



BUILDING BRIDGES FOR AMERICA
presents

How to Be Politically Active



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There are many lanes to political action.

You got choices!

Civic leaders



Candidates



Governance



Organizers



Campaigns



Experts



Activists



Volunteers



Watchdogs



Advocacy

Elections

Policy



And there are different types of groups.

Even more choices!



Always	3-9 months	Year round
All goals	Short term	Long term
Fast & Loose	Cautious	Cautious
Resources	Fundraising	Fundraising
People	Volunteers	Infrastructure
Grassroots	Campaigns	Democratic Party

**Whichever way you wish to take part,
it all begins with YOU**



Today you will learn to:

1. Tell your story
2. List your network
3. Actively listen
4. Engage others to join you

Permission granted

You are an organizer.

Your job is to organize
the people you know
to take real action.



**TELL
YOUR STORY**



Be ready to articulate why you care.

QUESTION

What was the first political action you took beyond voting?

Self Reflection

- Step ① **What are your core values?**
- Step ② **Recall a time that you felt one of your values.**
- Step ③ **Share how that values is reflected in a campaign or cause.**
- Step ④ **Why is it important to you that we act and get involved now.**



What are values?

What you value

What is important

Values \neq Morals
Values \neq Issues or Policy

We share values.

We may not interpret them exactly the same, but the gut feeling is the same.

Example: Freedom

What are values?

Issue

Economic inequality

Policy

Raising the minimum wage

Values

Justice

Equity

Freedom

Compassion

Resilience



What are values?



Issue

Economic inequality

Policy

Raising the minimum wage

Values

- Justice
- Equity
- Freedom
- Compassion
- Resilience



DIG DOWN

How does an issue make you feel?



Why do you feel that way?

- | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| “It’s not fair!” | “It is my right!” | “We need to care!” | “Give people a chance!” |
| Justice, equity | Freedom | Compassion | Resilience |



Grace
Patience
Forgiveness
Self-Respect
Service
Reciprocity
Enjoyment
Entrepreneurship
Happiness
Harmony
Peace
Relationships
Knowledge
Patience
Growth
Prosperity
Wellness
Finances
Gratitude

Justice
Appreciation
Willingness
Family
Freedom
Security
Loyalty
Intelligence
Connection
Creativity
Humanity
Success
Belonging
Truth
Resilience
Integrity
Love
Openness
Transparency

Respect
Joy
Forgiveness
Goodness
Involvement
Wisdom
Beauty
Caring
Personal
Development
Teamwork
Communication
Learning
Excellence
Innovation
Spiritualism
Strength
Power
Cooperation

Leadership
Renewal
Home
Contentment
Friendship
Courage
Balance
Compassion
Fitness
Professionalism
Diversity
Generosity
Adventure
Kindness
Clarity
Invention
Equity
Perseverance
Patriotism

Sharing Your Story

Use the common language of personal stories to connect, even with people who disagree with you.

We share: Values. Empathy for people we know. Personal stories.

We do not share: Morality. Logic. Interpretation of facts.

You cannot use these differences to make a connection.

Speak to what is most important to you by sharing a story about how an issue affects you or someone you love.

DO NOT USE:
FACTS
LOGIC
MORALITY

USE:
YOUR VALUES
YOUR STORY





LIST YOUR NETWORK

Be organized and include everyone.

ORGANIZE YOUR NETWORK

Start making a list of people you know.

Make a plan to talk to each person.

Track who you talk to, how they respond.

Make a plan to reach out to them again.





Making Your List

USE THE PROMPTS BELOW TO HELP YOU
START TO LIST YOUR NETWORK

THREE PEOPLE YOU
KNOW WILL VOTE

THREE PEOPLE
EASIEST TO TALK TO

THREE PEOPLE YOU
KNOW WILL NOT VOTE
OR ARE NOT REGISTERED

THREE PEOPLE YOU
HAVE NEVER SPOKEN
TO ABOUT POLITICS

THE PERSON YOU WISH WOULD SUPPORT YOUR ISSUE

ACTIVELY LISTEN

Be open, be helpful, and build trust.



