

# COMMUNITY BUILDING

## ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE COMMUNITY

### *Ideas for Action*

- ❖ **Incorporate a local civic curriculum**, grades K-12, into the public school system to encourage youth participation. Implement through community leaders and volunteers.
- ❖ **Hold a career day** for government and non-profit organizations so people can see what the jobs are like.
- ❖ **Create an opportunity (day) to listen to youth** and what they want to contribute, and then find ways to help them get involved.
- ❖ **Create a Community Participation Day**, combining recognition and information about participation.
- ❖ **Create a Government Awareness Week** to try to reach those people who don't usually participate. Meet the people on their turf. Make it diverse and inclusive by developing a coordinating committee of private, public and non-profit organization representatives.
- ❖ **Increase participation by seniors** by conducting an "Interest Level" survey for community participation. Work with SCORE, RSVP, and local senior groups to implement.
- ❖ **Hold regular brown bag lunches with government officials** where everyone can voice their opinions. These would allow elected officials to stay in touch with their constituents, and for the people to be heard.
- ❖ **Recognize elected officials** for their service through visible means. By showing them and the general public that their work is valued, it encourages more people to serve.
- ❖ **Create ad hoc committees** to include people who live outside an area but work in a community and have valuable input.
- ❖ **Create institutionalized internships** so they continue from year to year. For example, an internship always filled by a senior in the high school, with selection an honor.

- ❖ **Use special interest and talents in the community** in creating an advisors program to assist leadership in specific areas of concern.
- ❖ **Ask for help from the community.** Make the need for participation widely known. Publicize the need for volunteers through the public directory, a website, or through regular media want ads.
- ❖ **Provide student financial aid for public service.**
- ❖ **Use student government to access students.** Ask them for help and provide opportunities.
- ❖ **Use time limited, project or issue specific task forces in government.** Have members be cross-disciplinary to advise standing boards.
- ❖ **Develop a town website or public directory** of who's who and what's what in all areas of the community. It could include a list of volunteer organizations and how town government works. Educate the public about the responsibility of volunteering and who needs volunteers. Put the directory on video and circulate to the community library and video stores.
- ❖ **Encourage student involvement** through activities like a student day in town government.
- ❖ **Involve students in the budget** or decision-making processes so they see how it works and feel like they have a vested interest in the process and outcomes.
- ❖ **Run student organization meetings** like Town Meetings so students have some experience in the process prior to actually attending a Town Meeting.
- ❖ **Conduct open non-agenda type meetings**, like a welcome or hospitality night, occurring two or three months prior to elections or between various organizations like Kiwanis and Rotary, so people who might be interested in running for office can learn about positions and the issues they would be required to address in public office.
- ❖ **Produce a newsletter of school, community and government activities** using student help. It could include information on how "things get done" and how to access the system.
- ❖ **Make all reports readable and in everyday English** so everyone can understand what has taken place at meetings.
- ❖ **Produce voter guides on how to run for public office.**
- ❖ **Conduct sessions** where people who want to run for office can learn how, and then once running, have forums where candidates can discuss their views with voters.

- ❖ **Post information about how government works** around the community, in places people frequent. Disseminate decisions more widely and make them readable. Have one central location where all information is posted.
- ❖ **Have government, non-profits and business conduct workshops** in schools on issues important to students so they can see how the process works.
- ❖ **Encourage local civic and service organizations** to start youth groups so young people can learn the process and the ethic of service early in their lives.
- ❖ **Have civic and service groups work together** to create a fund supporting civic education.
- ❖ **Encourage all organizations in the community** to use their existing forums and meetings for some civic education.
- ❖ **Encourage the media to respond** to positive local government actions. Local interest stories can help develop positive attitudes so people want to find out about what is happening and to participate.
- ❖ **Conduct education courses on how the system works and how to access it.**
- ❖ **Local Neighborhood Pride:** Create local pride and action. Don't depend on government to solve all the community's problems. It's also easier to accomplish on the local level and it can be a training ground for involvement.

**Resources:**

Granite State Civic Profile Book of Ideas. The Governor's Commission on New Hampshire in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.