CIVIC encourages an adaptable and nimble research approach so that solutions can be rapidly deployed and tested.	NSF CIVIC targets hyper-local issues identified and prioritized by the community members themselves.	NSF CIVIC harnesses the power of collective stakeholder effort within communities. It focuses on developing solutions <i>with</i> communities, not just <i>for</i> communities.	NSF CIVIC focuses on using applied research to achieve impactful outcomes. It emphasizes boots-on-the-ground work, not work in a lab.

### What is the personality of a CIVIC Project?

A CIVIC project is nimble. It's a driven, "boots-on-the-ground" project that results in a new type of research and pilot deliverable. These projects are community-centered, both in solution design and implementation. Academic leaders managing these projects are innovators, shaping a project with humility and flexibility.

### Process v. Outcome

- The process is key.
  - buy-in is part of the process, community engagement comes along the way
- Outcomes are key.
  - communities benefit as a result of these projects

## A Unique Program for NSF

NSF is a research champion, focusing on curiosity-driven research. NSF is the only federal agency whose mission includes support for all fields of fundamental science and engineering. What is special about CIVIC:

1. CIVIC takes outcomes and tests them in the real world.
2. This is an emerging technology PULL (community-centric).
3. The audience is unique and goes beyond the research community.
4. Fast-paced and implementation focused.

## Logos/Style



### Fonts:

Headings: Oswald

Body Text: Source Sans Pro

### Colors:

- Most colors: #006697
- Logo: #00aeef

## Branding Effort Outputs

### Roadshow Roadmap

#### *Introduction*

The Roadshow Roadmap is designed as a resource for you and your team as you communicate to third parties what NSF CIVIC represents.



The Roadmap will guide you through a series of stage-setting questions, then provide you with recommendations on how to best frame your conversation depending on the situation you find yourself in.

*“Marketing is about values. It’s a complicated and noisy world, and we’re not going to get a chance to get people to remember much about us. No company is. So we have to be really clear about what we want them to know about us.” - Steve Jobs*

*“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough” - Albert Einstein  
(attributed)*

Even before any particular conversation turns to the NSF CIVIC program, you should understand the core values NSF CIVIC represents. This doubles for when you talk about your project as well.

So, while the Roadmap focuses primarily on communicating about the NSF CIVIC program, it does provide you with some information to develop a story for your project as well.

## Articulating NSF CIVIC

In addition to the resources included in the Roadmap sections below, MetroLab and NSF have developed a full NSF CIVIC Branding Book for your use. The Branding Book includes an NSF CIVIC elevator pitch and NSF CIVIC brand pillars for use in a variety of conversations and presentations. In the last section of the Roadmap, we will use the elevator pitch and brand pillars to help you build your message, tailored for the situation and audience.

## Articulating Your Project

*“People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” - Simon Sinek*

The particular challenge of articulating the story of your own project will require some level of introspection by you and your team. We suggest watching or revisiting the recording of this storytelling workshop designed for NSF CIVIC teams. As Katie Liesener explains, “Storytelling is a distinct form of communication that is different from just your everyday presentational speech.”

Additionally, we recommend thinking about how that story aligns with the NSF CIVIC elevator pitch and brand pillars. To the extent that your project’s values can link with the NSF CIVIC

values, you can use them collectively to navigate the next sections of the Roadmap where we talk about situational messages and audiences.

## Setting the Stage

When thinking about a Roadshow, you should first think about the types of conversations you might have. These conversations could range from casual to formal, from brief to extended; and from informational to an “ask”.

The information you emphasize may vary depending on the situation, but should always link back to the underlying core NSF CIVIC values. Here are some stage setting questions to ask before each conversation:

- *What are you trying to achieve with this conversation?*
- *What is the situation? How much time do you have? For example:*
  - *Happenstance elevator ride?*
  - *Short conference presentation?*
  - *Pearranged one-hour meeting?*
- *Who is your audience? What aspects of NSF CIVIC would be most interesting or motivating for them?*

## Conversation Scenarios

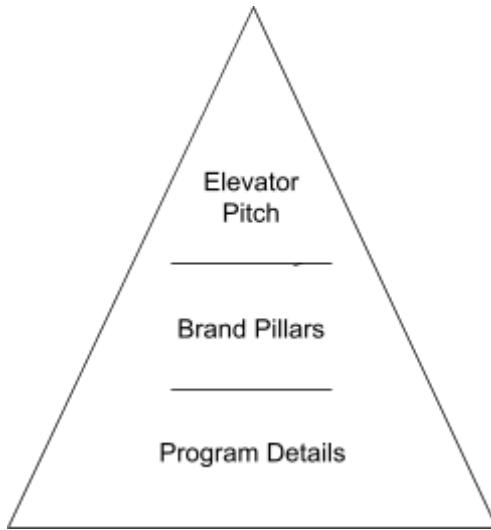
Regardless of audience, the Roadmap envisions a message pyramid where the top of the pyramid represents the most targeted message for the shortest time possible, and the bottom of the pyramid represents a deeper conversation for a longer engagement.