Conversation Style

Discussion

Debate

Dialogue

- Open-minded & curious
- Focused on listening
- Ask questions so you can understand

Where are they at politically?

Light opener– Personal fact

I signed up for this organizing class because I feel I need to do more than vote in 2026.

Have you thought about voting this year?

Timely opener– News item

The war with Iran feels so reckless and scary.

What do you think about the war?



STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Stay open and listen.

You may have to fight your instinct to push back or defend.

No matter what they say, be curious and respond with “Tell me more about that.”



ACTIVE LISTENING GUIDE

THE BEST WAY TO CONNECT AND BE HEARD IS FIRST TO ACTIVELY LISTEN.

AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZER'S GREATEST SKILL IS TO LISTEN. TO BE HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD FIRST YOU NEED TO OPEN THE DOOR OF UNDERSTANDING. PRACTICE THESE BASIC HABITS AND SKILLS TO SHOW YOU ARE LISTENING AND WATCH AS THE CONVERSATIONS YOU HAVE GROW DEEPER.

AVOID DISTRACTION

Set your intention to listening.
No daydreaming or multi-tasking.
Remove things, persons or animals that might keep you from paying attention.

REFLECT, PARAPHRASE OR CLARIFY

Repeat back what you have heard
"It sounds to me like you are saying..."

PAY ATTENTION

Do not use this time to prepare for a rebuttal. Ignore the divides and listen for the connections.

DO NOT INTERRUPT

Allow the other person to finish what they are saying.

USE DOOR OPENERS

Keep them engaged and talking
"Tell me more"
"That's interesting"

DO NOT ARGUE

"I can tell you are very upset/frustrated""I know that it has been hard for you to change gears"

ACTIVE LISTENING GUIDE

REFLECT AMBIVALENCE

"So, on the one hand you want ___ and on the other you don't think you can ___"

LOOK FOR COMMON GROUND

"Where do you think we could find common ground?"
"We agree on this, what else do we agree on?"

EXPRESS YOUR ATTENTION

Words and phrases like "Oh", "I see", "uh huh" and "hmm" show that you are listening.

CREATE DISSONANCE

"Tell me (describe to me) what your feeling are on ____"
"Can you tell me what is keeping you from supporting ___?"

SHOW EMPATHY FOR THEIR FEELINGS

"I am hearing you say that you are frustrated because ____"

WRAP UP

"Thank you for talking with me."
"I appreciate your opinion and understand your concerns."

This guide is in the workbook



DOWNLOAD THE STEP BY STEP COURSE WORKBOOK

DOWNLOAD FILLABLE PDF

PRINTABLE DOWNLOAD



ENGAGE

SHARE YOUR STORY

WELCOME OTHERS TO JOIN YOU



I feel ___*fed up*___

because ___*leadership*___ is important to me

and ___*we need to restore sanity and have leaders who work for the people, not billionaires*__.

That is why I ___*will vote for Democrats all the way down the ballot*___.

I am ___*going to a Democratic meet-up Saturday*___. Will you join me?

Encountering Tension

Fight your instinct to defend.

Ask them, “Tell me more” to get them thinking and feeling for themselves.

Validate their feelings.

Don’t talk theory, keep it personal and issues based.

Give yourself permission to walk away.



AVOID FATIGUE

**Just till the soil, plant a seed,
and touch on it over time.**

**Limit political talk to 20 minutes
at a time.**





BUILDING BRIDGES FOR AMERICA

Civics for Change

Know the system to change the system.



Let's Effectively Reach Out to our
Policy Makers!

Why don't people reach out to policy makers to express an opinion?

- They don't know they can.
- They are unsure about the source of the problem or about what to work on.
- They don't know whom to contact or how to reach the right person.
- They don't know what to say.
- They think "it doesn't matter."

