

## How to Use this Resource

This resource provides background on civic and policy engagement as an approach to health equity. Use this resource to understand the foundational concepts and strategies for implementing practices to increase individual, community, and organizational civic engagement practices in your health equity work.

## For more context on civic and policy engagement and health equity

To get the most out of this resource, Partners for Advancing Health Equity (P4HE Collaborative) recommends reviewing the level-setting resources provided to participants during this workshop series. For ways to increase engagement with policy and civic processes, see [\*Moving to Action: Advancing Health Equity through Policy and Civic Engagement\*](#).

## Level Setting

New to civic and political engagement?  
Below are level setting resources  
recommended by the workshop facilitator  
and authored by the P4HE Collaborative.

## Facilitator Recommendations

- [Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable](#)
- [Engagement Ladder Theory](#)
- [MSBWR 2025 Legislative Agenda](#)

## P4HE Resources

- [P4HE Level Setting Dialogue: Political Engagement](#)
- [P4HE Resource Spotlight: Political Engagement for Health Equity](#)
- [P4HE Blog: Political Engagement in Action](#)
- [P4HE Podcast: Bridging Policy and Health](#)
- [A Call for Continued Collaboration](#)

## Have a resource you would like to share on this topic?

- Recommend resources and topics [for our library](#)

## Workshop Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity Collaborative hosted a three-series workshop sprint on advancing health equity through policy and civic engagement led by Cassandra Welchlin, Executive Director of the [Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable \(MSBWR\)](#). MSBWR is an intergenerational statewide network with a mission to amplify the organizing power of Black women to shift power at the voting booth and the policy agenda to ensure their economic security.

➤ **Session 1:** speakers introduced key principles of grassroots organizing and coalition building. Speakers provided firsthand examples of MSBWR's efforts to organize individuals, communities, and organizations to mobilize for women's economic security within Mississippi.

➤ **Session 2:** speakers discussed the role of civic participation in systemic change with a specific focus on civic processes beyond voting (i.e. advocacy, policy influence, proactive organizing). Political engagement between distinct sectors and how to identify opportunities for cross-sector collaboration were shared.

➤ **Session 3:** speakers guided workshop participants throughout a question and discussion-based approach to developing a strategic planning framework for organizations interested in drafting concrete strategies for political and civic engagement within their sector.



## Moving to Action

Below is a summary of the three sessions which explored political and civic engagement to advance health equity from an intersectional perspective.

### What is the role of civic and political engagement in health?

Civic and political engagement play a crucial role in shaping health outcomes, particularly in marginalized communities. Active participation in civic activities, such as voting and community organizing, can lead to enacting policies that promote public health and access to healthcare services. Political engagement, including advocacy and lobbying, helps to address health disparities by influencing legislation and resource allocation. By fostering a sense of community and collective action, civic and political engagement empowers individuals to advocate for healthier environments, equitable access to healthcare systems, and improvement in intersectional areas that affect determinants of health such as socioeconomic status.

#### › Shifting power through civic and political engagement

Strategic community organizing can empower marginalized communities in politics, leading to both legislative victories and long-term movement building. In practice, the strategic element of community organizing efforts requires that organizations immerse themselves within the community they aim to advocate on with. The MSBWR describes this immersion as an opportunity to build trust with individuals within communities, identify issues the community prioritizes, motivate individuals to participate in voting, and build capacity of communities to actively participate in politics as elected officials.

#### Case Study: Mobilizing Communities Through Immersive Campaigns

Effective grassroots organizing involves employing various strategies to engage, inform, and mobilize the community in the political process. The Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable (MSBWR) exemplifies this approach through its progressive campaigns aimed at empowering Black women in Mississippi. MSBWR organized several initiatives to address the immediate needs of low-income Black women by sharing information on how they could participate in upcoming elections and campaigns to affect change on issues impacting Black women in Mississippi. One notable campaign is the [Quarters Because We Care Initiative](#), where MSBWR visited laundromats to cover laundry service costs for community members. Quarters Because We Care is not only a way to meet immediate needs, but also a strategic tool for engaging women in civic life and shaping MSBWR's policy priorities. The Initiative functions as an organizing hub—using community trust-building and storytelling to inform advocacy while helping women move up the ladder of engagement, from direct service to civic participation and leadership. During these visits, MSBWR engaged in conversations about important issues, shared information on upcoming elections, and collected contact information from individuals interested in participating in future events. This Initiative helped establish MSBWR as a reliable advocate and source of civic and political knowledge within the community.



### › Mobilizing communities through long-term movement building

Regular civic engagement through voting for local policies and officials, as well as community members actively participating in political roles, can drive systemic policy change. To move towards sustained community mobilization, it is essential to build motivation **and** capacity among community members. This helps to enable sustained, active, participation in civic and political processes.

#### Case Study: Supporting Long-Term Movement Building

MSBWR seeks to support long-term movement building through initiatives such as the [“Power of the Sister Vote” bootcamps](#) in which Black women from low-voting participation counties learn and participate in activities such as door-knocking and staffing poll centers to introduce civic engagement in practice. MSBWR organizes these initiatives to scale civic engagement, encouraging participants to participate in transformational leadership programs and learn about becoming political advocates, meeting with elected officials, and training Black women to run for local offices (city councils, school boards, State house, etc.). MSBWR’s approach reflects [the Engagement Ladder](#), starting with direct service and civic education (e.g., Quarters Because We Care), moving to grassroots activation (e.g., Power of the Sister Vote Bootcamps), and building toward policy leadership and electoral power (e.g., transformational leadership and candidate training programs). This framework supports long-term civic engagement and health equity for communities historically excluded from decision-making spaces.

### How do partnerships enhance intersectionality in advocacy?

Organizations interested in promoting civic and political engagement must recognize the importance of partnerships. No community is a single-issue group. Advocacy organizations must recognize the need to partner with others that provide services that align with the goals and priorities of the communities. Organizational partners may serve a variety of needs that an advocacy organization requires to be effective, such as expertise on intersectional issues that affect the community (e.g., maternal health), and the provision of physical space to hold events at existing community hubs (e.g., churches, community centers) and supportive services for community members while they engage in political and civic engagement (e.g., childcare, gas subsidies).

Diverse partnerships and shared leadership empower communities by enabling experts and organizations to combine their strengths and advocate effectively with policymakers and politicians. MSBWR’s coalition-building work is anchored by the [Mississippi Women’s Economic Security Initiative \(MWESI\)](#), a statewide policy and advocacy collaborative co-founded by the Executive Director. MWESI brings together grassroots organizations, researchers, policy experts, and advocates to co-create and advance a policy agenda rooted in economic and racial justice. The Initiative focuses on issues such as equal pay, Medicaid expansion, affordable childcare, and paid family leave—all of which directly impact health outcomes for Black women and families. For example, expanding Medicaid improves access to preventive and maternal healthcare, and paid leave supports mental health and reduces chronic stress. By elevating economic stability as a health determinant, MWESI ensures that community-driven advocacy leads to systems change.