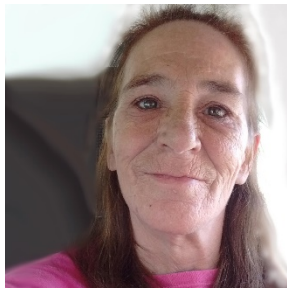




BUILDING LOCAL POLITICAL VOICE & POWER

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In speaking with my community I have come to the realization they also feel like they have none in county or state governments. When I asked in my community some of the following questions I found out that they may know who the governor, senator, or mayor is but they didn't know you could actually contact them.

I have been a Branch Manager for the last 5 years and since I have been here I have attended every city council meeting. I have seen myself how little our leaders listen to the members of the community and how their concerns or ideas are never addressed. I have also been the target professionally of our board when I have spoken out as a member of my community about the removal of our park and playground. So I do understand that the following tools may not work exactly for your communities but the community garden and other ideas to not only bring the community together it gives them a sense of power and community involvement .

My momma used to say "Get 5 people together you can build a doghouse; get 10 people together you can build a mansion "

What is in this tool?

This tool is to help you think about how you can make your local formal political process easier to understand for everyone in town. It is also to give you some ideas for how to facilitate your community members building their voice through self-made action.

Further Resources:

Want more resources on using programming to strengthen the community? See "Pathways to Belonging: Delight", and "Youth Empowerment".

IN THEIR WORDS

"I can't run because I don't live within the city limits. But I have ideas that can reflect-- because I live here--they reflect the town of State Line and what needs to be here in order for this to be a productive place. It can be small but it can be productive."

Tanya
interview #6-1-07

LIBRARIES CONNECTING PEOPLE TO POWER

The first step is to gather the information community residents need to gain access to political power. Next, ask yourself if you use those paths.

Do you attend city council meetings to stay informed on what your community government is doing?

Make a note here on when and where local government meetings are held. Can't go yourself? Who do you know that will share all with you after they go?

Does your library provide contact information for local and state leaders?

How could you get contact information to patrons and community members?

(Contact information is NOT partisan. That said, some library authorities might take issue if you provide "voting guides" from non-partisan non-profits – especially if they have national reach. Creating your own contact-only information post could side-step this particular gatekeeper pitfall.

Remember, contact information changes – also note how you'll build periodic checking your information into this particular project.)

Do you have members of your community who are very vocal in their concerns about the community and direction it's going?

What are structural supports you could give so they can organize others?

How might you bring together people to discuss issues toward shared understanding and action?

ACTIONS A COMMUNITY CAN TAKE... EVEN IF *YOU* CAN'T

The following ideas come from community resident quotes throughout the research, like this one:

“And then most people don’t and aren’t able to work a job where they’re able to be self-sufficient. If somebody came in here and farmed, you know that would be a hard lifestyle but it would also be — it could be a good lifestyle for somebody. Because you’ve got local resources just around here that it’s like you don’t need to sell to the whole world. I mean you can kind of keep things localized and you can have a small enough.”

Are their groups that are currently taking action? Or have power?

List them here:

Do you have a local community garden and/or farm market?

Is there someone in your community interested in organizing around food security?

About farm markets or other local food options: When, where, who? Add information like if they take EBT or SNAP benefits, and how to sell in the market to your information places.

<p>Is there a food pick-up point for farm seconds or other free/low-cost local food?</p>	<p>How could you connect your town's food suppliers to the government officials that make decisions about sales and markets?</p>
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Could the library be a pick up location? If no, note here how you might make connections between food bank people and farm people.

<p>Is there anyone in your community who organizes sharing and bartering of basics like</p>	<p>Suggestions - city wide food drive Back to school supply drive Possible street dance or festival of some kind Clothing drives Clean up the city drives (litter and trash ...weeded or overgrown lots</p>
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<p>food, clothes, or even sports equipment?</p>	<p>Research City Ordinances about old building or eyesores to begin possible process of getting them removed (my community has no ordinance in place so cannot do anything but some communities do have one * check with city or county clerk's office</p>
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<p>Are there any other businesses or organizations in your town interested in youth self-sufficiency and power?</p>	<p>Yes ..opportunity to partner for resourcing and sharing information with the community – list here. No ...opportunity to have back to school projects – list your ideas here.</p>
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Supporting Politically Active Residents
 Just supplying the resources about candidates and how to reach them is a tool that is easy to do and I have found that the more information available the more my community feels as if they have some contact so they feel they have a say.

<p>Do you encourage your community members to attend city council meetings?</p>	<p>What are some ways you could?</p>
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Note ways in which you can spread that kind of information through community networks:

Do you encourage voting in your community with information on local, regional, and state referendums?

Packet Packet Guide (who is who in politics) City and Local leaders _- Information can be gotten from Local City Hall)
County Leaders- County Clerk's office should have information
State Lealers – Govener , Lt Governor , Reprensitive (your district)
Senators Congressman – Information can be found on state websites
Also you can contact the nearest newspaper to find out information they usually have all that information already compiled.

Next Steps

What is the research I need to do?

What is one step I can take to help my community residents understand how government works here?

What is one step I can take to help my community residents get together over topics that concern them?



DISCUSSION

Understanding political systems is key to influencing them. Being able to have a say in the direction of shared decision making (like what tax money is spent on, or whether a dollar store can move into main street) is important for community-level self-determination. Having a voice also plays a strong role in individual self-determination, and how locals experience life in their town. Feeling pushed around, not knowing who to go to with a complaint, and never being asked your opinion can make people feel isolated and insecure. Short and long term community groups can arise to fill gaps not being addressed by a local municipality (eg. beautifying main street), or to address a shared concern (eg. windmills being installed too close to their neighborhood). Libraries often play an infrastructural role in supporting groups--without advocating for a specific political position--including providing space, filling informational needs, or providing a copier. Because libraries tend to be aware of which groups exist, they also help connect individuals to groups that might be of interest to them.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Want to read about a small town trying to build their political voice? See the Stateline, Mississippi case study.

What to learn more about ways to give people more agency over their lives? Try the tools “Pathways to Belonging: To Be Seen & Feel Known” and “Is Everyone Welcome at Your Library”.