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

Alice Walker, First African-American Woman
to win the Pulitzer Prize for Literature

“The secret is not to allow the fact that you can’t
do everything keep you from doing something.
Something, then rest.
Something, then rest.”

Glennon Doyle, Author

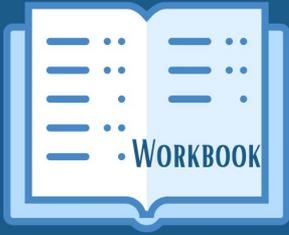
What's Your Role?

Super Volunteer – Some of Us – A campaign resource, a leader of other volunteers, an advisor

“Just” A Volunteer – Most of Us – Phone banking, canvassing, postcard writing, yard sign distributing, “lit” dropping

Trusted Voice – All of Us – Friends, family, colleagues trust us to give them good advice because we understand civics

Concerned Citizen – All of Us – A communicator with policy makers



Governmental Cheat Sheet – Step 1

In Your Workbook, identify the jurisdiction where you will be an advocate – This will also help you and your friends as you support candidates and GOTV

Jurisdiction = the official power to make legal decisions and judgments.

Getting Started – Cheat Sheet

Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction refers to a geographical area or a subject matter where government exercises authority. Legislative, executive, and judicial actions are effective within specific jurisdiction. Policy makers in those jurisdictions will be the most responsive to your message/request.

Legal Responsibility

Identify the person, elected or appointed body, or agency who is responsible for the law affecting your members.

Administration

After a law is passed, focus on executive and administration agencies that administer the law(s).

Your Jurisdiction

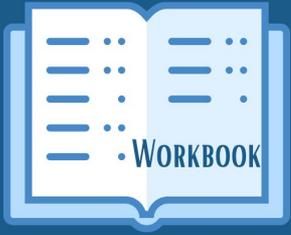
Step 1

Preparing your cheat sheet.

This sheet will help you identify the specifics about your area (jurisdiction) and will vary depending on the issue(s) you are addressing. Get started by filling in what you know and fill in the blanks later.

State	-----
County	-----
City, Town, Village or Unincorporated area	-----
School District	-----
Special Service District (sewer)	-----





Governmental Cheat Sheet – Step 2

In your Workbook, identify the policy makers you may contact – if they are on the ballot, make a note of that as well!

Your Policymakers

Step



You can search online and find this information.

U.S. Senator (1)	name, party, contact info.
U.S. Senator (2)	name, party, contact info.
U.S. Representative	name, party, district, contact info.
Governor	name, party, contact info.
State Senator	name, party, district, contact info.
State Representative	name, party, district, contact info.
Mayor	contact information
County Commissioners	contact information
City/Town Council	contact information
School Board Member	contact information

More “Jurisdictions” and “Policy Makers” to Identify for 2026 and Beyond

At the State Level:

- Secretary of State
- Treasurer
- Attorney General
- CFO

At the Local Level:

- Judges
- Township Trustee, Advisory Board

Take Note

Be Credible -- Before you begin your advocacy around an issue, make sure you have the correct information.

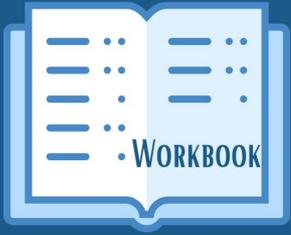
Is the issue addressed by legislation or the administration of a law or policy by the executive or administrative agencies that implement it?

Who are the agencies or people with jurisdiction over that issue?

How do your family, friends, and colleagues figure out who is THEIR representative?

Focus Your Efforts - Before you support or oppose a candidate.

Make sure you understand their jurisdiction



Issue Identification Worksheet

Step 3

In Your Workbook, Define Your Key Issues

Identify your issue(s)

Identify

Now is the time to identify the issues or campaigns that are motivating you to take action. This list will change, but it is a good exercise to plan your advocacy.

State your issue in positive terms. Avoid repeating the “opposition’s” wording.

