

PUBLIC POLICY 101

A GUIDE TO MULTI-LEVEL POLICY CHANGE

What is public policy change?

Often, when we think about policy, we think of federal or statewide legislation. But the policy decisions that affect us most are made at the local level, and it's there that our individual actions can have the biggest impact.

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Policy occurs at the federal, state, and local levels, and each level has a different scope and methods for engagement. One way to think about policy is in terms of “Big P” (federal and state laws and regulations) and “little p” (county, city, township, school district, etc.). Frequently, the policies enacted at the state and federal level are broad in scope and rely on local governments to implement (for example, the federal government provided money to states for COVID-19 relief, and state governments determined how that funding was used).

What is community organizing?

For those looking to get involved, there are far more opportunities at the local level for your voice to be heard. You may have heard people talking about “community organizing” in the past few years. What is community organizing?

Community organizing is a strategy to address community problems by coming together to identify problems and potential solutions for the community to gain power or influence over issues concerning their welfare.

Examples of community organizations in MN:

- MPD 150
- TakeAction Minnesota
- Indigenous Environmental Network
- Communities United Against Police Brutality
- Voices for Racial Justice
- Black Lives Matter Minnesota
- OutFront Minnesota
- Showing Up for Racial Justice
- ISALAH
- Neighborhoods Organizing for Change
- Fair Vote MN

Levels of Policy Change and How to Participate

There are many ways to take action at each level of policy change. It's important to know the scope of that level, key representatives, and opportunities to vote, contact, donate, and act to influence policy. See the chart below for more information.

GOVERNMENT LEVEL	SCOPE	REPRESENTATIVES	HOW TO PARTICIPATE
Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws and policies that affect the entire country • Currency • Postal service • Federal taxes • Federal infrastructure (interstates, etc.) • Foreign policy • Declare war • National parks and landmarks • Citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • Cabinet • US Congress • US Supreme Court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote: President, US Senators, US Representative • Contact: White House, your senator or representative • Donate: to national organizations or movements (ex. ACLU, NOW, RAINN) • Act: volunteer for national campaigns or organizations

GOVERNMENT LEVEL	SCOPE	REPRESENTATIVES	HOW TO PARTICIPATE
State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws and policies that affect the entire state • State taxes • State infrastructure • State parks and landmarks • Drivers licenses and vehicle registrations • Education funding and standards • Election compliance and certification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor • State Legislature • State Attorney General • State Supreme Court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote: Governor, state legislators, attorney general • Contact: Governor's Office, your district representatives • Donate: statewide organizations or movements • Act: Volunteer for statewide campaigns or organizations
GOVERNMENT LEVEL	SCOPE	REPRESENTATIVES	HOW TO PARTICIPATE
Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counties, cities, towns, school districts • In charge of public services (ex. police and fire) • County and city parks and recreation • Electricity, natural gas, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor • City Council • County Commission • Town boards • Local school boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote: Mayor, City Council members, county commissioners, judges, planning/ zoning board members • Contact: your Mayor, representatives from your district or ward

	<p>water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads • Schools • Elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor • State Legislature • State Attorney General • State Supreme Court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donate: Local community organizations, local initiatives • Act: Attend and participate in public meetings, community organizing
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Join our policy email list.

To learn more about the many ways you can get involved with public policy change, join MNCASA's policy email list.

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