

Strengthening Our Nation's Democracy

Taking Advantage of a Unique Time in U.S. Political History

OBJECTIVES

A diverse group of 50 advocates for strengthening our nation's democracy were convened by Demos, Everyday Democracy and AmericaSpeaks on July 29 – 31, 2008, in Washington, DC, with the following objectives:

1. Strengthen the democracy movement by identifying shared goals and values across the fields of electoral reform, deliberative democracy and community development
2. Articulate a list of recommendations that the next Administration can pursue to strengthen our democracy, as well as a set of actions that we can each take to advance the movement for stronger democracy
3. Develop a strategy to advance the agenda that emerges from the conversation

AN AGENDA FOR THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION

Over the course of the two-day meeting, participants discussed the different reform proposals that had emerged from different parts of the democracy movement. Participants evaluated the various reforms against a set of criteria developed by the group as well as an understanding of the current political climate.

Participants developed a set of recommendations for the next Administration that focused on three primary elements:

1. Establish a White House Office of Participation and Make an Institutional Commitment to Greater Participation

Establish an institutional commitment to participation through the creation of (1) a White House Office that serves as a champion for participation in the executive and legislative branches of the Federal Government, (2) an Inter-Agency Council that fosters greater collaboration and participation among Federal Agencies, (3) an advocate for spurring expanded public participation in electoral democracy and (4) a training module for new political appointees to the Administration that educates new staff about the values and methods of participation and collaborative governance.

Among the other roles that may be played by the new bodies include: conducting an inventory of participation activities by Federal agencies, disseminating best practices, providing technical assistance to local communities to support better participation, making legislative recommendations to increase participation, and reporting on the state of civic engagement in the nation.



2. Convene National Discussions to Provide Citizens with a Voice in the Policy Making Process and Build Capacity for Greater Participation at All Levels

Provide the public with a greater voice in national policy making by supporting the convening of national discussions on critical policy issues. The national discussions may address specific policy questions that are being addressed by Congress or broader issues that require action at multiple levels of American society. Specific provisions will ensure that public priorities are responded to by the Federal government.

3. Adopt Policy Reforms for Increasing Local Participation in Public Life

Advance a package of policy reforms to increase participation that includes:

- A Public Participation Act that eliminates obstacles preventing Federal agencies from using higher quality public participation practices
- Technical assistance and model legislation for local efforts to increase participation
- Legislation to strengthen and enhance the right to vote through election day registration, universal voter registration, enforcement of the National Voting Rights Act, and other measures
- Legislation creating public financing of state and federal elections

Work groups have been created to complete the recommendations for the next Administration.

PARTICIPANT LIST

AmericaSpeaks, Carolyn Lukensmeyer and Joe Goldman

Asian American Justice Center, Terry Ao

Brandeis University, Carmen Sirianni

Carnegie Corporation, Geri Mannion

Case Foundation, Ben Binswanger and Michael Smith

Common Cause, Tova Wang

Common Sense California, David Davenport

Community Building Institute, Bill Potapchuk

Cynthesis Consulting, Cynthia Gibson

Deliberative Democracy Consortium, Matt Leighninger

Demos, Miles Rapoport and Stuart Comstock-Gay

ecoAmerica, Jared Duval

Everyday Democracy, Martha McCoy and Patrick Scully

FairVote, Rob Richie

Free Press, Josh Silver

George Washington University, Spencer Overton

Harvard University, Marshall Ganz

IBM Center for the Business of Government, John Kamensky

Indiana University, Lisa Bingham

Institute for Local Government, Terry Amsler

Kettering Foundation, John Dedrick

Kirwan Institute, John Powell and Andrew Grant-Thomas

MIT, Xavier de Souza Briggs

Mobilize.org, Maya Enista and Ian Storrar

National Civic League, Gloria Rubio-Cortes

National Council of La Raza, Clarissa Martinez de Castro

National Issues Forums Institute, Bill Muse

American Prospect, Mark Schmitt

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, Cornelia Butler Flora
Policy Consensus Initiative, Wendy Willis

PACE, Chris Gates

PolicyLink, Joe Brooks

Proteus Fund, Marc Caplan

Public Agenda Foundation, Will Friedman

Public Campaign, Nick Nyhart

Rock the Vote, Kat Barr

Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Ben Shute

Small Planet Institute, Frances Moore Lappe

Sunlight Foundation, John Wonderlich

Surdna Foundation, Robert Sherman

The Advancement Project, Eddie Hailes

W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Chris Kwak and Sheri Brady

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