Identify Your Issue(s)

Step



Issue Identification

Now is the time to identify the issues or campaigns that are motivating you to take action. This list will change, but it is a good exercise to plan your advocacy.

Write down two important issues in each category

Issues that affect you/your members in an immediate and practical way (examples: "The roads in my area are all broken and are causing damage to my car." "I want my son to get his COVID shot, but it is not available")

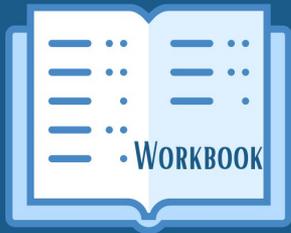
- 1.
- 2.

Issues that affects the community in which your organization operates (examples: "I think school vouchers harm public schools" "I am concerned about homelessness in my area" "I am concerned about voting rights in federal elections"

- 1.
- 2.

Are there organizations working on these issues?

What are some terms to use consistently and positively to describe your issue?



Let's Tie It All Together– Step 4

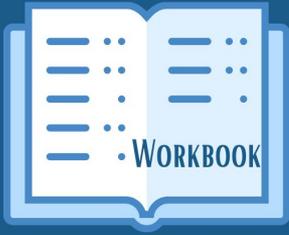
In Your Workbook, Plan Your Advocacy

Who Should You Talk To? What Should You Say? Where?

- Who is in charge?
- What is the best way to explain the issue?
- How to make your views known?

The Process

If you are leading a group, walking your members through this step-by-step approach will help them confidently reach out about an issue or law.



Worksheet

Step



This exercise will answer several important questions:

- Who is in charge
- What is the message
- Where to deliver it

We encourage you to use your own words, make it personal and keep the message simple. See the following pages for sample issues.

Bringing it Together

Who is in charge?

-
-

Identify, frame and formulate (what we can all agree on)

-
-
-

My Message?

Where to "deliver" my message

-
-
-

Walking your members through this step-by-step approach will help them confidently reach out about an issue or law.

Who is in charge?

- For each issue identify the individual, group, or agency that has jurisdiction. **Refer to your Governmental Cheat Sheet.**
- Make sure your group knows who should be contacted.
- Reach out to those who are FOR and AGAINST your POV

Identify, Frame, and Formulate

At the Organizational Level -- Super Volunteer

Develop your organization's summary of the issues and positions on the issue. What is your purpose? What are your goals? How will you achieve those goals?

As an advocacy organization, you compile information--facts, figures, status of legislation. You may work with other organizations to share resources.

Go to our Training Page - "Say This, Not That" will provide great insights on how to identify, frame, and formulate your message

Identify, Frame, and Formulate

For Your Group -- Super Volunteer, Volunteer, Trusted Voice

Assist in developing communications that will connect with policy makers. Develop uniform and consistent explanations for the issue, suggest frames for the issue, encourage personal stories. Communicate positively! Here are tips:

- Explain why you are concerned
- Identify the issue - “Good roads” “Fair Healthcare” “Better Schools” “Women’s Rights”
- Frame the issue around your values - “Hard worker” “Family” “Democracy” “Freedom” “Fairness”
- State how you are affected personally
- Ask for a specific action

Make Your Views Known

At the organizational level, make your presence known!

- Share brief policy statements with policy makers.
- Start talking to policymakers.
- Look for opportunities to speak in person (town halls), send emails, and write letters.
- Help your members deliver their communications – email, letter, phone call, personal meeting.
- Develop specific recommendations on where/how to communicate
- Make sure your members include contact information, indicate they are a constituent

Make Your Views Known, cont.

Consider all options for communicating with the policy maker

- Make phone calls – Be prepared to speak to a “live” person or leave a voicemail. Before the call, write down, rehearse what you will say.
- Send email, letter, and/or postcard
 - ◆ U.S. Senators and Representatives
 - Email forms on their websites
 - Postcards delivered more quickly in D.C.
 - Mail can be sent to district offices
 - ◆ If using form letters and postcards, personalize them.
- Write an op-ed for local “paper”, trade publication, or blog. Mention policymaker by name
- Speak in-person – at public meeting, town hall

Using Civics for Change

Be Present! Be Positive! Be Repetitive!

