

We the People 21st Century Town Meeting®



We the People engaged citizens in developing - and implementing - solutions for the toughest questions facing their community. Owensboro-Daviess (KY) County's civic renewal was ignited by an AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meeting® and sustained by citizen working groups. Years later, **We the People** boasts an impressive array of citizen-led action on key issues, and continues to develop community support for leaders working on change.



- ▶ **County-wide citizen participation project addressed long-lasting civic challenges**
- ▶ **21st Century Town Meeting® identified the community's shared priorities in education, the environment, health care, economic development and government transparency**
- ▶ **Citizen-led working groups are actively advancing community goals**
- ▶ **Local decision-makers participated in the project and are responding to citizen recommendations**



Building a Civic Infrastructure

We the People is an initiative of the Public Life Foundation to revitalize civic commitment to their region's future. AmericaSpeaks partnered with **We the People** to develop and sustain a strong civic infrastructure that builds on previous public engagement efforts.

Carefully designed, **We the People** was – and continues to be – a highly inclusive model that created community momentum for ongoing participation. Its success is setting an important precedent for citizen participation in government, in and beyond Owensboro-Daviess County.



Leaders Actively Involved

In recent years, tensions between city-county and urban-rural interests blocked constructive political discourse and decision-making in the county. **We the People's** community-wide engagement process opened new possibilities for collaboration.

The Mayor, the County Judge, all city commissioners, a state Senator and 2 state Representatives attended **We the People** 21st Century Town Meeting® and deliberated with citizens. And, at the close of the meeting, these leaders publicly responded to the participants' shared priorities.



“It was very rewarding to see so many different folk come together. Everyone brought their own perspective. These differences made it work so well. That's what's important: not just having a voice, but having your voice heard.”

Valerie Holcomb, Participant,
We the People

Identifying Community Priorities

Growing regional challenges, including a lack of economic development and distrust in local government, prompted the community to take seriously the opportunity to work together for better solutions.

At a day-long 21st Century Town Meeting®, 650 area residents gave leaders and stakeholders direct, substantive feedback on important issues of education, environment, health care, economic development and government transparency.

Discussions deliberately kept a close eye on tradeoffs, costs, pros and cons to ensure resulting recommendations were realistic. Follow-up actions began during the meeting, immediately supporting attendees to stay involved, and inviting others to participate in making their region a better place to live.

Lasting Results

Outcomes from the 21st Century Town Meeting® and ongoing public engagement are spurring regional revitalization:

- ▶ Citizen Working Groups meet monthly to take action on shared priorities
- ▶ Leaders publicly agreed to a 10-year strategic planning process that draws heavily on the outcomes from **We the People**
- ▶ Steering committee of 20 area leaders - government, education, social services and business - support and animate the initiative's work
- ▶ More than 1,200 area residents receive regular updates about **We the People**



“We the People illuminated how civil public dialogue and deliberation engages, educates and empowers people to assume rightful ownership of their public institutions. With leaders committed to citizen sovereignty, we can realize the kind of community and world we want for the 21st century.”

John Hager, Founder, Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

Citizen Working Groups

Within weeks of the 21st Century Town Meeting®, workgroups met to take action on the priorities identified by participants. Each group chose leadership, developed a mission, vision and values.

Meeting monthly, the groups are advancing measurable goals, such as:

- ▶ Citizens for Good Government sponsored public forums on local government structure and taxation, resulting in an Openness and Transparency Pledge that is being considered by County leaders
- ▶ After meeting with the Daviess-County Fiscal Court, the Environmental Impact Council launched a 13-week educational campaign on the benefits of recycling
- ▶ Healthy and Caring Community sponsored a two-month volunteer initiative to help low-income families apply for low-cost health, dental and vision insurance
- ▶ Education committee launched a Generations United program to promote senior citizen volunteerism, and the committee is partnering with a local organization to mentor students
- ▶ Two committees surveyed mayoral candidates on their views of downtown revitalization and development, and widely distributed the results

AMERICASPEAKS provides citizens a greater voice in local, regional, and national decision-making on the most challenging public issues of the day. Over 146,000 people have participated in *AmericaSpeaks'* meetings where participants wrestle with complex issues,

uncover shared priorities and offer recommendations to shape next steps.

Our innovative deliberative tools, such as the internationally recognized 21st Century Town Meeting® that links citizens and decision makers - have been used in all 50 states and around the world.

AmericaSpeaks is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington DC.

Learn more at:

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