



BUILDING CIVIC HOMES

FOSTERING BELONGING, AGENCY, AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Photo Credit: Ohio Organizing Collaborative



VOCES
de la Frontera



THE PROBLEM



Loneliness, distrust, and disillusionment with politics have driven millions to quit civic life. Current strategies are too transactional and don't add value before asking for votes.

Only 22% Of Americans Trust in Government

Source: Pew Research Center 2024

22 % of Blacks are
"Rightfully Cynical"

Source: Black Values Research 2024

31 % of Latinos are
"Reluctantly Committed"

Source: AZ Latino Values Research 2024

1 in 5 Americans
said they felt
loneliness "a lot of
the day yesterday."

Source: Gallup 2024

THE SOLUTION: BUILD CIVIC HOMES

Civic Homes are an antidote to the growing distrust, disillusionment, and disengagement in politics.



Photo Credit: Building Freedom Ohio

Civic Homes, with belonging as their foundation, are how we address our current cynicism crisis.

We talked to dozens of community members across the country and found that, at this time of growing distrust, people are looking for spaces where they feel seen, heard, and understood.



WHAT ARE CIVIC HOMES & WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?



Photo Credit: Poder NC

Civic Homes are spaces where individuals connect over shared values, build collective power, and work toward common goals.

Civic Homes are trusted entities that are rooted in inclusivity and culture, and address issues people care about.

EFFECTIVE CIVIC HOMES HAVE

3 CORE

attributes:

**Civic
Home**



1. CULTIVATE BELONGING

Belonging is foundational to effective Civic Homes.

Participants emphasized that feeling seen, heard, and understood was central to their connection to a civic organization. What that looks like for each organization and community will differ—for some, it is about language, while for others, it is about creating spaces to connect with others who have similar lived experiences.



Photo Credit: Poder NC



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When I feel like I belong somewhere, I feel less like a cat arched for battle. When you don't feel like you belong somewhere, you're constantly in fight or flight mode. I grew up in rural North Carolina, Burke County. So constantly feeling this sense of dull hostility from people [because they didn't know] what we were or where we were from.

— North Carolina Community Leader

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When I first started working here, I felt really welcomed by everybody because I think we kind of all understood our backgrounds, even though we weren't the same person. We kind of saw pieces of who we were, and we were just welcoming to the idea that we were all going through something different, experiencing different things differently. But we were still able to accept each other. So it was just a very comforting space to know that the issues I saw in my community were valid and that some other people also saw the same issues.

— California Community Leader

2. BUILD AGENCY & LEADERSHIP



Civic Homes must build leadership development pipelines.

Participants shared that having opportunities to lead within organizations not only kept them engaged but also increased their sense of personal agency and efficacy.

Leadership opportunities help develop a civic identity by enabling members to understand their own power and ability to influence the systems and institutions that impact their lives.



“

I'll use VOTE, for example ...they'll meet the person where they are. So [VOTE] is the legit space to where if I know somebody is coming to me looking for like a specific resource or whatever the case is ... VOTE not only support you as a whole but then they also educate to make sure you're on the up and up with that you need to know about these laws that are changing and the legislatures and that form of education.

— Louisiana Community Leader

3. COLLECTIVE ACTION & IMPACT



Collective action distinguishes Civic Homes from other social community spaces, such as sports teams or hobbies. Participants expressed that it's important for members to understand how specific wins directly impacted them and their communities, and their role in obtaining those wins.

Seeing tangible impacts as a result of their actions in community with other members, and the organization reinforces their belief in the organization and deepens their connection.



Photo Credit: Poder NC

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It just felt like ‘Wow, a place where I can really be and where my efforts would count.’ And then, when I started seeing them really getting stuff done, like the [ban the] box issue and the non-unanimous jury issue, that just lit my fire, and I’m a VOTE member forever. I’m going down. I’m gonna ride it until the wheels fall off.

— Louisiana Community Leader

METHODOLOGY

This project was conducted in partnership with six organizations—three during phase one (2022) and three during phase two (2023–2024). In phase one, we conducted research in collaboration with Voces de la Frontera, an immigrant rights organization in Wisconsin; VOTE, which organizes justice-impacted people in Louisiana; and Inland Congregation United for Change, an affiliate of PICO California, a youth advocacy organization in California. In phase two, we partnered with Poder NC, a Latinx organizing group in North Carolina; New Georgia Project, which primarily works within the Black community in Georgia; Building Freedom Ohio, a partner of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, a group that works with justice-impacted people in Ohio.



Photo Credit: Poder NC



We used qualitative methods for this project, which included participant observation, one-on-one interviews, and listening sessions. We chose a qualitative approach because civic homes, especially from the perspective of community members, are underexplored. We needed to provide space to hear directly from community members on how they define community, what brings them into organizations, and what keeps them connected to organizations.¹ We sat down with community members and asked them about their work with these organizations, the issues they felt were most pertinent in their lives and the lives of their community members, and how well they understood and engaged in the terminology of a civic home.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

For this research, we sought organizations with geographic, programmatic, and racial diversity. These community partners represent a cross-section of the US and organize on a range of issues from immigration to criminal justice reform.



Voice Of The Experienced (VOTE) – works with recently incarcerated people and their loved ones (Louisiana)



VOCES
de la Frontera

Voces de la Frontera – empowers immigrant workers and families to advocate for progressive workers' rights and policies (Wisconsin)



Inland Congregation United for Change (ICUC) – Pico California Affiliate, a faith-based org focused on youth engagement, criminal justice reform, and policing (California)



New Georgia Project – builds power and increases the civic participation of the New Georgia Majority—Black, Latinx, Asian American Pacific Islanders, young Georgians, and other historically marginalized communities (Georgia)



Building Freedom Ohio (BFO) – statewide org of people impacted by criminalization and mass incarceration, including individuals directly impacted by felony convictions as well as families, friends, and community members of those impacted by the carceral state.



PODER NC – focuses on building base, community organizing, and leadership development of Latine people (North Carolina)



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