- In our representative democracy, policy makers must hear from their constituents to affect their decisions
 - Don't allow policy makers to only hear one POV
- The facts DON'T speak for themselves!
 - Explain YOUR "why"
- Beyond your direct contacts, how can you influence policy makers?
 - Reach out to reporters
 - Write op-eds for local papers
 - Organize your Facebook (social media) group
- Provide a sustained flow of information/contacts -- once is never enough

Let's Do This -The "Always" Rules

- Every communication

- My name is Terry Mumford, Street Address ZIP CODE, email
- I am your constituent. I have supported you (by vote and/or donation). [Mention any point of contact]
- I want you to take [action] on [Bill number] or specific issue.
- [There are 3 things I want to say about this] - Topic sentence
- This affects me personally - here's my story
- Summarize and restate your request
 - ◆ Express appreciation for support
- Thank you

Let's Do This -- Never Say!

- I will never vote for you!
- You are an idiot!
- I bet you won't even read this letter!
- Your capitalist masters won't let you do what's right!
- You must hate veterans!
- You don't care about people like me!

Never Say – On a serious note

- “When you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame, and it won’t be the frame you want.” – George Lakoff
- “When you repeat a lie, even to debunk it, you help to strengthen and spread the lie. When you negate a frame, you evoke the frame. Remember this when someone provokes you with an absurd lie. Are you falling into a trap?” – George Lakoff
- Don’t start with a slogan. “Let’s start with what is true.” – Barack Obama

What do you want to write/call/talk about?

- Federal and/or State
 - ◆ Abortion rights legislation
 - ◆ Gun safety legislation
 - ◆ Ukraine
 - ◆ Immigration
 - ◆ _____
- State only
 - ◆ Election access legislation
 - ◆ Protection of LGBTQ+, trans kids
 - ◆ Wetlands protection
 - ◆ _____
- State and/or local
 - ◆ Police reform
 - ◆ Education policy
 - ◆ _____

Let's Create a Strategy – Immigration

- Who should I contact? –
 - ◆ For federal legislation
 - Your 2 US Senators (and/or candidates)
 - Your US Representative (and/or candidates)
 - ◆ For state legislation
 - Your state representative (and/or candidate)
 - Your senator (and/or candidate)
 - Your governor
- Refer to your cheat sheet!
 - ◆ Reinforce with others to get these contacts right

Let's Create a Strategy, cont.

- What should I say? – Follow the rules –
 - ◆ Name, address, zip code, constituent
 - ◆ 3 points
 - ◆ Personal story
 - ◆ Request for action
- Where/how should I deliver my request -- Phone, email, snail mail, op-ed, in-person

Let's Create a Strategy, cont.

→ Tips:

- ◆ But what about social media? – Facebook, X (Twitter), Threads – “Here’s what I just sent to my state rep”
- ◆ Modify form letters
- ◆ Petitions aren’t enough
- ◆ Communicate with those who support you and those who don’t
- ◆ Follow the same approach in written and verbal communications

Terry's Sample Letter – Congress

- Who:
 - ◆ Senator Todd Young
 - ◆ Senator Mike Braun
 - ◆ Congressman Andre Carson
- How do I find them?
 - ◆ Their websites provide contact information and email portal
- Who am I?
 - ◆ Constituent, Lifelong Hoosier, [Address]
 - ◆ Wife, mother, grandmother – 77 years old

Terry's Letter – Content

- Find a trusted source so that you can complete the letter – For example, the ACLU
 - ◆ Point #1 -- Why am I writing?
 - ◆ Point #2 -- What do I think about the problem?
 - ◆ Point #3 -- What is the solution?
- What is the action I want them to take?