Additionally, even if you know at the outset that you have extended time, for clarity’s sake you should still work your way down the messaging pyramid sequentially. You will see this logic in the presentation templates as well. We explore each level of the pyramid in further detail below.

### Elevator Pitch

Generally speaking, an elevator pitch is an efficient summary of a business or product; one that is quick enough to convey during the proverbial short elevator ride with someone who knows nothing about the business or product. When talking about NSF CIVIC in this type of

scenario, you can use the elevator pitch included in the Branding Book (or some variation of such):



*“The NSF Civic Innovation Challenge funds a network of pathfinders using boots-on-the-ground research tactics to quickly and collaboratively launch ambitious pilot projects focused on issues prioritized by their communities.”*

## Brand Pillars

Brand pillars are the underlying core values of a brand and the values from which the brand positioning statement (or elevator pitch) is derived. A conversation about brand pillars represents an opportunity to take a deeper dive into a business or product after leading with the elevator pitch. The brand pillars for NSF CIVIC are:

- **Rapid**  
NSF CIVIC encourages an adaptable and nimble research approach so that solutions can be rapidly deployed and tested.
- **Local**  
NSF CIVIC targets hyper-local issues identified and prioritized by the community members themselves.
- **Co-Created**  
NSF CIVIC harnesses the power of collective stakeholder effort within communities. It focuses on developing solutions *with* communities, not just *for* communities.

- **Impactful**

NSF CIVIC focuses on using applied research to achieve impactful outcomes. It emphasizes boots-on-the-ground work, not work in a lab.

## Additional Program Details

If you find yourself in a scenario where you have enough time to move beyond the elevator pitch and brand pillars into further detail, you will have the ability to focus on a variety of business or product elements during a more lengthy conversation. For NSF CIVIC specifically, some topics that might warrant a deeper conversation could include:

- The rapid prototyping aspects of NSF CIVIC research
- Background on funding (e.g. funding source, funding amount, etc.)
- Types of projects NSF CIVIC has funded (Communities & Mobility; Resilience to Natural Disasters; Living in a Changing Climate; Resource and Service Equity)

For additional details on the CIVIC program, please refer to this [website](#).

## Audiences

Now that we have established the sequencing for NSF CIVIC messaging, we will consider the different types of audiences you might encounter when talking about the program. This section outlines the generic interests of multiple stakeholder groups and gives some suggestions on which aspects of NSF CIVIC you might consider emphasizing.

However, note that this emphasis will require some level of nuance depending on the situation you find yourself in. There is no one-size-fits all approach, and could even change between individuals who are members of the same generic group. Your challenge will be to assess both the situation and the verbal and nonverbal feedback you receive, and to tailor your message accordingly.

Some potential audiences for both NSF CIVIC and your project could include:

### Local Funders

- Interested in: project outcomes; local collaboration; community buy-in
- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Co-created

## National Funders

- Interested in: transferability and scalability; project outcomes; low-hanging fruit; proven teams
- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Rapid

## Philanthropic Funders

- Pillar emphases: transferability and scalability; project outcomes
  - Particular area of interest that the foundation focuses on
  - Timely
  - Impactful

## End Users

- Interested in: local focus; trustworthiness; “is this useful to me?”
- Pillar emphases:
  - Local
  - Co-created
  - Impactful

## Peers

- Interested in: different methodologies; process; project outcomes; research outcomes
- Pillar emphases:
  - Co-created
  - Rapid
  - Impactful

## Your local government\*

- Interested in: project outcomes; general success; moving fast; economic impact; making sure everyone is at the table; publicity
- Pillar emphases:
  - Local
  - Impactful
  - Rapid
  - Co-created

\*If your audience is an elected official, prepare an “ask.” Research what their priority issues are and what specific challenge your project addresses.

### **Other local governments\***

- Interested in: project transferability; proven project outcomes; speed of deployment; economic impact; making sure everyone is at the table; publicity
- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Rapid
  - Co-created

*\*If your audience is an elected official, prepare an “ask.” Research what their priority issues are and what specific challenge your project addresses.*

### **Federal government officials\***

- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Rapid

*\*If your audience is an elected official, prepare an “ask.” Research what their priority issues are and what specific challenge your project addresses.*

### **Congressional officials\***

- Interested in: successes for district residents; local impact; collaboration within district; speed of deployment
- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Co-created
  - Rapid

*\*If your audience is an elected official, prepare an “ask.” Research what their priority issues are and what specific challenge your project addresses.*

### **General public**

- Interested in: local success; local project impact; unique project collaborations
- Pillar emphases:
  - Impactful
  - Co-created

MetroLab Network has been a CIVIC partner since its inception—contributing to program design ([award #1833054](#)), leading programmatic elements during the first two iterations ([award #2223449](#)) and continuing this role in partnership with NSF for CIVIC 3.0 ([award #2513329](#)).

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.