

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXAMPLES



For the People

By the People

Communicators aspiring to create engaged, hopeful and constructive conversations about government have two fundamental tasks they must accomplish – to help Americans see that government should be both *for* and *by the people*. This tool offers tips on how to accomplish these objectives. This resource is grounded in an in-depth body of research conducted by the Topos Partnership on behalf of Indivisible.

For the People

Make collective achievements visible

Recommendations

1. Pivot away from government as politicians. Don't cue up harmful default frames such as: bickering politicians; government as service provider; or government as a vague, monolithic other.
2. Acknowledge that government doesn't always create benefits for all, as it is supposed to.
3. Turn the focus to public systems and institutions and the roles they play as foundations of our prosperity and quality of life. In particular, focus on ones that benefit us as broadly as possible.
4. Connect the dots between these public structures and how they help create "thriving communities."

By the People

Promote empowerment.

Recommendations

1. Acknowledge that people believe that they do not have a say, but they are supposed to.
2. Convey a new idea about how democracy really works. Explain that it takes steps beyond voting. This can be described as "voting plus one" or "going a step or two beyond voting," for instance.
3. Paint a vivid picture of the EXPERIENCE of having a say. We can do this by deploying a number of effective narrative tools, including:
 - Success stories.** Offer short stories of collective action to improve government. Stories of real people coming together to make a real difference in real places. Stories that promote an optimistic stance and clarify the importance of citizens coming together and working with (not around) government—e.g. promoting new laws or public investments, by working with city councils etc. Offer more than one. Use fairly current stories. Offer stories on multiple issues/topics.
 - Starter kits.** Create a starter kit that could include a brief, user-friendly set of simple ideas for HOW to get involved – as simply as talking to a neighbor about an issue, or bringing a friend to a meeting. This makes getting involved—which can feel simultaneously overwhelming and vague—more doable.
 - Process Improvements for having a say.** Offer explicit, realistic examples of how government and its representatives could meet people half-way in the effort to help people engage. Suggest new ways these mechanisms could be made easier.

For the People

Examples

We all know what the bedrock of a great community includes—schools with good teachers, well-maintained streets, police officers looking out for our safety, access to high quality healthcare—with these basics, communities thrive.

We create thriving communities when we work together through government to have things like top notch schools, firefighters, streets and public health.

We sometimes forget that governing isn't really about capitol buildings and politicians. It's supposed to be about the laws and investments we make to benefit all of us and to create thriving communities. When we're using government well, we create prosperity by building modern transportation and communications grids, and good colleges and court systems, and we make important laws about clean air, food and safe workplaces. But government only benefits all of us when we the people have control of its actions – not special interests, corporations or billionaires. This is too important to ignore. It's up to each of us to step up and do our part to make sure government is in our hands and accomplishing what it is supposed to.

[a programmatic example] The Newborn Screening Program at the Department of Health makes our communities and families stronger. In hospitals all across the state, blood samples of newborns are sent to the health department to be screened for dozens of disorders and diseases. For any newborn identified as having one of these medical problems nurses and public health workers follow-up with families and their doctors directly to make sure they receive the treatment and care they need. This is a great example of us creating a system that benefits all families in our state.

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Examples

Beyond voting. In our democracy, the people are supposed to have final say about how things are run – but most of us feel like we don't have much say, and just voting isn't enough. So some groups are working on the idea of Voting Plus One or Beyond Voting. This is the idea that everyone should vote, but everyone also has to take a step or two beyond that. Going beyond voting is the only way we are going to get a say in how things are run in our communities and our state.

Success stories. Down in Dermott (Chicot County, AR), residents badly needed jobs and economic development. It wasn't until local people worked with the City Council to organize themselves into a Community Development group that they could use tax dollars and get outside government grants to help with training and loans to open businesses – and to finally re-start the economy of their corner of Arkansas. To accomplish this, it took people really taking control of their government by going beyond just voting.

Starter kits. In our democracy, we the people are supposed to have the final say about things – but more and more Americans feel like we don't have the final say, and just voting isn't enough. So some groups around the country are working on the idea of Voting Plus One, meaning that every American has the responsibility to vote, but also to take a step or two beyond that. Voting Plus One will mean something different for every person. But when regular people take steps beyond just voting, we get government by the people. Groups are even giving out Voting Plus One Starter Kits, with tips on having a greater impact at every level of government. Tips include how to convince your city paper to cover public meetings, how to provide ways for more people to weigh in, advice about which government representatives or agencies should get more input from regular people, which citizen groups are active on issues that concern you, and much more.