Resources - To Help You Communicate Effectively - Immigration

- National Immigration Law Center - <https://www.nilc.org/resources/>
- ACLU - <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights>

Resources – Reproductive Rights

- ACLU – Conversation Guide – https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/2024/08/aclu_2024conversationguide_updated-1.pdf
- Planned Parenthood Action – <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/act>
- Act for Women & Girls – <https://www.actforwomenandgirls.org/>
- The Guttmacher Institute – <https://www.guttmacher.org/>

Resources – Gun Safety and More

Gun Safety

- Moms Demand Action – <https://momsdemandaction.org/>
- Everytown for Gun Safety – <https://www.everytown.org/>

More

SCOTUS Blog (Independent Analysis)
<https://www.scotusblog.com/>

Basics – Write an Op-Ed or LTE

Purpose of an Op-Ed or LTE – use the local media to get your message out. Policy makers and their staff pay attention! You can also support a candidate with an Op-Ed or LTE

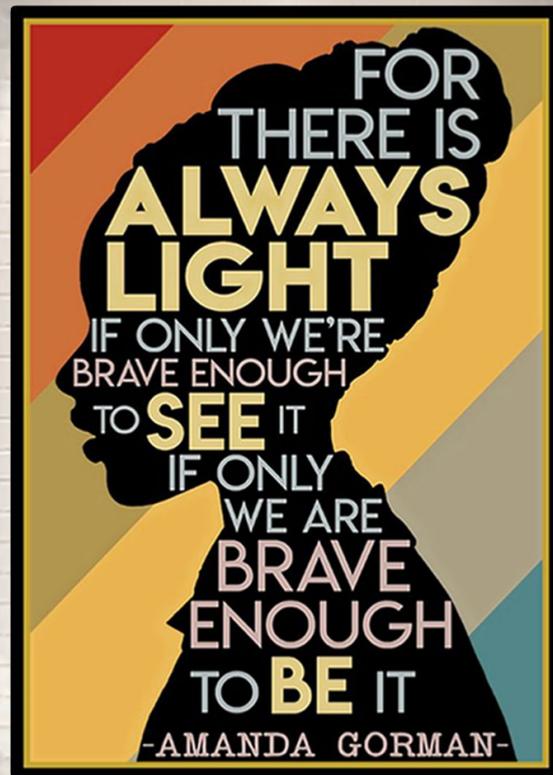
- Pick your “paper”
 - ◆ What is your paper’s policy on op-ed or LTE?
 - ◆ How do you submit?
 - ◆ Length limit? – no more than 300 words
- Describe your issue and your views (Say 3 things 3 times)
 - ◆ Who are you? What is your personal story?
 - ◆ Why is this important to you?
 - ◆ Why is it important to the community?

Basics – Write an Op-Ed or LTE, cont

- Request Action – What do you want to happen? Who do you want to take action?
 - ◆ If it's a vote or other governmental action, mention the policymaker by name
 - ◆ Do you want invite others to join your organization?
 - Invite to an upcoming event
 - ◆ Do you want to encourage others to take action?
- Amplify – If your LTE is published, amplify your message by posting in social media.
- “Multi-task” -- You can use your LTE and send as a letter to policy makers and vice-versa.

Civics for Change!

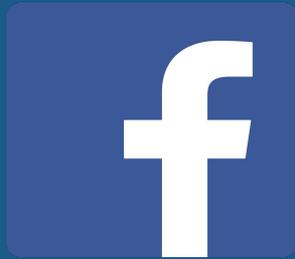
- Spend time on issue identification. What is important to you and why?
- Spend time determining who is in charge and let them know you are out there and keep contacting them.
- In preparing your message, stay positive, state what you are for and why.
 - ◆ If you are leading a group, spend time assisting members on framing and explaining their point of view. Support them in creating their own communications, offer words and phrases (what to use, what to avoid).
- Try other outlets, reporters, media, social media, op-eds and mention the policymakers by name.



Learn more at
www.buildingbridgesforamerica.com

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please take a moment before signing off to share it
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